

# Visible to God

Printed Text · 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

## Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: RECOGNIZE how the Thessalonian church's commitment to God was visible in their relationships to others; FEEL confident in the power of the Holy Spirit to help in times of trouble; and IDENTIFY an opportunity to be more intentional in living out our commitment to Christ.

## In Focus

Michelle was the only one professing faith in Christ within her extended family—not just in word but in deed—as she was committed to living a life pleasing to Christ. Often, she came up against persecution from family members because she would not join in their drinking parties and trips to casinos to gamble.

Michelle never argued with them, she just simply lived out her faith quietly. However, Michelle looked forward to participating in the many activities at church with other believers—like the ones in her mid-week Bible Study. She found encouragement and strength from her church family to continue to love God and others while working out her salvation as she walked daily with God, using the gifts he has given her. But even in this, she knew God was calling her to more.

*How is Michelle witnessing to her extended family? Our behavior is often a powerful witness to others. How can she further her witness to her family?*

## Keep In Mind

“And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost” (1 Thessalonians 1:6, KJV).

## Words You Should Know

- A. **Election** (1 Thessalonians 1:4, KJV) ekloge (Gk.) — The act of God by which He selects individuals and/or groups of people for salvation or service, without regard to their merit. God's election is from eternity and assumes God's knowledge of what persons will or will not do in their freedom.
- B. **Power** (v. 5) dunamis (Gk.) — Connotes here miraculous and mighty power; synonymous with “might” as found in Zechariah 4:6.
- C. **Wrath** (v. 10) orge (Gk.) — Extreme anger, indignation, and punishment.

## Say It Correctly

**Thessalonica.** theh-suh-LAA-nuh-kuh

**Thessalonians.** theh-suh-LOW-nynz

## KJV

**1 Thessalonians 1:1** Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

2 We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers;  
3 Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father;  
4 Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.  
5 For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.  
6 And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost.  
7 So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.  
8 For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing.  
9 For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye 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, which delivered us from the wrath to come.

## NLT

**1 Thessalonians 1:1** This letter is from Paul, Silas, and Timothy. We are writing to the church in Thessalonica, to you who belong to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. May God give you grace and peace.  
2 We always thank God for all of you and pray for you constantly.  
3 As we pray to our God and Father about you, we think of your faithful work, your loving deeds, and the enduring hope you have because of our Lord Jesus Christ.  
4 We know, dear brothers and sisters, that God loves you and has chosen you to be his own people.  
5 For when we brought you the Good News, it was not only with words but also with power, for the Holy Spirit gave you full assurance that what we said was true. And you know of our concern for you from the way we lived when we were with you.  
6 So you received the message with joy from the Holy Spirit in spite of the severe suffering it brought you. In this way, you imitated both us and the Lord.  
7 As a result, you have become an example to all the believers in Greece—throughout both Macedonia and Achaia.  
8 And now the word of the Lord is ringing out from you to people everywhere, even beyond Macedonia and Achaia, for wherever we go we find people telling us about your faith in God. We don't need to tell them about it,  
9 for they keep talking about the wonderful welcome you gave us and how you turned away from idols to serve the living and true God.  
10 And they speak of how you are looking forward to the coming of God's Son from heaven—Jesus, whom God raised from the dead. He is the one who has rescued us from the terrors of the coming judgment.

## The People, Places, and Times

**Thessalonica.** This is the capital and largest city of the Roman province of Macedonia, a mountainous region of Greece. As a port on the shores of what is now called the Gulf of Salonika with a population of about 200,000 people, Thessalonica was one of the wealthiest and most flourishing trade centers in the Roman Empire. The city was on a trade route, the Egnatian Way, linking it to Philippi, Apollonia, and Berea— other places where Paul, Silas, Timothy, and others traveled during their missionary journeys. Many pagan religions and cultural influences also flourished in Thessalonica. These influences challenged the faith of the young Christians there.

**The First Century.** During this period (A.D. 51), Paul was helping to establish churches among the Gentiles. The Thessalonian church was established during his second missionary journey. The environment was usually hostile because religious leaders and others of influence saw Christianity as a threat to the status quo. Believers in these early churches faced great persecution. In fact, many new believers lost their lives.

**Thessalonian Believers.** The new Christians in Thessalonica were struggling with their newfound faith. Persecutions against them by the established order were fierce. The Thessalonian believers had many unanswered questions as they struggled to hold on to their beliefs and waited for Christ's return.

**Timothy.** He was an assistant to Paul who became a believer during Paul's first missionary journey. Timothy was like a son to Paul, and he joined Paul for the other two trips. Timothy was respected in his hometown of Lystra and was Paul's special representative on several occasions. He received two personal letters from Paul and probably knew Paul better than any other person. His mother was Eunice, and his grandmother was Lois. He had a Greek father, so he was of mixed ethnic background. Timothy apparently struggled with a timid and reserved nature.

**Paul.** He was one of the apostles who shaped the history of Christianity. He was transformed from being a persecutor of Christians to a preacher of Christ. This great apostle preached Christ throughout the Roman Empire on at least three missionary journeys. He wrote letters to various churches to instruct and encourage them. These letters became a part of the New Testament.

Paul was born in Tarsus but became a world traveler. He trained as a Pharisee and was actually present at the stoning of Stephen and encouraged the killers. However, when God saved and changed him, He used Paul for great things.

## Background

At the start of today's lesson, the church at Thessalonica was in its infancy. It had been established only two or three years before Paul wrote this letter. These new Christians were struggling with their faith, and there was still much that they did not understand about their walk with God. For example, the Thessalonian believers were unclear concerning Christ's second coming. Some felt that Christ would return immediately and were confused when their loved ones died before He did so. To add to their dilemma, members of the first century church were being persecuted mightily. Many believers were killed by those who hated Christ. These Christians, therefore, were facing extreme sacrifices for their belief.

Paul wrote this letter to encourage these young believers. He wrote to assure them of his love. He also wanted to praise them for their faithfulness in spite of their circumstances and to remind them of their hope in Christ. Paul assured them that their Lord and Savior would return.

## At-A-Glance

1. Greetings to the Believers (1 Thessalonians 1:1)
2. Faith of the Believers (vv. 2–3)
3. Choice of the Believers (vv. 4–7)
4. Witness of the Believers (vv. 8–10)

# In Depth

## 1. Greetings to the Believers (1 Thessalonians 1:1)

Paul and Silas brought the message of salvation to the Thessalonians (Acts 17:1–9), but they were not able to stay there because Greek political leaders and jealous, unbelieving Jews ran them out of town. However, those Thessalonians who had first turned to Christ remained faithful to Him, in spite of persecution.

Paul sent Timothy back to see how the Thessalonians were doing. Timothy brought back the good news that they were following the Lord, but they still had many questions. So Paul wrote this letter to answer their questions and to commend the Thessalonians for their faithfulness.

## 2. Faith of the Believers (vv. 2–3)

After greeting the Thessalonian believers, Paul began encouraging them. He told them how other Christians were praying for them and were grateful for their fellowship as part of the Christian body. He further commended these young Christians for their faithfulness to God in the midst of persecution. They had been faithful in Christian service, loving deeds, and anticipation of Jesus' return.

The Thessalonians were living in the expectation that Jesus could return at any time, and so should we. At some point in our lives, Christ is either going to come back to establish His kingdom or He is going to take us individually to be with Him in glory at the end of our days. If we are living in fellowship with Him, we should be looking forward to living with Him in eternity.

## 3. Choice of the Believers (vv. 4–7)

In verse 4, Paul told the Thessalonians that they had been chosen by God ("election of God," KJV). This is a tough theological issue. Although we are chosen by God, that does not mean we are not responsible for responding to Him. But once we are saved, we realize that we cannot base our hopes on praying, coming down to the altar, or adhering to the traditions of our church; it is only through God's work on Calvary that any of us are saved. We cannot work for our salvation. Since no one knows who God has chosen until they come to Christ, it is our mission to make the Gospel known to everyone.

Then Paul reminded the Thessalonians of how the Good News came to them with power and how God's Holy Spirit did a work in them and changed their lives. As a result, they had become true followers of Christ.

Paul, Silas, and Timothy were also living epistles to the Thessalonians because their lives embodied what they preached. They were doers of God's Word, which is important for all new Christians to see. The Thessalonian believers accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior under much persecution. This is the suffering ("affliction," KJV) Paul mentioned in verse 6.

The message of salvation brought great joy and great persecution. Both the Jews and Gentiles rose up against the Thessalonian believers. This caused some new believers to question their faith. They thought surely they would be protected from death until Christ returned. Paul, therefore, addressed this issue later in his letter and explained the final resurrection (1 Thessalonians 4:13–17).

#### 4. Witness of the Believers (vv. 8–10)

In verses 9 and 10, Paul recognized and applauded the Thessalonians for their response to the Good News of salvation. They heard it, believed, and turned from idol worship and sin to serve God and to look forward to the return of Jesus Christ.

Paul emphasized Christ's second coming in verse 10 and throughout 1 Thessalonians. Because of their persecution, Paul encouraged them to look forward to the deliverance that Jesus would bring with His second coming. This gave these new believers hope. It should also give Christians today that same hope. Some wrongs will not be made right until Christ comes.

#### Search the Scriptures

1. How did Paul and his associates greet the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 1:1–2)?
2. Describe how the Gospel came to these new Christians (v. 5).
3. How did these Christians receive the Gospel message (v. 6)?
4. Describe the effect of the believers' testimony on others (vv. 7–8).
5. Describe the impact that the Gospel had on the Thessalonians (vv. 9–10).

#### Discuss the Meaning

1. Why would a loving and merciful God allow these young Christians to be persecuted and even killed for their faith?
2. Why should Christians pray for and encourage one another?
3. Why is it important that we not only "talk the talk" of a Christian but also "walk the walk" like Paul and his associates did?

#### Liberating Lesson

In today's society, Christians are often called to stand firm and fast in the Lord and on His Word. Our society constantly changes its rules and laws, but God's Word never changes.

Sometimes these rules and laws may conflict with the Bible. Yet, as Christians, we still have to obey what God says in His Word.

Remember that we are lights in a dark and dying world. Unbelievers who see Christians not living the life that we profess may receive mixed or confused messages. Have you been challenged in the last few weeks to stand on God's principles? Did God help you to do so? Were you persecuted for your stand? What were the outcomes?

#### Application For Activation

Pray that God will mature you in the faith and that He will help you to stand firm and remain faithful to Him regardless of your circumstances. Pray that leaders in the church will always be good examples in the faith, believing in and standing on God's Word. Make some plans to be a witness to at least one person this week. How can you witness through your actions? Prepare what you can say as a verbal witness. In the words of 1 Peter 3:15 (KJV), "Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you." Rehearse in class today a simple outline for telling others how to be saved: *A—ask Jesus to forgive your sins; B—believe Jesus died on the Cross to take the punishment for your sins; and C—call on Jesus to save you.*

#### Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

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## Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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## More Light on the Text

**1 Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

Bible scholars speculate that while Paul was in Athens he sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to see how the new converts were doing. Later, while Paul was in Corinth, Timothy brought back a glowing report that they were remaining firm in the faith and were unified as a body. However, Timothy also told Paul that these converts did have questions about the Second Coming that needed to be cleared up. But before Paul addressed these questions in this letter, he greeted the Thessalonian believers with encouraging words, acknowledging Timothy's report that they were "in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 1). The word "in" in the Greek is *en* and means "primary position denoting a [fixed] position in place, time, or state of mind." In essence, Paul assured them that they were indeed children of the Most High God. They belonged to Him, and they were in His family—joint heirs with Jesus. Because they had believed in the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, they were also "fixed" in Him and nothing and no one could pluck them out. Paul ended his greeting by proclaiming God's grace and peace for their lives. "Grace" in the Greek (*charis*, KHAR-ece) means "goodwill, favor." "Peace" in the Greek is *eirene* (i-RAY-nay) and means "quietness, rest." In other words, Paul spoke about God's grace and rest in their lives. He knew that only God could give them what they needed—a sense of belonging, favor, and rest—for the spiritual battles that they had to fight.

**2 We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers;**

**3 Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father;**

Paul gave further encouragement by assuring the Thessalonians that the other saints were praying for them. In other words, they were not going through their battles alone. It is important for all Christians to understand this point. When believers are dealing with trials and tribulations, their other brothers and sisters in the faith need to undergird them in much prayer. Besieged believers should never be isolated and left to fight Satan all alone.

To further encourage the Thessalonians, Paul acknowledged their "work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 3). The word "work" in the Greek (*ergon*, ER-gon), means "labor, effort, business, employment." The phrase "of faith" (Gk. *pistis*, PIS-tis) means "assurance, belief, moral conviction; [it] suggests the belief that God exists and He is the creator and ruler of all things." In the Greek "of love" is *agape* (ag-AH-pay), which means "brotherly love, affection, goodwill, benevolence." The Greek word for "patience" is *hupomone* (hoop-omon-AY), which means "endurance, constancy, steadfastness."

In summation, Paul lifted these young Christians up by commending them on their faithful labor for the Lord, all the loving deeds that they had carried out in His name, and their endurance and

consistency in both the faith and in anticipating the Lord's second coming. He reminded them that the Lord saw their efforts—all that they had done did not go unnoticed by God.

**4 Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.**

**5 For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.**

Paul also reminded these fellow believers about God's "election" of them. "Election" in the Greek is *eklogē* (*ek-log-AY*) and means "divine selection; also, the act of picking out, choosing." This can include God's knowledge of what a person will do freely of his or her own accord. Thus, these Thessalonians were chosen—divinely selected by God Himself, who loved them and accepted them into His family. And because they were chosen by almighty God, the Good News did not come to them "in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost" (v. 5). The Greek word for "power" (*dunamis*, *DOO-nam-is*) means "force, might, strength, ability, inherent power." The Word of God, with the forcefulness to save and keep, therefore, came to them with much power—the might and capacity to transform them from sinners to new creatures by the strength of the omnipotent (all-powerful) Holy Ghost, who dwelled within them. In truth, they heard the Word, obeyed it, and their lives were transformed by it. They were saved and given eternal life.

The Holy Ghost also gave them the assurance that Paul's message was true—the Good News of Salvation was true. Plus, this same Holy Spirit would help them to remain strong in their new faith and would also help them to maintain their moral character and show unconditional love toward one another, even as they underwent persecution.

**6 And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost.**

**7 So that ye were examples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.**

**8 For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing.**

Not only had Paul and his companions been an example of holy living to the believers at Thessalonica, but after the Thessalonians followed in the faith, these new believers were able to become examples or witnesses for the faith to "all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia"—Greece and beyond (v. 7). In other words, in the midst of their afflictions and suffering, they imitated Paul, his companions, and the Lord. They planted seeds of faith that extended past Greece. Paul admitted to them that wherever he went, he found people telling him about the faith of the Thessalonians. They bore fruit for God that pleased both Paul and God.

**9 For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God;**

The Thessalonian church's testimony was that they had turned away from idols and had turned to the one true and living God. They turned from their sin to God, and they faithfully and tenaciously served God and looked forward to His second coming. They believed His Word. We, too, should follow the example of Paul, his companions, and the Thessalonians. We, too, should turn away from our sins to the holy God, set apart from sin. We should encourage each other's faith, lifting up one another's efforts on behalf of God. We should be fervent in our service to Him, winning other souls to Christ, helping make disciples and showing them how to live for Christ. Finally, we should look forward to the Second Coming and live life as though that coming could be any day. We do not know the day or the hour, but we do know that we must be ready when He comes.

**10 And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.**

Paul was sure of Christ's second coming, and he did not deviate from teaching this truth. Because the Thessalonians were being persecuted and even killed, Paul encouraged them to look forward to the deliverance that would be found in Jesus Christ, writing that believers should "wait for his [God's] Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead." There is no other One who can deliver us from the wrath of God to come. The word "wrath" (Gk. orge, OR-gay) means "the act of chastising or disciplining, imposing a penalty for an offense." Make no mistake, God will punish sin. As believers, then, our hope is in the Second Coming, when He will return to reign on the new earth forever and ever with His church.



# Daily Bible Readings

## **Monday**

Isaiah 59:9-15a

## **Tuesday**

Isaiah 59:15b-21

## **Wednesday**

Psalm 38:9-15

## **Thursday**

Romans 4:16-25

## **Friday**

Hebrews 6:13-20

## **Saturday**

Romans 15:7-13

## **Sunday**

1 Thessalonians 1