

The Legacy of Imitation
1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Introduction

1. Today we begin an eight week study through the book of 1 Thessalonians
2. Background:
 - a. In Acts 15-18 we have a recording of Paul's second missionary journey
 - b. On his first journey, Paul traveled with Barnabas and John Mark, but John Mark had abandoned them which led to a disagreement between Paul and Barnabas as to whether they should take John Mark on the next journey
 - c. So, they split up and Paul took Silas and headed for Syria and Cilicia where they met Timothy and added them to their team
 - d. When the Holy Spirit prevented them from going to Asia, they ended up in Troas where Paul had a night vision calling him to Macedonia to preach the Gospel there (Acts 16:10)
 - e. While there, Paul and Silas were arrested and spent time in prison, but after their release they went to Thessalonica where "**a great multitude of God-fearing Greeks**" and a small number of Jews were won to Christ
 - f. The rest of the Jews weren't happy about this so they forced Paul, Silas and Timothy to leave Thessalonica and head down to Berea
 - g. However, when they got to Berea, the Jews showed up there and forced them to flee again, this time to Athens
 - h. When they got to Athens, Paul sent Silas and Timothy away—according to 1 Thessalonians 3:2 and Acts 18:5, Timothy went back to Thessalonica and Silas to Berea to see how the new disciples were doing
 - i. A short time later, Paul left Athens and then had Timothy and Silas rejoin him in Corinth
3. Paul wrote two letters to the Thessalonians:
 - a. There is no agreement on which letter came first
 - b. Many believe that what we call 2 Thessalonians was actually Paul's first letter, and this one is actually the second
 - c. Part of the reason is the tone of the letters:
 - 1) 2nd Thessalonians is more pointed and direct, and was clearly written out of serious concerns—Paul mentions three (their persecution, a misunderstanding of the Day of the Lord, and that some in the church were being disruptive)
 - 2) 1st Thessalonians is much more praiseworthy and encouraging
 - 3) So, some believe that Paul wrote the 2nd Thessalonians first out of major concern about how they were doing after he was run out of the city and gave this letter to Timothy when he sent him back to check up on them, and then wrote 1st Thessalonians after meeting up with Timothy in Corinth and hearing his positive report
 - d. Internal evidence from the two letters seems to support the theory above:
 - 1) The persecution mentioned in 1st Thessalonians is past, while it is in the present in 2nd Thessalonians which would support the idea that it was written right after Paul was forced out of Thessalonica
 - 2) The disorder mentioned in 2 Thessalonians (people not working to meet their own needs) appears as a new problem, but in 1st Thessalonians it is also mentioned but appears to be resolved

- 3) Paul's signature at the end of 2 Thessalonians was given so that they would know how to recognize his letters—this makes sense if it was the first letter, not the second
- 4) Paul gave instructions regarding end times in 2nd Thessalonians, but in 1st Thessalonians he indicates they no longer need instruction—again, this makes sense if 1st Thessalonians came after 2nd
4. This letter is similar to Philippians in that it is overflowing with praise—in fact, two of the five chapters are dedicated to praising the recipients
5. Another major theme of the letter is encouragement (the Greek word *parakaleo*—to speak alongside—is used 8 times)
6. As I first studied this letter way back in seminary I was impressed with one last thing:
 - a. The Thessalonians left an impression on the world around them, especially other believers
 - b. There were known for a host of Christian character traits like imitation, investment, encouragement, purity, love, hope, watchfulness and Godly conduct
 - c. So, were going to look at these things and see what we can learn from them, and from what Paul encouraged in them
7. Today we're going to look at the idea of imitation
 - a. Paul left a legacy for the Thessalonians which they imitated
 - b. The Thessalonians left a legacy for all of Macedonia, Achaia and us

A. Introduction

1. The letter was penned by Paul on behalf of himself, Silas (Silvanus) and Timothy: **"Paul and Silvanus and Timothy..."** (1a)
2. It was addressed to the **"Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:"** (1b)
 - a. The Thessalonians were the **"god-fearing Greeks"** and handful of Jews that accepted the Gospel when Paul preached in the synagogue at Thessalonica in Acts 17:1-4
 - b. God-fearing Greeks were mono-theistic Greeks that worshipped God and shared much in common with the Jews (they were often found in the Jewish synagogue like they were at Thessalonica when Paul preached)
 - c. This is interesting because of the way Paul addresses them in this letter:
 - 1) In many of his letters, Paul refers to his recipients by reminding them of their new position in Christ:
 - a) Corinthians: **"To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ..."** (1 Corinthians 1:2)
 - b) Ephesians: **"To the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus"** (Ephesians 1:1)
 - c) Philippians: **"To all the saints in Christ Jesus..."** (Philippians 1:1)
 - d) Colossians: **"To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ..."** (Colossians 1:2)
 - 2) However, in this letter he adds the phrase **"in God The Father"** when he addresses them, in fact he leads with it: **"Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"**
 - 3) He also does this in the introduction to his other letter to the Thessalonians

B. Paul thanked God for the quality of the Thessalonians faith (2-5)

1. Read v. 2-5
2. Paul began his letter with a reminder of how he thanked God for the Thessalonians (2): **“We give thanks to God always for all of you...”**—He does this with three participial phrases:
 - a. The first one tells us **HOW** he thanked God: He thanked God by **“making mention”** of the Thessalonians when he prayed (2):
 - 1) How often do we think that our prayers for others have to involve some specific need or identified issue?
 - 2) Often, Paul’s prayers simply revolved around thanking God for others and simply mentioning certain praiseworthy things about their faith
 - 3) He does that here as reflected in the next couple of verses
 - b. The second phrase tells us **WHAT** he thanked God for: He was **“constantly bearing in mind”** the quality of their faith (3)
 - 1) The first thing Paul constantly kept in mind was their **“work of faith”**:
 - a) This refers to work which resulted from faith
 - b) It’s singular, not plural, so it’s a reference to their life-work as a whole now that they were Christians
 - c) See 1 Corinthians 3:12-15
 - 2) The second thing he constantly kept in mind was their **“labor of love”**
 - a) The word for labor here refers to labor that results in difficulties or troubles
 - b) This labor was motivated by their love for one another and the Lord Jesus Christ
 - c) The idiom “labor of love” refers to doing something for the simple pleasure of doing it, rather than doing it for reward or personal gain
 - 3) The third thing he constantly kept in mind was their **“steadfastness of hope”**
 - a) The object of their hope was Jesus Christ
 - b) Remember, they were under severe persecution at this time by the Jews
 - c) But, they never lost their hope in Jesus Christ
 - c. The third phrase tells us **WHY** Paul thanked God: He was thankful God called them: **“Knowing, brethren, beloved by god, His choice of you;”** (4-5)
 - 1) The phrase **“his choice of you”** (NASB) or **“that he has chosen you”** (NIV) is literally the phrase **“your calling.”**
 - 2) Paul was convinced of God’s calling in their lives because of the miraculous way the Gospel had been presented to them (5): **“For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.”**

C. Paul also thanked God for the Thessalonians because they became imitators of Paul and Jesus Christ (6-10).

1. Another reason Paul was so thankful for the Thessalonians was because they had become “imitators” of not only him and his companions, but of Jesus Christ (6): **“You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit,”**
 - a) Imitation may be the greatest form of flattery but it’s more than that for the Christian, it’s an expectation

- b) Discipleship is all about providing an example:
 - Paul challenged his disciples to imitate him (1st Corinthians 4:14-17; 11:1-2; Philippians 3:17; 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9)
 - He even commands Timothy and Titus to set examples for their disciples (1 Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:7)
- c) The Thessalonians had taken heed of Paul's example and began to live by it
 - **"with much tribulation"**
 - **"with joy of the Holy Spirit"**

Imitating Pastor Krenz in my preaching and teaching, and going against the trend in seminary

- 2. In turn, this imitation made them an example to Christians all over the known world:
 - a) In their immediate regions: **"so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia"** (7)
 - b) The entire known world: **"For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything."** (8)
 - c) It was so prolific that Paul didn't even get a chance to boast to others about them...others reported to Paul about the radical transformation of the Thessalonians!! (9): **"For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, 10 and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come."**
 - They were known for how they had accepted Paul and the Gospel (9b)
 - They were known for how they **"turned to God from idols"** (9c)
 - They were known for how they were eagerly awaiting the return of Christ (10)

D. Conclusion

1. How do you want to be known?
2. What do you want people to know and say about you?
3. What kind of legacy do you want to leave?
4. How do you want people to remember you?
5. Your legacy depends on who you are imitating—in some respect those Godly men and women who have helped establish you in your faith, but more importantly Jesus Christ, the author and finisher of your faith