

Synopsis of 1 Thessalonians

Foundations of Gospel Fellowship: Shared Grace, Service, Suffering, & Rejoicing

1:1-10 – Shared Grace: Saving Grace & Changing Grace

Paul and Silvanus and Timothy rejoice over how their brief stay in Thessalonica was used powerfully by God in their lives. God had chosen these Thessalonians as His own. And the reality of this choosing was evident by the change seen in them – specifically in their work of faith, labor of love, and perseverance of hope. Despite much persecution from their own countrymen, their visible and verbal witness was reverberating throughout the entire region – noticeably and unexpectedly they had radically turned from worshipping various idols to zealously serve the living and true God and waiting for His Son from heaven to rescue them from the wrath to come.

TakeAways:

- If you are in Jesus Christ, you can rejoice in the same – this shared grace – of His choosing of you and changing of you!
- Are our lives and our lips “reverberating” the gospel into our regions in a similar ways – through works of faith, labors of love, steadfastness of hope evident in our lives, by what we do and what how we speak – is it clear to people that we belong to Jesus now???
- Have we radically turned from the idolatry (NCC 17– trusting in created things rather than the Creator for our hope and happiness, significance and security)?
- Does this Shared Grace of God define us?

2:1-12 – Shared Service: Doing Jesus’ Work Jesus’ Way

Paul reminds them of the example he himself gave of what it is to serve the living and true God. He and his mission team came with great boldness to plainly explain of the Good News of Jesus – despite having just been painfully run out of neighboring Philippi for doing the very same thing. Undeterred, they neither spoke error nor tried to flatter men nor personally gain from those to whom they spoke. Just like Jesus before them, they acted like men on a mission, having been personally entrusted by God with the gospel, and fully accountable to God for all they said and did. Even though they had such an authoritative commission from God, it didn’t keep them from being gentle among the Thessalonians, like a mother with a baby – affectionate, careful, full of love, delighted to impart not only a message of salvation, but to pursue life-long friendships with them. Such an investment required much of them – laboring day and night, so as to never be a burden – behaving consistently devout, upright, and blameless in the eyes of men and God. Their mission meant not only exemplifying the tenderness of a mother, but also the encouragement, inspiration, and directness of a father. The goal of such ministry was not just to make friends or be a self-help coach – it was nothing less than a life lived truly worthy of God’s Kingdom and Glory – their lives lived that way, and bringing the Thessalonians into such a life!

TakeAways:

- Paul is not rehearsing this to get from them a pat on the back. Rather to encourage them to join in the Gospel Fellowship by living a life of Gospel service to others.
- We too have been entrusted with the Gospel – so just like the way Jesus fulfilled His mission was the example for Paul, so Paul’s example instructs us. With intentionality, love, and directness, and a heart of sacrifice that says “what can I give” rather than “what can I get”... we give the good news and ourselves to others around us. In this way, our interactions and relationships with others will not be “in vain” from an eternal perspective.
- We are not just trying to be nice or just hoping someone will get “saved” – our goal is nothing short of leading others to walk worthily in this world as a citizen of the glorious Kingdom of God. Keeping this goal in mind will direct our methods.
- The Spirit, through Paul here, is inviting us into the fellowship of Shared Service.

2:13-20 – Shared Suffering: It is Inevitable and Glorious

By the Spirit's power, the Word of Jesus proclaimed by Paul's mission team was not only received by the Thessalonians, but actively at work in them. Powerful proof was their willingness to endure the same kind of suffering believers in Judea were experiencing from the Jews (same as the Lord Jesus did, the prophets before Him, and now Paul and team were receiving all over the Mediterranean region). Paul assures them that one day, God is going to set all this right, but for now he rejoices in that their faithfulness was bringing them into the fellowship of Jesus' sufferings...

Paul adds that even though Satan had up to that point hindered him from being able to return to see the them, he expresses how eager he is to hear how they are doing, because he longs for them to be among the faithful fruits of his own ministry on the day Jesus returns, because THAT will give him all the more reason to rejoice on that Day.

TakeAways:

- Suffering for Jesus is suffering with Jesus. Paul invites Timothy to "join me in suffering for the Gospel." It is a glorious thing to suffer with Jesus. We need to see it that way. While we don't pursue it, we can rejoice in the fellowship when we share suffering with a pretty special group – Apostles, Jesus, prophets.
- Available to us as well is this special joy Paul anticipates in eternity of having personally contributed to eternal worshippers for Jesus.
- But joy for Paul is not just in future anticipation, but even in the present...

3:1-13 – Shared Rejoicing: Concern leads to Action leads to Rejoicing leads to further Prayer

Paul explains his reason for sending Timothy back to check on them – knowing that violent persecutions can deceive and disorient and discourage even the most devoted disciple (even if you know ahead of time that such sufferings will come). So, Paul doubles down and sends his right arm to personally strengthen and encourage them. So, imagine his delight when Timothy returns with expressions not only of the Thessalonians affection, but also reports of their staunch, joyful faith in the midst of their troubles. Ah, this is the "true life" of the joy of seeing the Spirit work in others! Invigorated, Paul prays with more longing to be able to see them face-to-face and help them even more along in the faith. He also prays for their increased love for each other and all people (even their persecutors). Because, he knew that if such love began to pervade their hearts and actions, this would be the means used by God to make their lives blameless until the day when Jesus returns with all the saints.

TakeAways:

- When we see a brother or sister in Christ going through a spiritual struggle... we can have a tendency to simply sit on the sidelines of their trouble and pray for them. Paul's example here is to personally move in to help, encourage, strengthen.
- The motivation for such concerned action ought to be not only love for them, but in anticipation of the joy of deepened fellowship with them and the shared rejoicing you will have as God carries them through this trial with their faith in tact, and even strengthened.
- Don't think – "surely someone else will encourage them...". You step up and do so!
- These are the Foundations of Gospel Fellowship

Foundations of Gospel Living and Gospel Hope

4:1-12 – Excel Still More in Everyday Life: Sexual Purity, Love for Others, Responsible Living

Having expressed his deep love and concern for their well-being and mutual relationship (like a Mom), Paul plays the loving Dad and now picks up his teachings that seem to have been cut short when he was suddenly run out of Thessalonica earlier in the year. "Keep on Keeping on" is the message from the Lord Jesus to the Thessalonians. A life pleasing to God is going to mean focusing on several tangible areas they seemed to be struggling with...

First, abstain from sexual sin so prevalent in the culture. This starts with a proper self-restraint over your own body and lusts, and extends to respect for other's bodies as well. Reason is, God will in fact avenge all who impurely take for themselves sexual pleasure that is not rightfully theirs to take. Sexual sin has devastating consequences.

Second, keep on showing the kind of supernatural, self-denying, others-blessing love of God that is already evident within you. You just can't love others too much, so brothers, give yourselves to this!

Third, be hard-working people who aren't stirring up trouble around town – this will not only provide for your own needs, but also allow you to be viewed by your community as respectable, responsible people. Make this your ambition!

TakeAways:

- The Christian life is real life. It works its way out in the real tangible things of everyday life.
- The Christian life is also about a lifelong pursuit of growth – you are doing well... Keep it up, excel still more. We are here to cheer each other on. Of course we get tired, and sometimes wear ourselves out and need some special rest. So, rest, regroup, refresh. And then get back to a steady pace of rest / work, refreshment / engagement that will keep you going for the long-run... Don't try to do more than you can do, but also don't be content with what you have done in the past. Rely on the Lord's strength to keep on living the life, and just know that all the while you will be growing stronger, wiser, more useful to the Lord and to others. This kind of realistic, practical approach in what it is to be a disciple of Jesus is a foundation for our Gospel living.

4:13-5:11 – Hope Fixed: The Day of the Lord is Coming!

4:13-18 – Paul clarifies the details of the Christian Hope that the Thessalonians seem to be confused on... Those who die before the Lord returns will in no way miss the glories of the Day of His rescue of His Church. Just like Jesus died and rose bodily again, when Jesus descends in the clouds for His church, those resurrected first will be the dead in Jesus. Then we who are alive in Jesus at that time will be snatched away from this earth to join them in the clouds to be forever with the Lord. These truths should be a great comfort to you all, especially in the face of the death of some among you.

5:1-11 – But while the certainty and suddenness of the Day of the Lord is a great comfort to us, it will be a dread day for the “sons of darkness.” They will be glibly thinking “Peace and Safety,” but suddenly like labor pains on a woman, Jesus will bring upon them the inescapable terror of His full wrath. Since we now live presently right alongside the sons of darkness, the temptation is to slip back into our old ways – being drowsy and drunk to the reality of what the great “tomorrow” will bring. So, being now “sons of the Day,” we are to live “woke to the Day” – sober lives of faith, love, and full of hope and anticipation of the Lord's coming. It won't be a day of wrath for us, but the Day in which we obtain our salvation in full measure through our Lord Jesus Christ – no matter whether we are alive or dead on that Day. Let this truth continue to encourage and enliven your hearts!

TakeAways:

- Don't view death with fear and dread. It is the doorway to life indeed. Live with a settled knowledge of what lies at the end of this race.
- But let your knowledge of the horror that awaits for those who are not “of the Light” move you to two things... 1) Resist being sucked into their values and pursuits – they are truly living a delusion; 2) Seek to sober them to the reality of their plight and the rescue that is available to them as well.

5:12-28 – Essential Christianity: Relating with Others, God, and the Word

Paul wraps up this letter with a series of rapid fire instruction on how a Christian ought to think and act. Appreciation and respect of those who lead, participation in helping others' in their walk, and a pursuit of peace, even with those who do you wrong. Toward God, He first and foremost wants us personally relating

with Him by being “in Christ.” Essentially this will show itself in personal joy, dependent prayers, and constant thanksgivings. The Spirit leads us through His prophetic Word – so examine it carefully and follow it (and it only) diligently.

Paul then models our method – praying earnestly for the sanctification for which we are so diligently working. May God have all of you, and keep you living out a blameless life before God and men. Not necessarily sinless, but earnestly living in humble faith and obedience – such that if the Day of the Lord were to be any given day, you would have nothing of which to be ashamed. It is only by active dependence upon the faithfulness of the Lord that such a life can be achieved. Pray and work for this yourself, and pray for us the very same. Warmly greet each other each time you gather; keep reading this letter again and again, and the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ will be with you!