
a Grace Notes course

1 Thessalonians

an expositional study
by Dr. Grant Richison

Lesson 2

1 Thessalonians 1:6-10

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1 Thessalonians 1:6

"And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit..."

Paul first shows God's work among the Thessalonians by describing the integrity with which the gospel team came to Thessalonica.

Now he turns to verifying God's work among the Thessalonians themselves.

And you became followers of us

The first evidence of God's work among the Thessalonians as new believers is that they imitated their spiritual fathers. They even went beyond that in imitating the Lord (1 Peter 2:21).

The word "followers" means imitators, emulators. This emulation goes beyond mechanically imitating the gospel team. These new Christians saw the essence of this gospel team in how they lived under the power of God and the dynamics of the Holy Spirit (v.5). The Thessalonians followed the character and commitment of the gospel team, not their personalities or charisma.

The example of the gospel team made a powerful impression on the church at Thessalonica. This new church watched the team as they confronted opposition under the power of the Holy Spirit.

"For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me. For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church" (1 Corinthians 4:15-17).

Paul did not want the Thessalonians or any other group he started to imitate him without qualification. He wanted them to imitate him to the extent that he followed Christ.

"Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1).

"And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Hebrews 6:11-12).

Principle

There is great power in imitating godly and great leaders.

Application

There are outstanding leaders among evangelicals today who have great track records of evangelism. Do we follow those who are successful in evangelism or do we follow those who merely know how to talk about evangelism?

Examples produce paradigms to follow. Followers can become leaders. They can become leaders by following examples that produce paradigms for ministry. They can do what they see modeled and by that become models themselves.

Churches seeking to make greater impact evangelistically should also imitate churches with successful records of evangelism.

"For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans, who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost" (1 Thessalonians 2:14-16).

There is a qualification to imitating other churches. Churches often make the mistake of following the raw program of another church.

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Churches that commit this fault do not take into consideration their own situation, the mores of their community, the history of their own church and other important issues. Each church has its own personality; the leadership must work with that personality when it launches new ministries.

That said, however, there are important lessons we can learn from churches that fruitfully reach the lost.

and of the Lord,

After leadership first wins credibility with their people, then they can shift that credibility to Christ. Great Christian leaders do not point people ultimately to themselves.

"Again, the next day, John stood with two of his disciples. And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, 'Behold the Lamb of God!' The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus" (John 1:35-37).

Note the result of following godly Christian leaders and the Lord -- "so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe (v.7)."

Principle

God will extend our ministry way beyond ourselves, when we follow the Lord.

Application

When Christians follow the Lord, they do what they could not otherwise do. God will extend our ministry way beyond ourselves, when we follow the Lord.

"Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma" (Ephesians 5:1-2).

having received the word

The word "received" means welcomed. In the face of maltreatment, they welcomed the word of the gospel.

"And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. "He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day" (John 12:47-48).

"These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11).

Principle

Life is in the seed, not in the sower.

Application

Life is in the seed, not the sower (Luke 8:11). Whenever we make ourselves susceptible to the gospel, God does a mighty work in our souls.

Harvesting the seeds of the gospel sown depends on 1) the integrity of the sower, 2) the amount of seed we sow and 3) where we sow the seed (Matthew 13). If Christians today want a great harvest, these essentials must exist in our ministries.

in much affliction,

After the Thessalonians followed the gospel team in sharing the gospel, they encountered "much affliction." The word "affliction" carries the idea of oppression or tribulation. They bore witness to the gospel knowing full well that wrath would rain upon them if they did so. Note that they did not simply receive some suffering, they received "much" affliction.

At the founding of the church in Thessalonica, Jason opened his home to the gospel team. He absorbed "much affliction" because he did. The Jews "dragged" Jason to the city authorities. Imagine the indignity of that!

"But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob,

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set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, 'These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. 'Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king—Jesus.' And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things. So when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go" (Acts 17:5-9).

The city officials took "security" from Jason and those with him. These believers paid a financial price for serving the Lord.

Principle

If we are going to advance the cause of Christ throughout the world, we will pay a price for it.

Application

It will cost us something to witness to the gospel (3:3).

"Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone, and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith, that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know. For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain" (1 Thessalonians 3:1-5).

The word "appointed" indicates that God ordains afflictions to those who share their faith. It is amazing that some people believe that when they share their faith they will never have problems again. The opposite is the case. They will collect more problems the more

effective they become in their witness. Becoming dynamic Christians will cost us something.

Has your Christianity cost you anything? Did it affect your job? Have you lost some business because of it? Did you lose some friends? We pay a price for witnessing to the gospel. Becoming dynamic Christians may cause some problems in our family.

"And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Romans 5: 3-5).

"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience" (James 1: 2-3).

with joy of the Holy Spirit

The Thessalonians witnessed to the gospel under persecution "with the joy of the Holy Spirit." The word "of" indicates that the origin, source or power of this joy is the Holy Spirit. Their joy came from the Holy Spirit.

In the face of extensive affliction and tribulation, they believed in their message and those who delivered the message. Not only did they carry their message with conviction in the face of tribulation, but they also had something more – "joy of the Holy Spirit." Joy in tribulation goes against human nature because God gives us capacity to face trial in the joy of the Holy Spirit.

"So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ" (Acts 5:41-42).

Principle

Joy transcends persecution and trial in sharing our faith.

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Application

Some Christians do not share their faith with their friends because they fear that their friends will ostracize them. Other Christians know something of the "joy of the Holy Spirit" in witnessing. They know something of God's sovereignty and control of any situation they might face. This gives them confidence to transcend human pressures or self-identity issues. People who can transcend their situations do not constantly complain about their problems.

Affliction in witnessing can show us how God sustains us under duress. The Christian possesses a special caliber of soul due to the joy of the Holy Spirit.

"...for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14: 17).

Suffering and joy are not mutually exclusive. To the Christian, both can exist simultaneously.

"Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality" (2 Corinthians 8: 1-2).

"In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 1: 6-9).

See also 1 Peter 4:12,13.

1 Thessalonians 1:7

"...so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe"

The two most outstanding churches in the New Testament were the churches at Philippi and Thessalonica. These churches were not perfect but they were exemplary. They were what churches should be. These churches were not the largest or the most gifted churches in the New Testament. The church at Corinth was the most gifted but not the most godly.

so that

The words "so that" point to an actual consequence. Paul is not talking in possibilities or probabilities. These churches actually became examples to other churches in Greece.

you became

The word "became" means to become something they were not previously. This is the transforming power of the gospel. Raw Gentiles in Thessalonica embraced Jesus as their Savior and their He changed their lives completely. Not only did they become Christians but they also became shining examples of those who penetrated their world with the gospel.

examples

The word "examples" is the Greek word tupos, from which we get our English word "type." Originally, this word meant "to strike." It was a visible impression of a stroke or pressure, mark, trace. Then it came to mean an impression after a blow. When the church becomes an example, it leaves a mark or impression.

"Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern" (Philippians 3: 17).

"...not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us" (2 Thessalonians 3: 9).

The word "examples" in the Greek is in the singular which indicates that the church as a

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whole was the example. Paul singles out no other local church as a standard for other churches to follow as he did this church. The standard against which other churches can measure themselves is the church at Thessalonica. What was so unique about their ministry? They shared the gospel "every place" (v.8).

The Thessalonian church was a model for others to follow. This church was not an ideal church, but a model church. It was effective in sharing the faith. The Thessalonian church was the only church Paul called an example. They were the pace-setter churches for other churches--the model church, noted for it's aggressive evangelism.

God's design for Christians is that they become instruments of impact. God wants each believer to leave a stamp on his sphere of influence. This implies that the believer has something that other people want.

Principle

Some churches are pace-setters for other churches to follow.

Application

Churches today can make a mark for Christ in evangelism. There is a tendency for churches to depend on para-church organizations or evangelistic crusades to do their evangelism for them. The Thessalonian church is the standard for your church.

Most churches do evangelism through their internal networks. Are you in a network whereby you can share your faith? Are you in a small group that is open to reach those without Christ?

Does the gospel reach a dead-end street with your church? Does the gospel come to you as an individual and stop? Pass it on? The gospel is the best-kept secret in many churches.

"We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For He says: 'In an acceptable time I

have heard you, And in the day of salvation I have helped you.' Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6: 1-2).

Many churches simply maintain the fish in the aquarium rather than travel to the home of uncaught fish.

When it comes to evangelism, most of us fish with a rod rather than a net.

This passage sets forth what an ideal [not a perfect church] should be. It is amazing how simple it is. We have a knack for complexity. We try to make everything complex. If we know the core ingredients of what makes a biblically successful church, we can trim off the unnecessary bureaucratic fat. We can build muscle using the right spiritual nourishment and exercise.

to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe

The Thessalonian church became the outstanding church to churches in Macedonia, the province of northern Greece and Achaia, the southern half of Greece. The cities of Athens and Corinth were in southern Greece. In other words, this one church reached all of Greece with the gospel by their influence on believers in other places. Not only did they reach Greece with the gospel but they extended the gospel to all of the Roman Empire – "in every place" (v.8). They did this within one year!

The Thessalonian church made a mark on their world. They made an impact because Christ made an impact on them. They influenced other Christians and so reached those without Christ in places they could not have gone themselves. Churches throughout Greece looked to the church at Thessalonica as their model for evangelism.

The city officials of Thessalonica described the extent of the ministry in this way,

"But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, 'These who have turned

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the world upside down have come here too"
(Acts 17: 6).

Principle

Churches can extend the influence of their churches by modeling evangelism for other churches.

Application

Churches can extend their influence of evangelism by influencing other churches. Clearly some churches are far more effective in evangelism than other churches. Is it pride that keeps churches from investigating successful evangelism in other churches?

Although we need to investigate successful evangelistic churches, this does not mean that we copy them in every respect. Each church has its own strengths. Ultimately, each church must find what God would have for them. Churches that make an impact for Christ do not dance to the tune of someone else's music. They set their own tune. They may follow the example of another church, but they do not do so exclusively. Their leaders must find the unique vision God has for them.

1 Thessalonians 1:8

"For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything"

Verse eight develops the reason the Thessalonian church became an example to all the churches in Greece (v.7). This was a church of faith.

For from you

The gospel went out from the Thessalonians.

Principle

The gospel needs to go out from us as well as come to us.

Application

The gospel often comes to Christians but never goes out again. The gospel ends in them like a dead-end street. People carry the gospel to us, but we do not carry the gospel to others.

The gospel needs to go though us to others. As far as some of us are concerned, the gospel is the best-kept secret. No one will hear it from us if we can help it. We never share it or pass it on. Many churches are that way. Few ever hear the gospel in these churches. They make apologies for the gospel.

The gospel carries both a negative and a positive message. People do not like to hear that they have violated a holy God. They do not want to know that they have sinned and need a Savior. There is no easy way to declare this message. We must hear the bad news before we hear the good news. We must have a diagnosis before we can have a cure.

the word of the Lord has sounded forth,

The words "sounded forth" come from two words out and to hold meaning to cause to sound out, ring out or resound. "Sounded forth" then has the implication of to sound out a trumpet or thunder, to reverberate like an echo. When the gospel gains momentum then its impact increases.

The idea of resounding gives the impression that the gospel went out and then reverberated repeatedly throughout the Roman Empire. We often get reverberations in our church auditoriums. The same sound echoes in the room a number of times. God's Word reverberated everywhere like rolling thunder.

Principle

Momentum will increase the impact of the gospel throughout the world.

Application

We need to thunder out or trumpet out the gospel so that it reverberates throughout our community and world. It is not enough to be an evangelical church; our church must be an evangelistic church as well.

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Is your church geared up to win people to Christ? Is this a fundamental purpose of your church? Many churches have lost this passion. Getting the gospel out is no longer a central value to them. They have lost their sense of heaven and hell, and the wonder of what Jesus did about sin. It is very easy to take our eyes off the target and focus on things of lesser value. Many good things out there are not the best.

"Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain" (Philippians 2:14-16).

"Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you..." (2 Thessalonians 3:1)

not only in Macedonia and Achaia,

The gospel from the church at Thessalonica reverberated throughout both northern and southern Greece.

but also in every place.

The gospel reverberated throughout the Roman Empire. The gospel rang out to the then known world. Thessalonica was a great seaport. Christians from this city went preaching the gospel throughout the world. As Paul writes First Thessalonians one year after he left the city, he hears reports from all over the world about their faith.

Your faith toward God has gone out,

The Thessalonians directed their faith toward God, not toward idols. They exercised a vital faith in Him. It was a vital faith because they expressed their trust in God using their testimony.

so that we do not need to say anything

The faith of the Thessalonians went out to such an extent that Paul did not have to say anything. Wherever Paul went, the faith of the Thessalonians preceded him. They prepared the way for his witness.

Principle

A church can be famous for its faith.

Application

Churches can be famous for many things but are they famous for their faith? The Roman church was famous for its faith throughout the world. Are you?

"First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world" (Romans 1: 8).

1 Thessalonians 1:9

"For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God..."

For they themselves declare concerning us

Third parties from other places told Paul of the effects of the gospel team in Thessalonica. The story spread throughout the Roman Empire by the grapevine.

what manner of entry we had to you,

Paul's gospel team moved into Thessalonica with a marvelous Spirit-empowered entrance. They did not come with a mediocre mechanical gospel preaching that lacked any semblance of vital faith. No, they came with a burning conviction about Jesus Christ that the Thessalonians in turn caught. It matters how a church begins for that establishes a precedent for its future ministry. "What manner" is important as well as what content.

"And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was

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with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (1 Corinthians 2:1-5).

Thessalonians came to God supernaturally, not naturally. Their conversion did not come from some dynamically discoursed address. It came from people empowered by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit supernaturally brings the gospel message home to hearts.

"And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: "of sin, because they do not believe in Me; "of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; "of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now" (John 16:8-12).

Principle

Integrity determines how we live out our core values.

Application

What we are speaks so loudly that people hear our lives more than our words. Nothing is more fashionable than announcing our core values and mission statement and then setting goals to reach our end. Ministry has many similarities to business but there are massive differences as well. We measure everything by the bottom line in business for business revolves around the market. In ministry, however, everything revolves around a person and that person's integrity.

Read Psalm 139:23,24

Successful Christian leaders pivot their goals around integrity. Our integrity determines how we live out our core values. We shape our character, not solely by how much information we know, but by how we apply that

information to our experience. Is God transforming our lives by His Word? Are we becoming more like our Lord every day? Momentum in ministry comes from both the character of the message and the character of the messenger.

and how you turned to God

The "what manner" is important but so is the "how" of the gospel coming into a community. The Thessalonians demonstrated the power of the gospel by their conversion to serve the "living and true God" and their willingness to "wait for His Son from Heaven."

The word "turned" is a term of conversion, a complete change of course. This was a revolutionary change in viewpoint and attitudes of the Thessalonians. Others saw their theology as living vitality. The only theology that non-Christians know about is what they see in the lives of believers. When they see an about face in values and life, it brings them up short. They take notice: "Why does my friend direct his whole life toward God now?"

Note the order of words here. We would normally think in terms of turning from idols to God but here Paul's argument is that they first turned to God and then away from idols. The Thessalonians did not leave their idols and then go out to find God. They turned to God and then left their idols. When people see the glory of God they willingly and immediately turn from idols. Conversion is no convenient fire escape from hell; it is not only turning from something but it is a turning to something.

from idols

An idol is anything that we worship, anything that takes the place of God in our lives. Many people worship money. Others devote themselves to self-adulation. Some place self-indulgence and pleasure as the centerpiece of their life. A great segment of our society lives in sexual lust and worship in a pattern similar to those who worshiped Aphrodite centuries ago.

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An idol is an expression of rebellion against God (Romans 1:18ff). However, to embrace the gospel message is an expression of trust in God's authority as the only way of salvation.

Conversion is not only a turning to something but it is a turning from something. When we turn to God, that automatically turns our back to anything that gainsays who He is. There is a difference between God and Satan, heaven and hell. When we turn our face to one we turn our back on the other.

Principle

The gospel is mutually exclusively true.

Application

True conversion involves coming to understand the gospel in mutually exclusive terms. The Thessalonians turned to God from idols. Syncretism of any kind distorts the gospel message. We cannot mingle any other message with the gospel. No one can worship two masters at the same time (Matthew 5:24) because the dynamic of a master is absolute. To misunderstand this is to miss the essence of the gospel message.

It is not enough to believe that Jesus is our Savior, we must renounce any other way of salvation. As the Thessalonians turned away from idols, so those who truly believe must turn their back on any belief that stands in contradistinction to the essence of the gospel.

We cannot truly turn to God without turning away from something. True conversion involves turning our back on any worship other than that of "the living and true God." This will cost us something. No doubt, we will lose friends and probably some business. People in our day turn to God without turning away from their primary devotion. No wonder many conversions do not take! Very few leaders will take a stand on a mutually exclusive gospel because they do not want to fly in the face of "tolerance" in local churches and parachurch organizations.

The Lord Jesus Christ will not play second fiddle to anyone or anything.

"Seeing they may see and not perceive, And hearing they may hear and not understand; Lest they should turn, And their sins be forgiven them" (Mark 4:12).

"And the Lord said, 'Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. "But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren"' (Luke 22:31-32).

"...to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me" (Acts 26:18).

"Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins" (James 5:19-20).

"For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls" (1 Peter 2:25).

to serve the living and true God

Two results came of the Thessalonian conversions. First, they served the living and true God (instead of idols). The word "serve" is in the present tense. Even as Paul speaks, the Thessalonians serve God. The word "serve" means to serve as a bond slave. The sham and shame of paganism did not fulfill them. They turned to a fruitful life of service.

We cannot become Christians without some impact upon our lives (Ephesians 2:10). Lip and life go together.

"But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off,

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concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:20-24).

Service here has to do with worshipful adherence to the true God. Christian service is vital because it relates to a "living and true God." The word "living" stands in contrast to dead idols of paganism. The impotent, dead gods of paganism cannot change lives. The essence of Christian service is personal service. We serve a person, not a religion.

"...how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Hebrews 9:14)

The word "true" means real. Christians worship a genuine God. There is nothing false or counterfeit about the God of the Bible.

Principle

We worship a living and genuine God.

Application

If Christians seek fulfillment in anything other than the "living and true God" then they will end with some void in their lives. If we serve the living and genuine God, we will live a fruitful life of service.

God transforms us not to make us ornamental but to be functional. He saves us to serve, not sit. Churches are full of religious spectators who do not involve themselves with eternal issues.

"And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose

land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Joshua 24:15).

"Only fear the LORD, and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you" (1 Samuel 12:24).

"And when he came to the den, he cried out with a lamenting voice to Daniel. The king spoke, saying to Daniel, 'Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?'" (Daniel 6:20).

"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24).

"...serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews..." (Acts 20:19).

"For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers..." (Romans 1:9).

"But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter" (Romans 7:6).

"...not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord..." (Romans 12:11).

"For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men" (Romans 14:18).

"...not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men..." (Ephesians 6:6-7).

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1 Thessalonians 1:10

"...and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come"

and to wait

The word "wait" means literally to wait up. The Thessalonians were waiting up for the Lord's return. They waited with anticipation, to wait for, expect someone or something. We order a new car and wait with anticipation for its delivery date. The Thessalonians remained expectant concerning the future event of Christ's coming.

There is a connection between those who effectively share their faith and those who wait for Jesus' coming. Their orientation is different from those who live for the now. We do not wait up all night for someone we expect to arrive at 9:00 the next morning. They expected Jesus to return at any time.

The Thessalonians suffered persecution (2:14). Some experienced excessive sorrow because they lost loved ones in death. They did not know about the rapture, so they carried unwarranted sorrow (4:13-18).

The Thessalonians did two things: they served and they waited. It is the believer's responsibility to do both.

Principle

The purpose of the rapture is to keep us on our toes spiritually.

Application

Jesus gives no signal for His coming. He might come at any moment. It might happen today.

"Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God" (1 Corinthians 4: 5).

"For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Corinthians 11: 26).

"And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation" (Hebrews 9: 27-28).

"For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry" (Hebrews 10: 37).

Jesus will not loiter. He will not tarry. When it is time for His coming, He will execute it efficiently. When the last person comes to Christ, when Jesus completes His church, then He will come back.

"You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!" (James 5: 8-9).

"...and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away" (1 Peter 5:4).

"And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming" (1 John 2: 28).

Some people will be ashamed when Christ comes. Jesus will catch them in some situation that does not honor Him.

"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 John 3: 1-3).

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When we anticipate the rapture, this purifies our souls. Hope of Christ's coming purifies us. Each generation of believers has the right to expect the Lord to come in their lifetime. Generations past were disappointed but not mistaken.

We anticipate that it might be in our generation, but no one knows for sure. One thing we do know is that it is imminent. Each day we should affirm that "Perhaps Jesus will come today." This will enable us to keep short accounts with the Lord. We will not put off till tomorrow what we ought to deal with today.

"And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work" (Revelation 22:12).

for His Son

The Thessalonians waited for the return of the person of the Lord Jesus, the Son of God. To them, He is the matchless person who saved them from their sin and provided many assets both for time and for eternity. In addition, He will deliver them from their present problems by rapture.

The factor that impressed the new Christians at Thessalonica was not the coming of Christ as much as the person who was to come. He was the object of their hope. May Jesus, rather than the things that accompany Him, be the center of our interest.

"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. "In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know" (John 14: 1-4).

Principle

We must both serve the Lord and wait for Him at the same time.

Application

The Christian must both serve and wait. Doing one and not the other is not an option. Some Christians serve but do not wait. Others wait but do not serve. We should serve as if Jesus was never coming and we wait in anticipation as if He were to come at any moment. This is not a paradox. The Christian must hold both of these truths in tension.

To live the full Christian life, we must expect the Savior's coming. No prophecy needs to be fulfilled before He comes back. They wait for an imminent and looming rapture of the church to Heaven. Above all, Jesus is coming. We will personally meet Him at last.

"Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?" (Romans 8:23-24).

"...so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ..." (1 Corinthians 1:7).

from heaven,

The Thessalonians were waiting for Jesus to come literally through the clouds. This is the great climax, consummation and coronation of the Christian life. This is the time when Jesus comes to take us physically into Heaven.

Principle

Jesus will come from Heaven to take our physical bodies to be with Him.

Application

When a Christian dies, he goes to Heaven. God does not leave our loved ones in the grave. God translates their souls into His presence. He does not bury souls in cemeteries. He will resurrect even the body at the rapture (4:13f).

"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly

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body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself" (Philippians 3:20-21).

This is great news for those with physical problems. Those who are handicapped or have bodies racked with paralysis will one day have a perfect body. Our present body is a body that humiliates us. Our future body is a body that will be like the resurrected body of our Lord Jesus Christ. This gives optimism to people with mental problems. The best is yet ahead. That is why we anticipate His coming.

whom He raised from the dead,

We establish our confidence in the rapture (v.10) by the resurrection of Christ. Jesus defeated death by His resurrection. We will defeat death in the rapture. Jesus said, "Because I live, you shall live also."

"Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, "because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17: 30-31).

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead puts Christianity into a different league from all other religions of the world. Every other architect of religion is dead. Buddha is dead, buried and gone. Confucius is dead. Mohammed is dead. Jesus did not die as a mere martyr. He died deliberately for those who violate God's righteousness. Now Jesus is alive and well by resurrection. He lives in Heaven. Christianity is exclusively true because Jesus lives in Heaven.

Principle

The genius and glory of Christianity is the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

Application

God bases everything on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. By His resurrection, God delivered

us from sin, the Tribulation, Hell and the power of sin in the believer's life. Jesus can set us free from any sin.

If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then Christianity is a farce. There is no hope or Heaven. An eternally dead Jesus would give no one hope. He would have nothing to offer us. However, He rose from the dead giving hope to the hopeless.

"Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it" (Acts 2:23-24).

"But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses" (Acts 3:14-15).

"If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole" (Acts 4:9-10).

"Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come—that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26:22-23).

"It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification" (Romans 4:24-25).

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"Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4).

"Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God" (Romans 7:4).

"But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you" (Romans 8:11).

"Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us" (Romans 8:34).

"...that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9).

"For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living" (Romans 14:9).

"Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead)..." (Galatians 1:1).

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead..." (1 Peter 1:3).

"He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God" (1 Peter 1:20-21).

"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit..." (1 Peter 3:18).

The resurrection of Jesus is the receipt that Jesus paid the price for our sins. We cannot add anything to this. We cannot improve perfection.

even Jesus

The object of our anticipation is the person of Jesus. Note the name used here is "Jesus" which is His human name. They waited for the incarnate Christ. He is the center and circumference of our lives. We wait patiently for that wonderful day when we will meet the center of our expectation.

Principle

Jesus is the center and circumference of our lives.

Application

My wife loves to compare costs when she shops. Sometimes I take her to the store and wait in the car. At times, I wait patiently and sometimes I do not! There is a difference between waiting patiently and just waiting. God wants us to wait patiently for the Lord. Some of us will wait for 60, 70, 80 years. One day we will finally meet Him face to face. Oh, what a day that will be!

"Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ" (2 Thessalonians 3:5).

who delivers us from the wrath to come

Jesus will deliver Christians "from the wrath to come." Thessalonian Christians do not have to be delivered from Hell sometime in the future. For them the deliverance is past (John 5:24). This "wrath" is the wrath of the Tribulation just before the Millennium (Revelation 6:17). Jesus delivers believers from this period of Tribulation.

The word "from" indicates that God keeps the church from "wrath." The word "from" means

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away from. This means that the church will not go through the future Tribulation period. The tribulation period deals with Israel, with the evangelization of the nation Israel in order to establish the promised Millennial Kingdom for Israel.

It is apparent that Paul deals with the Tribulation as the "wrath" in this verse because his reference is to the rapture. The Thessalonians did not need to prepare for the Tribulation because Jesus would deliver them from it. Just think of those left behind after the rapture. The church will not be a conscience to society any longer.

First Thessalonians deals with the coming of Christ in every chapter (1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:23). Each chapter ends with a reference to this event.

Principle

A role of the believer is to anticipate the rapture.

Application

Jesus came to pay for our salvation in His first coming. In the rapture and Second Coming, He will bring full and final liberation from sin, death and Hell. An important function of every believer is to anticipate the rapture. We rejoice in it. We celebrate it. We place our hope in it. It becomes an ever-present blessing to our souls.

Looking for the Lord to return at any moment will change our lives. It will transform our way of doing things. It will change the way we deal with temptations. If you knew you were going to die in two years, would you change your priorities? Would you do something about broken relationships?

Many of us carry a great amount of spiritual flab. To deal with this, we must admit that we are out of spiritual shape. "There are a few people to whom I take exception. I am out of phase with them. I don't talk to them any more. I resent them. I envy others. Deal with me, Lord."

Do you have animosity, resentment or anger toward some other Christian? Have you come to grips with this? You should not allow it to go on and on. If we expect that the Lord may come at any time, we must not allow ourselves to cherish these sins. We must bury the hatchet. We must shake hands with them. We must forget the past.