

1 Thessalonians 1:1 (213)

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The Church in Thessalonica: Insights Into Ministry and Grace

INTRODUCTION:

At the time of this letter Thessalonica was capital of the Roman second district of Macedonia [LIVY, Histories, 45.29]. It was situated on the bay of Therme. The original name came because of the many hot springs adjacent to it. It was a place of considerable commerce. In 315 BC it was renamed Thessalonica after the half sister of Alexander the Great - the wife of Cassander.

In Paul's day the city had a population of 100,000 to 200,000, most of them Greeks, but also many Romans. The city was steeped in pagan religious practices. The citizens of Thessalonica were committed to the worshipped of the pantheon of Greek and Roman deities and the worship of Caesar. Egyptian cults were also prominent. In the midst of all of that there was a sizable population of Jews.

In Acts we find Paul dealing with a woman who was a medium, possessed by a demon

In Paul's day 200,000 people lived there, most of them Greeks, but also many Romans and a strong Jewish minority.

KEY INSIGHT:

We find the account of Paul's arrival in Thessalonica in ACTS 17 (Salonika today.)

Acts 17

Paul arrived in Thessalonica with Silas, Luke, and Timothy after they had gone to Philippi. There in Philippi they led a woman named Lydia to faith in Christ, and then her household came to Christ. There in Philippi they established the first church in what is today Europe. While in Philippi Paul and Silas were arrested on false charges, beaten with rods, thrown into the lowest part of the jail, and put in stocks. They would spread your legs as far apart as possible - an excruciatingly painful position. If I were unjustly arrested and subjected to excruciating pain, I would have been singing the blues, but not Paul! Paul turned to Silas and said, "Let's sing some hymns." So there they were - singing out in that dark room. We can only imagine what the other prisoners were thinking.

WHILE they were singing praises to the Lord there was a great earthquake. The chains fell off! REMEMBER The status of Philippi in the Roman Empire; it was considered by Caesar to be "Italian Soil." That means that the jail keeper would have been put to death for allowing Roman prisoners to escape on his watch. The jail keeper was about to fall on his sword but Paul saw him and told him not to kill himself.

The jail keeper says, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"; receives Christ; and he washes the wounds of Paul and Silas.



When the magistrates find out that Paul is a Roman citizen they are afraid that they will be put to death for wrongfully beating and imprisoning a Roman citizen and they tell the jailer to tell Paul to hit the road. The jailer comes back and suggests to Paul that they should slip out of town nice and quietly. But Paul is not the kind of man to slip out of town quietly. Paul says, "Are you kidding - I'm a Roman citizen and they beat me and they want me to leave!?" No doubt the baby believers were encouraged by his standing for Christ in the face of Rome.

WHEN PAUL LEFT PHILIPPI they bypassed Amphipolis and Apollonia (Acts 17:1) and traveled all of the way to Thessalonica. Not because they had no burden for the people in those cities, but because Paul's PRACTICE was to minister in the large cities and then have the believers reach out into the smaller towns nearby.

CRUCIAL:

ACTS is THE MODEL for the life and ministry of the individual and the local church today. THAT MODEL of Paul's ministry is an important one to follow today.

EXAMPLE: Calvary Chapel Grass Valley - Big stink over moving down the hill onto HWY 49 (as much traffic at that intersection as there was at HWY 49 and Interstate 80). That fellowship had a greater impact in the town of Grass Valley and into the rest of the world from Highway 49 and Wolf Road than it had ever had on Alta Street.

NOTE IT WELL:

When Paul arrives in Thessalonica He is bearing the marks of suffering for the Lord; bruised, aching, and no doubt recovering from the beating received in Philippi. He references this in this letter:

1 Th 2:1-2 For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. 2But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.

KEY INSIGHT:

There was a large Jewish population there and he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath. In Luke's account of this we find him using words that are very important in helping us understand Paul's ministry, and by way of that, understand what OUR ministry and OUR message should look like TODAY.

Acts 17:2-3

Reasoned means "to discourse using questions and answers." Perhaps "dialogue" would be a good synonym; explaining.....

Paul would read a portion of the Old Testament Scriptures and explain their meaning with reference to Jesus Christ and the Gospel.

Proving literally means "to lay beside." Paul put the Scriptures before them in an orderly manner, showing them how they harmonized.

Proclaim means "to announce."

Paul did not simply teach the Scriptures. He proclaimed Christ and urged his listeners to receive Him by faith.

KEY APPLICATION:

Here was a man who had ZERO technological advantages, LIMITED financial means (made tents to support himself), PLENTY of physical suffering because of his faith, YET IN THE FACE OF all of that, we are here 2,000

years later, in the Gospel because of him! BY CONTRAST - Modern ministry tells us that the Scriptures in general are unreliable, the God of the O.T. is irrelevant and actually repulsive to postmodern man. You can't really "preach" or "proclaim" anything as if it were irrefutable truth that man must respond to because post modern man doesn't like absolutes or demands. With that as their premise they EXHAUST every modern technological advantage available to them. Spending countless dollars in reinventing the image and focus of Christianity (earth stewardship — human rights). And they have made ZERO impact on the world.

CRUCIAL POINT:

Paul's ministry reached our world BECAUSE he used the Word of God and he declared the Son of God. He did that as MUCH and as OFTEN and in as MANY WAYS possible in his historical context. IF Paul were living today I believe that HE would exhaust every bit of technology available to him. Spend every available financial resource to REASON, EXPLAIN, PROVE, and PROCLAIM the Word of God and Jesus Christ. We should NEVER be afraid of technology and media, but we should ALWAYS be afraid of using them without content!

CRUCIAL INSIGHT:

He ministered in the synagogue of Thessalonica for three Sabbaths, and the Lord worked in power.

Acts 17:4

However, the unbelieving Jews began to oppose the work. The accusation against them:

Acts 17:6

That wasn't true! They had turned the world right-side-up! When you were born again weren't you blown away when you looked at your old life and saw how upside down it really was? TRAGICALLY - The Church today doesn't see the world as really upside down they see the Word of God as anachronistic (out of time). They see those who have not believed in the Gospel as maybe just a little confused. And tragically the Church today is standing on it's head and turning the Gospel upside down in it's attempt to get the world to embrace them and their blurred beliefs. I pray that WE will have that reputation earned by Paul and his little team - Those Christians from Metro turned the world right side up.

From there they went on to Berea. Though the Bereans are not the focus of our study, they are worthy of a brief look as we launch into the the first chapter of 1 Thessalonians.

Acts 17:10-11

The same should be true of you; you shouldn't believe everything I say without checking it out. What if I teach some weird stuff? What if I lose my mind (more than I already)? It is incumbent upon YOU to check what is taught by the Word of God! THAT is why everyone should bring and open their Bible!

All of this background teaches us several helpful lessons.

1. God uses people. God did not send angels to evangelize Thessalonica. He sent a converted Jewish rabbi and his friends including a young man who was part Jew, part Gentile. God still uses people dedicated people who will obey His leading and share His message.
2. The Gospel is "the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16). Paul reminded them that the Gospel came to them not "in word only, but also in power in the Holy Spirit" (1 Thes. 1:5).
3. Finally - Satan still opposes the Gospel and persecutes God's people, but persecution can be a means of growth. It can lend credibility to your testimony!

As I read the account of the Acts and the letter of Paul to the Thessalonians I find it so hard to understand WHY contemporary Christians want to come up with a message that minimizes opposition and persecution and WHY contemporary Christians view minimal opposition to the Gospel as the mark of success. It is beyond me!

NOTE WELL:

Paul was only in the city of Thessalonica for THREE weeks. In just three weeks Paul left behind a thriving group of believers and the work of God in that city was so radical that when he writes to them he says:

1 Thes 1:6-8 6And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, 7so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. 8For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything.

It is believed that this is one of, if not THE earliest of his writings - 51 or 52 AD. That means that it was written within 20 years after the death and resurrection of Christ.

KEY INSIGHT:

It is interesting to note that in the Book of Revelation there are seven churches that Jesus writes to. When we look at the epistles we find that Paul writes to seven churches; Roman, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, and Thessalonica. Each of those epistles have themes!

KEY INSIGHT: OBSERVATION:

It is interesting to see the things that Paul has to say to these new believers. If we bare in mind the brevity of his time there, it is quite amazing to see the THEME of his letters to THESE believers. The THEME of Paul's letters to the Thessalonians is the coming of the Lord!

1 Thes. 1:10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

1 Thes. 2:19 For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? 20For you are our glory and joy.

1 Thes. 3:13 so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

1 Thes. 4:17-18 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. 18Therefore encourage one another with these words.

1 Thes. 5:23 Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

CRUCIAL OBSERVATION:

Every chapter of the letter closes with a reference to the rapture! This is amazing as you read these 2 epistles. These believers had only known the Lord for three weeks, at the most, yet Paul spoke to them about:

- Election and Calling
- The Rapture
- How the Church wasn't appointed unto wrath
- The anti-Christ
- The great deception that was coming upon the world

CRITICAL CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION:

Most believers today are absolutely IGNORANT of these great DOCTRINES! Those in the pulpit today say:

- These things aren't important
- These things aren't practical
- What practical value are such things to NEW believers
- They need to get rooted in the basics of the faith.

But THAT is not how Paul saw it. Paul THE APOSTLE, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, taught them about the imminent return of Christ. If the Thessalonian believers were looking for the coming of Christ 2,000 years ago, how much more should you and I be looking up, for our redemption draws nigh?

Are you reading the news? Are you aware of what is happening in the world?

FINANCIAL TIMES - Feb 3 2009 - Google and Nasa are throwing their weight behind a new school for futurists in Silicon Valley to prepare scientists for an era when machines become cleverer than people. The new institution, known as "Singularity University", is to be headed by Ray Kurzweil, whose predictions about the exponential pace of technological change have made him a controversial figure in technology circles.

Nasa's backing demonstrates the growing mainstream acceptance of Mr Kurzweil's views, which include a claim that before the middle of this century artificial intelligence will outstrip human beings, ushering in a new era of civilisation. To be housed at Nasa's Ames Research Center, a stone's-throw from the Googleplex, the Singularity University will offer courses on biotechnology, nanotechnology and artificial intelligence. Proponents say that machines will be able to improve themselves using artificial intelligence and that smarter-than-human computers will solve problems including energy scarcity, climate change and hunger. Yet many critics call the singularity dangerous. Some worry that a malicious artificial intelligence might annihilate the human race.

Rev. 13:15-17 15And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain. 16Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, 17so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. (demonically energized A.I.)

FINACIAL TIMES Dec 9. 2008 - I have never believed that there is a secret United Nations plot to take over the US. I have never seen black helicopters hovering in the sky above Montana. But, for the first time in my life, I think the formation of some sort of world government is plausible.

A "world government" would involve much more than co-operation between nations. It would be an entity with state-like characteristics, backed by a body of laws. The European Union has already set up a continental government for 27 countries, which could be a model. The EU has a supreme court, a currency, thousands of pages of law, a large civil service and the ability to deploy military force. So could the European model go global? There are three reasons for thinking that it might. First, it is increasingly clear that the most difficult issues facing national governments are international in nature: there is global warming, a global financial crisis and a "global war on terror". Second, it could be done. The transport and communications revolutions have shrunk the world so that, as Geoffrey Blainey, an eminent Australian historian, has written: "For the first time in human history, world government of some sort is now possible.

BRUSSELS 2003 - The European Union scrambled to contain the fallout from a public opinion poll that – to Israel's fury – labelled the Jewish state the biggest threat to world peace. The United States was just behind Israel in the global danger league, in joint second place with North Korea and Iran, according to the "Eurobarometer" poll requested by the European Commission.

This should NOT surprise us!

Zec 12:2-3 KJV Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling unto all the people round about, when they shall be in the siege both against Judah and against Jerusalem. {3} And in that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in

pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it.

WE ARE CLOSE!

This little letter is filled with wonderful promises relative to the time in which WE live! And how important they are to NEW believers.

1 Thes. 1:1 KJV Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father

I like that! What a great place for the Church to be.

and in the Lord Jesus Christ:

KEY INSIGHT:

The Lord Jesus Christ is NOT His name - like Smokey - The - Bear

Lord = His divine title!

Jesus is NOT just fire insurance - be my savior -

He is our LORD.

There is no such thing as -

He's accepted Christ as his savior but he hasn't made him his Lord yet.

Luke 2:11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

Jesus = His NAME

Hebrew = Joshua = God has become our salvation

Christ = His mission = the anointed One (Hebrew = Messiah)

Isa 61:1-3 The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn;3 to grant to those who mourn in Zion - to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified.

KEY POINT:

Lord Jesus Christ tells us everything about His divinity and His Mission - and the Church is IN all that He is and all that He does!

Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

ALWAYS the same order. You can NOT have PEACE without GRACE. You know there is NO such thing as CHEAP grace. Grace is the most DEMANDING message that there is. A religion based upon works is one that you can always walk away from when you fail. BUT - grace means that the door of relationship with God NEVER closes

— You can't pack it in!

The Gospel of grace tells me that if I fail He is faithful and just to forgive me. If I fail He's right there saying I know you've failed but I've paid for it; come on - get up now. We have to grow. There are some things that we need to change. I'm conforming you into the image of My Son.

- Because of GRACE the door NEVER closes.
- Because of Grace God never ends that work in our lives of conforming us to the image of His Son.

KEY INSIGHT:

When you TRY to be a Christian - don't do this, don't do that. You strangle yourself. You might shock yourself with how incapable you are of earning God's approval. You need to realize that when He saved you He KNEW that you would fail AFTER being saved - and He saved you anyway! WHEN you begin to get that you then begin to serve Him out of LOVE and GRATITUDE rather than from UNDER the Law. You begin to serve Him FROM acceptance rather than FOR acceptance.

GRACE - Interesting that Paul used the word over 120 times — GRACE was Paul's word.

John only uses the word grace 7 times in 5 letters. But what He says is:

John 1:14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

And then he endlessly says Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus....

You find the name of Jesus used over 240 times in his gospel. He in essence says - If you want to see grace then you have to see Jesus.

Peter only uses the word grace a few times. His defining word was manifold grace of God - the word means a various colours, variegated — many colored. Peter learned God's grace that way because of his emotions that flowed out of the many ways that he failed.

- The way that he failed Jesus the night before Jesus died
- The ways that he failed even as an apostle when he had to be rebuked by Paul.

When Peter's world was grays and dark blue the many colored grace of God would come flowing in like brilliant light.

Paul used the word over 120 times. His defining use of the word:

Titus 2:1-14 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, 12training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, 13waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, 14who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

GRACE -

- BROUGHT us into the Kingdom
- KEEPS us in the Kingdom
- IS THE ONLY WAY that we can look forward to the end of the world.

It is GRACE from BEGINNING to END!
THAT is why we are sitting here this morning!

We have come to know the same GRACE OF GOD

God's unmerited favor

That is wrapped up in Jesus

That the Thessalonians had come to know 2000 years ago.

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