

1. A friend of mine asked me a bible question the other day that went like this:
 - a) Why does Jesus have to come back a second time? Why don't we just go to heaven?
 - i) Answering that question not only made my day, but could have kept me talking all night. ☺ I tried to be as brief as I could.
 - b) It also reminded me it was time to get back to my bible writing. God had been nudging me for a few weeks to start writing on 1st Thessalonians, and the major topic of this letter along with 2nd Thessalonians is about Jesus' Second Coming. That question reminded me to get back to what God called me to do.
 - c) Back to the question itself, I can't just answer that question in a brief answer, because it is a long topic, and requires a few bible lessons.
 - d) What is important is that it Jesus' Second Coming is a fundamental aspect of Christian theology.
 - i) That means that it is necessary to believe in Jesus' Second Coming in order to be a Christian. The "how's" and "why's" of that Second Coming is a matter of debate, but the fact of Jesus' Second Coming is a basic belief in Christianity.
 - ii) First of all, the bible makes promises that Jesus is coming a second time:
 - a) "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." (Acts 1:11 NIV)
 - b) "Look, he (Jesus) is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen" (Revelation 1:17 NIV)
 - c) Both of these verses make the point that Jesus will return and it will be a worldwide event. (It is interesting to think about the Revelation verse could not literally be true prior to the days of satellite television!)
 - e) Which leads us back to 1st Thessalonians: The main topic of this letter has to do with Jesus' Second Coming. There are a bunch of references to His Second Coming throughout the letter. The question of 1st Thessalonians is not so much how his Second Coming is going to happen but why it is so necessary.
2. Before I continue, let me back up and give the big picture, especially to those who are new to these studies: Welcome to a study of 1st and 2nd Thessalonians.
 - a) These are two letters written by Paul to a new church in Thessalonica, Greece.
 - b) Thessalonica was a major city. Some estimated the population around 200,000.
 - c) We have some background information on the Thessalonians from the Book of Acts:
 - i) Acts was written by Luke. Most of Acts describes Paul's travel journeys.
 - ii) There was a small Jewish population In Thessalonica, and thus there was a synagogue. We know this because that is where Paul preached in Acts 17.
 - iii) Paul visited that synagogue and spent 3 Sabbath's preaching Jesus.
 - a) It wasn't just a matter of "Paul spent 3 Saturday's preaching, then the church magically formed by itself as Paul went away." We get clues from the text that Paul spent the days between those 3 Saturdays working on forming this church. (See 1st Thessalonians 2:9). Paul may have been there for a month or two, but Acts only mentions 3 consecutive Sabbath's where Paul preached Jesus at a local synagogue.

- d) The Book of Acts said that after the 3 Sabbath's Paul, along with his traveling companion Silas were being persecuted for their faith and were run out of town. A 3rd missionary named Timothy stayed behind. Paul went on to preach in two other Greek locations: Berea and Athens before coming to Corinth, Greece. There Timothy rejoined Paul and reported that the church that was planted in Thessalonica is still thriving. (Ref. Acts 18:4, 1st Thessalonians 3:2).
3. Let's get back to the theme of Jesus' Second Coming. This is the major theme of 1st Thessalonians and it will be a primary topic of the next few lessons. Let's start with a classic Christian self-examination question that goes as follows:
- a) If it were illegal to be a Christian, and you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?
- i) Would the prosecuting attorney be able to bring for witnesses or evidence that you have committed your life to serving Jesus?
- ii) On a similar note, the late Walter Martin used to joke: "Congratulations, many of you are wonderful secret agents for Jesus Christ... You're neighbors don't suspect in the least that you are a Christian!" ☺
- b) The reason ask this question is because the first chapter of 1st Thessalonians is all about having a good reputation in the community for being followers of Jesus Christ.
- i) Paul spends most of the first chapter commending them for their faith, their witness to the world and their survival despite persecution.
- ii) Here is the kicker: The church is only a few months old, tops. This letter is how Paul heard the church is surviving and thriving despite the fact he only started the church a few months ago.
4. Before I start to analyze Chapter 1 of 1st Thessalonians. I want you to notice how important the theme of Jesus' Second Coming is throughout this letter.
- a) Every chapter in 1st Thessalonians has some reference to Jesus' Second Coming
- i) "Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath" (1st Thes. 1:10 NIV)
- ii) "For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? (1st Thes. 2:19 NIV)
- iii) "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 all his holy ones." 1st Thes. 3:13 NIV)
- iv) "According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. (1st Thes. 4:15)
- v) "May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1st Thes. 5:17)
- b) Here is where it gets interesting: Remember that Paul was only in Thessalonica for at least 3 weeks and at the most, a month or so! Paul taught all sorts of doctrines in that short time, and it appears a major issue was about the Second Coming.
5. So why the emphasis on Jesus Second Coming?
- a) Lets face it, if you were starting up a new church, why this emphasis?
- i) First of all, I'm sure Paul taught all the basic doctrines of Christianity. Even what Paul "missed" discussing, we learn from the Book of Acts that Timothy hung around longer time to fill in some gaps in the Christian fundamentals.
- b) Second, I think this was an issue of confusion to the Thessalonians.
- i) You can read this letter as if "The Thessalonians were worried they missed the rapture". They had a concern that Jesus Second Coming had already come and gone and somehow, "they missed it".

- ii) More likely the Thessalonians were worried that those who had been killed so far for their faith in Jesus will “miss” Jesus Second Coming. Paul had to clear up some issues about the Second Coming, which again is a theme of this letter.
 - c) This letter is also a reminder to us about the importance of the Second Coming:
 - i) God wants us to live as if Jesus can come back at any moment. It is a motivational tool to keep us on our toes and keep our focus on God himself.
 - ii) It is not something we should panic about. It doesn’t mean to sit around all day waiting for Jesus. If anything, it is just the opposite. The fact that Jesus could return at any moment should motivate us to live our lives as witnesses for Him.
- 6. One last issue and then we’ll get started. It’s now been 2,000 years and Jesus hasn’t come back yet. Why has he taken so long? Peter answers that question:
 - a) “But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise (about the Second Coming) , as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” (2nd Peter 3:8-9 NIV)
 - b) A Loose Translation: God the Father is taking a long time before sending Jesus to return because God the Father wants as many people as possible to be in heaven.
 - c) So why not wait until “infinity”? There will always be some who will accept Jesus. Why does God not wait indefinitely so that all can be saved? Good question! ☺
 - i) Think about this: In heaven, will there be a finite, or an infinite number of people? The answer, whether you like it or not, is that there is a finite number. Just like there is a finite number of people before the world ends, there will be a finite number of people in heaven and a finite number of people in hell.
 - ii) If there will be a finite number of people in heaven, then if Jesus is correct (and we believe He is! ☺), then there has to be a day when God the Father says, “OK, today is the day Jesus. You go back and get whoever is left on earth still living and we’ll wrap this up.” In order to have a finite number of people in heaven, there has to be a “last day” when the last believers are rounded up. Thus, the necessity of Jesus coming a second time to earth.
 - a) Here is where good Christians divided. Some believe the “wrap up” is a literal 7-year tribulation period followed by a 1,000-year millennium, followed by God creating a new heaven and a new earth for believers. This is what the Book of Revelation is all about. Some Christians (mostly from Roman Catholic and Orthodox backgrounds) allegorize this time frame and believe Jesus just comes back and “that’s a wrap”.
 - b) The important point is that life does not go on like it does now forever. There is a “wrap up period” where life as we know it changes.
- 7. OK, almost three pages down, and I haven’t touched a verse of Chapter 1 yet!. ☺
- 8. Chapter 1, Verse 1: Paul, Silas and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you.
 - a) First a little on writing styles of the 1st Century:
 - i) When we write a letter, we start with “Dear So-and-So. We then write the text of the letter and sign our name. In that culture, they did it in opposite order.
 - ii) First the letter states who it from, and second, who the letter is to.
 - iii) Therefore, we see the letter is from Paul, Silas and Timothy. We get the impression later through the letter that Paul is the primary writer, or at least the dictator of the letter.
 - iv) Second we see the letter is to the church in Thessalonica.
 - b) The next thing to notice what how Paul addresses this church. They are the church in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ.

- i) So how are we “in” God and Father and “in” Lord Jesus Christ”?
 - a) Jesus himself answers that question:
 - b) “On that day you (believers) will realize that I (Jesus) am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.” (John 14:20 NIV)
 - c) My prayer is not for them (disciples) alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” (John 17:21 NIV)
- ii) Being “in” God the Father is more of a mental-state than a physical one.
 - a) As a Christian, I willfully choose to be “in” God the Father and “in” Jesus Christ. I have turned my life over to them and my desire is to do their will for my life.
 - b) Imagine choosing to get into a bus and not knowing where the bus is going to go. That is the idea of being “in” God the Father and “in Jesus”. We get on “for the ride”, but God is in charge of our lives, not us.
 - c) How to do God’s will is a complicated question. In summary, we study our bible as guidance for our lives. We pray God’s will be done for our lives, and then we move forward. For example, we don’t have to pray if it is God’s will to brush our teeth every morning. If God’s word and prayer to God is “engrained” in our heads, we are doing God’s will if we willfully choose to obey what the bible teaches us to. I would also add to that the necessity of spending time with other Christians to guide them, and help them guide us. Christianity is meant to be a team effort.
- iii) The fact that we are “in” both also implies equality between God the Father and Jesus the Son. It implies they are both God. The reason we refer to one as the Father and one as the Son is one is superior in rank. If you meet any father and son, they are both humans and both equal, but one has to be the leader. This is why God the Father is superior in “rank” over God the Son.
- iv) The last thing to say on this topic that being “in” the God the Father and being “in” Jesus is also a moment-by-moment “free-will thing”.
 - a) Yes, I do believe you are eternally saved as long as you are trusting in Jesus for your salvation. You are not going to hell if you are committing a sin for one particular moment.
 - b) The idea is that we need to constantly seek God because like sheep, we are prone to wander. Think how often we have thoughts and actions that are “not biblical” despite the fact we are seeking and praying for God’s will for our lives. That is because we are “in” God the Father and “in” Jesus, but God gives us the free will to wander away every now and then. God does this as to see how wrong those choices are and coming back to God is always the best course for our lives.
- c) Let’s finish Verse 1: The last sentence is “Grace and peace to you”
 - i) This is a standard tag line in all of Paul’s letters with some variance.
 - ii) Whenever you read Paul using this salutation, it is important to note that Paul always has “grace” first and “peace” second.
 - iii) It is a reminder that in order to have the peace of God, it requires God’s grace to exist first.
 - iv) Grace simply means to get something you don’t deserve, as opposed to getting payment for something you do deserve. Mercy is a similar idea, but mercy means to be forgiven of a punishment you do deserve. Grace is to get rewards for something you don’t deserve.

- v) The idea is tied to something John said: “We love him (Jesus) , because he first loved us” (1st John 4:19, NIV). It means that God reaches out to us in love before we respond to Him. He loved us simply because he does. There was nothing we did to deserve that love. Thus, it is grace. Because of the grace of God’s love, we can have the peace that follows.
9. Verse 2: We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers.
- a) This verse is a great little line to keep in mind about our prayer life.
 - i) It is about the importance of praying for other Christians.
 - ii) I suspect that when Paul prayed for the Thessalonians, he didn’t go into long prayer requests on a name-by-name basis. He simply prayed for the church in Thessalonica, period.
 - b) I believe God wants us to give prayer support to our local church as well as other Christian churches He has laid on our heart.
 - i) On one extreme, I don’t believe God wants us to spend days in prayer for every branch of every denomination. On the other extreme, we shouldn’t just say, “God bless all the churches around the world”. The balance is to prayerfully support the churches we have been called to prayerfully support.
 - ii) That is most likely, the church you attend.
 - iii) If you are a missionary, you prayerfully support the church you help plant or help grow. You may have been called by your church to continually and regularly pray for a specific church or a specific group to grow and flourish. I believe that is what Paul did daily. He spent time in prayer for the churches that he planted.
 - c) It is time to remember one of my favorite expressions: “Without God, we can’t. Without us, God won’t.”
 - i) If God wants a church to flourish, He could do it without our help. God likes to work through people. Out of His love for us, He wants to get us involved in the process. Therefore, God encourages prayer support for churches.
 - ii) This means at the least, we should be prayerfully supporting the pastors of our church as well as individual members of our church. Over and above that, if there is a particular group that you want to either see saved or a church you want to see grow, pray for them. If you’re not sure, find one! There are places around the globe where Christians are being persecuted. Pick one or some spots, and start praying for them!
 - iii) I am convinced the church in Thessalonica would never have survived without Paul’s (and his companion’s) prayer support. That church had to survive persecution as well as the moral deviant temptations of that world around it. The survival of a church is not just the self-will and determination of that church, but the prayer support of its members and outsiders for it to flourish! Again, “Without God we can’t and without us, God wont.”
 - d) So how exactly did Paul pray for the church in Thessalonica? We get clues in the letter:
 - i) “For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory. (1st Thessalonians 2:11-12 NIV)
 - a) The point here is I think Paul spent time in prayer to encourage this church to live a life worthy of God. For us to work with an encourage the growth of a church is not just a “hands-on” experience, but also prayer to God to give us the power to do so as well as for the church itself.

- ii) “May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1st Thessalonians 5:23 NIV)
 - a) Here is the other little prayer in the letter. It is a prayer of encouragement to “keep doing the right thing”. Notice this little prayer mentions the “whole spirit, soul and body”. The idea is that all believers work together to grow and thrive in their faith in Jesus. It is a prayer for a healthy and vibrant church.
10. Verse 3: We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.
- a) Speaking of prayer, there is more in Verse 3. ☺
 - b) Verse 2 talks about how Paul and his companions were praying for this church.
 - i) In Verse 3 it says we “remember before our God”. That is prayer.
 - ii) We tend to think of prayer as a “laundry list” of requests to bring to God. Prayer is also stating gratitude of things God has already accomplished.
 - a) Remember that God knows everything. We don’t pray gratitude lists to remind God of what He has done, but to remind us of what God has done. It is an act of humility. If we recall the good things God has done, it encourages us in other works. It reminds us, “I have seen God do this-and-that and that gives me the courage to move on to the next step.”
 - c) Paul states three specific things he is grateful for (in prayer to God) in this verse:
 - i) The first is “Your (The Thessalonians) work produced by faith”.
 - a) This gets into the classic topic of “faith and works”
 - b) “Faith” and “Works” are like a two-sided coin. You can’t take one with you without the other side tagging along. For example, you may have faith that a chair can hold your weight, but true faith in actually sitting in that chair because of your faith in that chair holding your weight.
 - c) We are saved by faith alone. But if we are truly trusting in that faith, we will act accordingly. That is the idea of “work produced by faith”.
 - d) Some people think Paul is “faith only and no works”.
 - (1) Paul said, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9, NIV)
 - (2) Yet here in 1st Thessalonians, Paul says “work produced by faith”.
 - (3) Again, you can’t have one without the other. God does give us faith in Him. That is a gift from God. Through that faith, we “work” because we trusting in that faith.
 - (4) I once heard “faith and works” described as breathing. If you take in a big lung full of air, you need to let it out. The same with faith and works. If you take in a “big lung full of faith”, you need to have an outlet of that faith, and that is the things we do for God and for others. That is “works”.
 - ii) The second thing Paul states is “Your labor prompted by love.”
 - a) Think back to the first time you fell in love with somebody:
 - (1) You wanted to find out everything you could about that person.
 - (2) You wanted to spend time with that person.
 - (3) You longed to be with them when you were apart.
 - (4) That the idea of “labor prompted by love”. When we have love for someone that produces “labor” to act upon that love.

- b) Let's use that analogy of "first love" with our relationship with God:
 - (1) If we have that type of love, we want to spend time with God (through prayer and study).
 - (2) If we have that type of love, we long to be with God when we are "away" for a while.
 - (3) When Jesus was scolding the church of Ephesus, he said, "Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love." (Revelation 2:4 NIV). That ties to the idea of God as our "first love". He should be our primary love over our family, our work, our children, etc. It is through God's love that we have the power to love all others in our life.
- c) Next, let's use the analogy of "first love" with our relationship with others.
 - (1) If you have the love of God in you, you want to share it with others.
 - (2) A good example is an artist with a great gift to paint or sculpt. If someone has that talent, they just "want" to paint or sculpt whether or not they get paid for it. It's "in their system".
 - (3) God is a God-of-Perfect-Love. If He has that love then he just "wants" to share it with others. This is why He calls people to spend eternity with us. Perfect Love requires free will. If you "force" someone to love you, that is not true love. Therefore God reaches out to us in that Perfect Love and at the same time allows us the free will to choose him.
 - (4) Which leads to love-of-others. If God puts that love in us, we then "naturally" want to share that love with others. Biblical love is the idea of giving of ourselves to others. It is about making others a priority over ourselves. It is putting other's needs above your own.
 - (5) There is a balance aspect as well. God does not expect you to say, completely ignore your own health to serve others. God expects us to take care of ourselves so we have the strength to help others.
- d) Let's get back to the second idea of "Your labor prompted by love."
 - (1) In a sense, it is very similar to Paul's first comment on "work produced by faith". If we have faith, then we naturally want to do "works" to act on that faith. The same applies to "labor prompted by love". If we have that love, then we naturally want to "do things (i.e., "labor") due to that faith.
 - (2) The idea of "love's good works" is a big theme of 1st John. Here is an example: "My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth." (1st John 3:18 NIV). My translation: "Don't just so you love someone, act on it!"
- d) Finally, Paul said "Your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ."
 - i) Christian "burn out" can come real easy. We can get over committed, overburdened, overworked or many other "over's". Part of living the Christian live is to constantly draw upon God for strength to keep going. (By the way, next time you read through the Gospels, notice how much emphasis there is on Jesus resting with his disciples!)
 - ii) What "keeps us going" is the hope in Jesus.
 - a) First of all, we're not talking about "hope" as in "I hope Jesus comes back". In that context, it sounds like one has doubt.

- iii) Hope is about expectation.
 - a) "Faith is belief, Hope is expectation. Each involves the idea of trust, but with the use of different prepositions. Faith is trust in or reliance upon any person or thing. Hope is trust of some person or thing, or expectation of the happening of something desirable." James Boyce (1887).
 - iv) Hope in this context is about we expect Jesus to return. (We're back to that Second Coming thing again! ☺)
 - a) Because we have that expectation (hope), we live accordingly.
 - b) Paul commends the church in Thessalonica. They are a "successful" thriving church. One of the reasons for that success is they live on that expectation of Jesus coming back at any moment.
 - c) In my life I have had the privilege of meeting lots of Christians and going to a bunch of different churches. As a general rule, I have found that most "on fire for Jesus" people are ones who live with the expectation that Jesus can come back at any time. It was true in the 1st Century and is true in the 21st Century. God "designed" the plan so every generation would think, "this is it, Jesus can return at any moment". There will be a day when Jesus does come back. In the meantime, we are to live with that expectation that it can happen at any time.
 - e) Believe it or not, we made it all the way to verse 4. (I promise to go a little faster now! ☺)
11. Verse 4: For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you,
- a) Verses 4 and 5 are one sentence. I'll tie them together in a moment.
 - b) Before I do, it is important to discuss the idea of "chosen".
 - i) Christianity teaches the concept that saved people are both 1) chosen by God and 2) we have made the free-will choice to choose God.
 - ii) It is impossible to reconcile those two facts, but they both exist. Using an analogy I did earlier, it is like "two sides of the same coin.". If God knows all things, then he knows in advance who will choose Him. Therefore, there is "pre-destiny" aspect of our salvation. The bible clearly teaches that God choose us first and therefore, "somehow", we turned around and choose him.
 - iii) "Some people say, "That's not fair that God didn't choose me. Well, go and accept Jesus as your Savior and you know that God choose you."" Chuck Smith.
 - iv) The danger in Christianity is to take either point to an extreme.
 - a) I have met Christians who refuse to get involve with Evangelistic rallies as they believe "God chooses people and therefore we shouldn't have meetings asking people to accept Jesus".
 - b) The other extreme is that one ignores the fact that God specifically chooses people and it is strictly a "free-will" decision.
 - c) The point of this verse is that "Since we know God choose us, we need to do something about it". There is an old Christian slang proverb that says, "God choose me and God don't pick no junk!".
 - i) The application of this verse is, "If God choose you, what are you doing about it?"
 - ii) Again we are back to "faith and work". If we believe we are chosen by God, we need to act upon that faith. If we know that we are loved by God, we need to respond in love to God and to others. That is what Paul is calling the church in Thessalonica and us to do!
 - iii) With that in mind, now let's read Verses 4-5 together:

12. Verses 4-5: For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵ because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake.
- a) Verse 4 says that God choose them. That's the Thessalonians and all believers.
 - b) Verse 5 says that God choose them because the Gospel came to them with power and conviction. That means that God calls believers with a purpose in mind: To change them and change the world around them.
 - c) Verse 5 describes the power of how God choose them.
 - i) Paul is saying is that God's Word, the Gospel message has a special power to it.
 - ii) When we were children, we were told stories how magic words like "Open Sesame" can cause a cave door to open". In that sense, the words of the Gospel have special powers over and above the words themselves. The words "do things" to people because there is power behind those words.
 - iii) You can give the Gospel message to people, and it has the power to change lives. It is not the persuasiveness of the speaker but the power of God's Word at work.
 - a) Go to an Evangelistic rally some time. Watch people step forward when the preacher asks if anyone wants to accept Jesus in his or her life. The point is there is power in those words.
 - iv) I have also seen the power of the Word of God work "the other way" as well.
 - a) I have a friend who was approached by some Hari Krishnas at the airport. He started quoting part of Romans to them and they actually ran away in fright. (That's one way to get to your airline gate on time. ☺)
 - b) I remember many years before I got saved being approached by Christians at college and I remember running away. I know understand the spiritual powers that lead me to run away. (Luckily, God didn't give up on me!)
 - v) Back in Thessalonica, Paul went to a synagogue on 3 consecutive Saturdays (Acts 17:1-4). Some people believed and got saved. Others did not. This is the idea of being chosen by God and at the same time gave those who were called the power to go forth and to develop faith in Jesus Christ.
 - d) This verse mentions the Holy Spirit by name.
 - i) When you read through the New Testament, you get clues here and there about the role of the Holy Spirit, but there is no particular chapter on that topic. To learn of the purpose, role and deity of the Holy Spirit one has to study the entire bible.
 - ii) The reason the Holy Spirit is not a focal point is because His job is to give glory to God the Father and to Jesus. I like to describe part of His role as being a choir director at church. A choir director is to lead others in praising God.
 - iii) Jesus makes a promise that once you get saved, the Holy Spirit "enters" you and becomes part of your life.
 - a) If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever – the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. (John 14:15-17, NKJV).
 - iv) Which leads back to 1st Thessalonians. Paul knew his Holy Spirit theology. ☺
 - a) He understood the purpose of the Holy Spirit and how it worked in people's lives. Further, this young church also understood it. Paul would not have referenced the Holy Spirit unless the reader understood it.
 - v) Another purpose of the Holy Spirit is to help us grow in our faith.
 - a) As we read and study the bible, the role of the Holy Spirit is to help us understand God's word and teach us how to apply it. (See John 14:26).
 - b) Another purpose of the Holy Spirit is to convict people of the truth.

- (1) There are many people who just wish “those Christians would just leave their religion to themselves”. Folks, that’s conviction. People don’t want to feel guilty about whatever sin they are committing. That is the Holy Spirit trying to work in their lives.
 - (2) “When he (Holy Spirit) comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; (John 16:8-9 NIV)
 - c) Finally, the Holy Spirit helps us on how to pray:
 - (1) “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will.” (Romans 8:26-27, NIV)
 - e) OK, let’s finish Verse 4: You know how we lived among you for your sake.
 - i) This last little sentence, among others later in this chapter, reminds us how Paul, Silas and Timothy lived as examples among this church.
 - ii) This little sentence indicates that Paul did not just preach on 3 Saturdays and ignore the saved people the other six days of the week. Paul and the others lived among them so as to teach, exhort and help them grow as a church.
 - iii) This thought continues in Verse 6.
13. Verse 6: You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.
- a) I’m fascinated by the thought of “imitators of us”.
 - i) Does this mean Paul, Silas and Timothy were perfect? I don’t think so.
 - ii) God does not expect perfection, but He does desire changed behavior.
 - iii) Thessalonica was a big city of 200,000 people. They worshipped multitudes of Greek Gods. Paul lived among them and taught them to ignore the pagan gods of the world and focus their lives on the true God. Paul said in effect, “Here is the truth. Look to God as the model for lives just as we do. That is how the church is to “imitate” Paul and his coworkers.
 - iv) We still have false gods today. We just use different titles for those “gods”. Everybody has a god. Look how people spend their disposable income and their free time and you will find their god. Christianity teaches to make the true God the center of your life. I’m not preaching against hobbies and interests, I’m saying that we are to make God is our primary focus and interest. If we have that type of focus, our interest in other things will be limited.
 - b) With all of that in mind, now we can take the whole verse in context.
 - i) Here was this young church. They suffered for their beliefs even in the early days.
 - a) The Book of Acts taught that the members of the Jewish synagogue who were not converted persecuted the Christian believers.
 - (1) Don’t take that lightly. People were killed for their belief.
 - (2) I’m sure the leaders of the Greek god temples didn’t take this lightly either. They don’t like their attendance dropping and their power base dropping. I’m sure they persecuted as well.
 - b) Remember that Satan persecutes the church because He doesn’t want others to become believers. Therefore, there are demonic forces behind those that are persecuted.
 - ii) Now look at the verse again. Paul states that despite all of this, the Thessalonians welcomed the Gospel message. They welcomed the Holy Spirit into their lives.

- iii) This shows the power of the Holy Spirit is greater than whatever the world has to offer. The power of the Holy Spirit is greater than the demonic forces that try to prevent the church from growing.
 - a) It also makes a great witness to others. “Hey, Bob, I haven’t seen you at the Greek Temple lately. ☺ What’s gotten into you?”
- 14. Verse 7: And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.
 - a) When you become a good witness for Jesus, people take notice.
 - i) When you can be strong in your belief despite persecution, others notice.
 - ii) When you can have joy in your heart despite suffering all around you, it becomes a great witness for Jesus. All people go through suffering at some point in their life. Others are watching. This is not about being happy all the time. Life has its painful moments. But if others can see you have joy and inner peace despite the tragedies of life, they notice.
 - b) Here are the Thessalonians, growing as a healthy church despite the persecution.
 - i) Their reputation had spread through all of Macedonia (Northern Greece) and Achaia (Southern Greece).
 - ii) Other churches were probably saying, “Hey, if the Thessalonians can survive through all of this, so can we!”
 - a) My point is you never know who you are being a witness to. You may be going through some tragedy as a group or by yourself, and you don’t see how it is benefiting anybody. Yet here are other churches that only heard of the Thessalonians by reputation and how their suffering was benefiting others. Again, you never know who you are being a witness to!
- 15. Verse 8: The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia--your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it,
 - a) One commentator paraphrased this verse by saying, “Hey folks, you’re such a good witness for Jesus, you’re putting me (Paul) out of business!” (Paraphrasing David Guzik)
 - b) Let me say something wonderful about being a missionary or a pastor.
 - i) There are few greater joys in life than to watch someone grow in Christ.
 - ii) Imagine being a missionary. All you did was preach the Gospel message and teach the basics. Now on their own, these people are growing, thriving and teaching others about Jesus. For those who get the chance to see people’s lives grow and change, there is no greater joy to behold.
 - iii) I believe that is what motivates a lot of pastors and missionaries. They simple preach the Word, stand back and watch God work. It never gets old!
 - iv) Part of my motivation for teaching and writing these lessons is I love to see the results in people’s lives.
 - v) You can apply these same principals to parents and children or to a special person you are called to minister to. You teach others, lead by example and pray over them, and then let God take care of the results. It is a wonderful thing to watch.
 - vi) Yes there are people who don’t get to see the results. God does call some people home prior to seeing their results. There are times where walking by faith means trusting God with the results and not getting to see them ourselves in our lifetime.
- 16. Verse 9: for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,
 - a) Imagine Paul coming to Christians in another town.
 - i) These other Christians say to Paul, “Hey Paul, have you heard about those guys over in Thessalonica? They are doing well despite persecution!
 - b) Now here is Paul telling the Thessalonians, “Hey folks, you’re famous! You may not realize it in your pain, but you’re being a great witness for churches in other towns!

- c) Can you imagine how uplifting this message was for the Thessalonians?
 - i) “Wow, we hadn’t thought about how we were affecting believers in other towns. We were just worshipping Jesus, going to church, and trying to stay alive. We never thought about how our behavior is being a witness to others!”
 - ii) Yes there is a not-to-subtle sermon here! ☺ I ask the question back in the introduction of this lesson that, “If you were accused of being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you? The Thessalonians were “convicted” and hopefully, so are we!”
 - iii) The question for us to examine every now and then is what “idols” are we serving that we need to turn from in order to serve the “living and true God”?
17. Verse 10: and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead--Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.
- a) OK, were back to the Second Coming thing again! ☺
 - b) Paul emphasizes two points about Jesus in this verse:
 - i) The first is that God the Father raised Jesus from the dead.
 - a) That is important for a number of reasons. The first and foremost is the resurrection of Jesus is God The Father’s “acceptance” of Jesus as payment for sins. You can argue that if Jesus was not resurrected, than God the Father did not accept his payment on the cross for our sins.
 - b) The second aspect is the trust in resurrection. Let’s face it, if were not resurrected, we’re wasting our time being Christians.
 - (1) “If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.” (1st Corinthians 15:19 NIV)
 - c) Let’s face it. Living the Christian life can be tough. We’re praying to a God we cannot see or touch and does not audibly communicate to us. Further, we become non-popular with people. Why bother going through all of this, unless of course, it is the truth! We do this as it is truth and we are trusting that we will be resurrected like Jesus and live with him forever. Forever happens to be a lot longer than our lifetime!
 - ii) Paul’s second point is that Jesus rescues us from the coming wrath.
 - a) This can refer to eternal hell or it can refer to the tribulation period. In summary, the tribulation is a 7-year period where much of the world is destroyed. This is the main topic of the Book of Revelation. When Paul says the “coming wrath” he can be referring to either the tribulation or eternal judgment. Reading the whole letter in context, I do believe it refers to the tribulation period, but that’s my opinion.
 - b) Personally, I would rather avoid both. ☺ Therefore, I am trusting in Jesus to come back again.
 - c) Paul’s main point is that Jesus rescues us from the coming wrath!
 - i) One of the reasons we look forward to His Second Coming is to avoid that wrath.
 - ii) Personally, I don’t like pain. I don’t even want to think about wrath! ☺ I would rather trust in Jesus and avoid the wrath-thing, thank you very much. ☺
 - iii) The mistake many people make is they think they can “Get saved once, and then for all intents and purposes ignore God”. There is a wrongful idea of “accept Jesus and get that’s it”. It is true that to accept Jesus is a first step. The mistake people make is to make a verbal commitment to Jesus and then not follow through with changes in their lifestyle. Remember in Verses 3-5, Paul commended their faith by their “faith, love and hope”. That is the evidence of their changed lives.

- iv) The Christian life is “worth it” at the very least, to avoid the wrath that is to come. There is no avoiding that it is coming. There are other benefits as well, but one cannot ignore the fundamental truth that we are sinners and we are trusting in Jesus substitute payment of our sins, past present and future. The rest is “gravy” in comparison to that fact.
 - d) OK, a little over twelve pages on 10 verses. I think that’s enough for one week. ☺
18. Let’s pray:. Heavenly Father, first of all, we thank you that you have called us to salvation. You have rescued us of the wrath to come upon the world. Help us to continually trust in you and trust in what Jesus did for us. Help us to make our lives a living witness for you. Help the church we are involved in to survive, grow and be witnesses for you in our community and to other churches as well. Comfort those who are being persecuted for their faith and help us to pray and comfort other Christians who are going through such persecution. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.