

1 Thessalonians-by Tommy Lee

Chapter 1

Paul usually begins his letters with an opening section like this one: after the greeting, he expresses thanks to God for what he (God) is doing in the lives of these Christians. Paul's own love and concern for these Christians shows through brightly, as he seeks to give them meaningful encouragement. If you need meaningful encouragement, the first chapters of Paul's letters are usually good places to find such. The themes of the encouragement found here are as follows: their faith, hope, and love are bearing a strong, energetic, enduring witness to the Lord Jesus Christ (v.3). It's evident that God has chosen them (v.4) because of the way the power of the Holy Spirit accompanied their receiving the Word (v.5, see also 2.13). Even though they've been opposed and attacked, they've continued with the kind of joy that can only come from the Holy Spirit (v.6). And in this way they've become examples to many people (v.7,8). God has changed their lives in this specific way: they abandoned their idols, turned to serve the true and living God, with faith in the risen Jesus to deliver them from sin (vs.9,10).

Chapter 2

Go back and re-read 1.5,6. It may not have been obvious yesterday, but the background to that statement included this: after Paul left Thessalonica, those who oppose the gospel came into Thessalonica and waged a war of great criticism against Paul, trying to turn the new Christians against his leadership. Sadly, this was a common event in Paul's ministry. He would be stalked from city to city, and as soon as he would leave a city his enemies would begin to slander him in his absence. Most of chapter 2 can be read as Paul's response to their criticism in this particular case. What was his conduct like? What kind of man was he among the Thessalonians (1.5)? A really great way to grasp chapter 2 is to take out a sheet of paper and take notes on how Paul describes his ministry. What charges does he deny? What marks of his conduct does he draw their attention to? What pictures does he use to illustrate his care for them? Take special note of the times when Paul starts a statement with "you know" or "you remember" (vs.1,2,5,9,11). Also note the two "gifts" of ministry in v.8.

Chapter 3

Paul loved the church. (As should we, for it is the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.) And we see that love expressed here in some ways that are very instructive for us. We saw at the end of chapter 2 (vs.17-20) that Paul had longed to return and encourage this particular church again, but was not able to do so. Therefore, Timothy was sent to "*establish and exhort*" (v.2) this church in the faith, to strengthen them against affliction and temptation (vs.3-5). When Paul heard from Timothy the "*good news*" that their "*faith and love*" (v.6) were "*standing fast in the Lord*" (v.8), he himself was greatly encouraged in the midst of his own "*distress and affliction*" (v.7). Look at v.9 for a sense of the joy and thanksgiving Paul has before the Lord for an awakened and living church. In v.10 Paul reports that he prays "*most earnestly night and day*" for the church, and in vs.11-13 we have a sense of those prayers. He prays for the church's love to increase and abound, for one another and for all. He also prays that they may be found blameless in holiness before God at the coming of Christ. Which leads us into chapter 4...

Chapter 4

At the end of chapter 3, Paul prayed two things for the church: 1. An increasing and abounding love. 2. Hearts to be established in the blamelessness of holiness. At the beginning of chapter 4, these two matters are expanded upon, in reverse order: holiness is dealt with in vs.1-8 and love is dealt with in vs.9-12. What do we learn about holiness in this chapter? That in the grace of the Lord Jesus there are "*instructions*" to honor (v.2). That the "*will of God*" for us includes our "*sanctification*"—that is, that ongoing process in the Christian's life in which we are becoming more and more free from the slavery to

sin so that we might more and more live in the love and character of God (v.3). One aspect of what this means, which must always be stressed, is sexual holiness (v.3-8). Note that holiness does not forbid sexual activity; rather, it keeps the wonderful gift of sexuality honorable and pure. Next, Paul turns to the "love" command, and addresses those who might take advantage of love by depending on the charity of others rather than working responsibly (vs.11,12). Then a new topic opens up...

Chapter 5

At the end of chapter 4, Paul began to deal with questions surrounding the promised return of the Lord Jesus. *What's going to happen to those who have already died by the time the Lord returns?* Paul answered that in 4.13-18. *Well... what's going to happen with regard to those who are living when the Lord returns? What if we're not ready for it?* Paul answers that in vs.1-11. The second coming of Christ will be a day of judgment for those who live in the darkness of sin, but it will be a day of gloriously "fuller" light for those who live in the light of Christ. Note how we need to encourage and build one another up in these truths (4.18; 5.11). What follows from vs.12-22 is a brilliant series of staccato (*for you music people*) instructions for life together in the church. Topics include our posture toward our leaders (vs.12,13), how we are to provide spiritual counsel and direction for one another in the church (v.14), Christian living (vs.15-18), and life in the Spirit (vs.19-22). Note that "*pray without ceasing*" (v.17) does not mean praying nonstop, without ever an interruption. It means praying regularly and frequently.

Reflecting on 1 Thessalonians-

Before moving on to our next book of the Bible, take some time today to reflect on what we've read in 1 Thessalonians. Perhaps re-visit a favorite chapter or an especially meaningful passage. Or read the beginning chapter(s) again, now that you've read the whole. Or go back to a part of the book that struck you as curious and see if it makes more sense now. Or speed-read the whole thing again, seeking to reinforce its main themes. Or... perhaps you need a catch-up day to finish 1 Thessalonians before we move forward?

"The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times." Psalm 12.6