

## Small Group Leaders Notes - 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

### Introduction

These notes have been written to help you prepare to lead the study. They are not meant to be used in the study itself. At the end of the notes you will find some suggested Bible study questions you can use or adapt. Alternatively, after using these notes to help you study the passage, you could write your own questions.

If you have not watched the 'Introduction to 1 Thessalonians' video I would suggest you watch that first before reading these notes as it will help you understand the background to the letter as well as the big themes and overall aim of the letter.

The video and accompanying handout are available on the church website - <https://www.bec.uk.net/resources/small-group-leaders>

Whilst these notes may be helpful they are no substitute for reading the passage over and over again and wrestling with it for yourself.

### Context

See the 'Introduction to 1 Thessalonians' for the background and context to the letter. The key passage is Acts 17 which describes how the church was planted through Paul's preaching in the synagogue on just 3 sabbaths. Paul and his companions were then forced to flee the city leaving behind a vulnerable church of new believers. 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13 then tells us of Paul's concern for the Thessalonian believers he had to leave behind and how he sent Timothy to find out about their faith. Timothy has brought good news about their faith (3:6-7) and so Paul begins his letter (our passage) full of thanksgiving to God for the Thessalonians faith.

### Structure

After the initial introduction in v1 the passage holds together as one unit as Paul thanks God for the Thessalonians faith and the difference it has made in them. We can see that v2-10 hold together as 1 unit by the many different linking words (e.g. 'For', 'therefore', 'so then', 'because') that are used in these verses.

In v2-3 Paul thanks God for the Thessalonians faith and then in v4 he gives the reason he is so confident about their faith. See how the 'For' at the beginning of v4 links it with v2-3.

In the same way see how the 'because' at the start of v5 links it to v4.

See how many other linking words you can find? (v6, v7, v8, v9.)

How do these linking words help to give the sense that this is one passage?

## Notes

### **v2-3**

- Paul often, but not always, starts his letters with thanks and praise to God for the people he is writing to. Here he thanks God for the Thessalonians faith, hope and love which is seen in their work, labour and endurance. This is all the more remarkable when we remember that these were relatively new believers who had only had a limited amount of teaching from Paul before he and his team had been forced to leave.
- It is also worth noting that their faith, hope and love are active. You can see the difference their faith, hope and love make. This is a theme we will see later in the passage (v7-10.)

### **v4-5**

- Paul is so confident God has chosen and loves the Thessalonians because of what happened when he preached the gospel to them.
- There is some debate about how we should understand what it means when it says, “our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction.” Was this what Paul experienced as the preacher or was this what the Thessalonians experienced as the receivers? I don’t think it makes a big difference either way but on balance I think this is describing what happened to the Thessalonians as they heard the gospel. They were powerfully affected by the gospel as the Holy Spirit spoke to them (see 2:13.) They were deeply convicted by what they heard and therefore they welcomed the message with joy in the midst of severe suffering (v7) and they repented of their idolatry and turned to serve and wait for the living God (v9-10.)

### **v5-7**

- The Thessalonians didn’t just believe the missionaries gospel, they also imitated the missionaries’ (and Jesus’) example by suffering for the gospel (v6, see also 2:14.)
- Not only did they welcome the gospel in the midst of suffering but they did so joyfully. This is only possible when the Holy Spirit is at work.
- This made them an example to other believers in the region (v7) and therefore they are an example to us as well.

### **v8-10**

- It seems that the Thessalonians have become famous amongst the churches (v8). Everybody knows how they responded to the gospel. v9-10 highlight 2 key elements of their response;
  - **They turned from idols to serve the living God.** Again we return to the key idea that truth faith is active. They stop serving and worshipping their idols and instead turned to serve the living true God. Their repentance involved both saying, ‘no’ and saying, ‘yes.’ ‘No’ to sin and ‘yes’ to living for Jesus. Again this makes them a great model for us. Any true spirit-empowered response to the gospel will involve turning away from sin/idolatry and turning towards Jesus and serving him.

*Before you carry on with the rest of the notes, stop and spend a few moments examining your own life. How are you responding to the gospel? What are you turning away from? How are you then seeking to serve the living and true God?*

- **They were now waiting for Jesus, who was raised from the dead and rescues us from the coming wrath.** Again, waiting like faith are not passive. We serve the

true and living God as we wait for him. We serve him, but not out of fear, because we know that Jesus has saved us from the wrath to come.

- Notice how there are parallels between v2-3 and v9-10. In v2-3 Paul mentioned their active faith, hope and love. And here in v9-10 we get something similar as we are told the difference their faith and hope made. They actively turned from their idols to serve the living God and to wait in hope for Jesus.

### Big Idea

Paul thanked God for the Thessalonians faith, hope and love which everyone could see.

### Area of Application

*Here are some suggested areas of application from this passage. In a Bible Study there may not be time to cover all. As you study the passage on your own spend some time applying the passage to yourself before you lead the Bible study.*

#### **Thank God for what he has done in your life**

- Throughout these verses we are reminded that faith is a gift from God and a work of the Holy Spirit. Where we see evidence of faith in our own lives or the lives of others then we should rightly turn in thanks and praise to God.
- After studying a passage like this it is right to thank God for what he has done in our lives. Similarly it is good to look around and thank him for the work he has done in other people's lives especially where faith has been costly.

#### **Our faith, hope and love should be active and visible**

- Everybody, not just Paul could see the difference the Thessalonians faith had made to them. People could see that their work, labour, endurance, joy and repentance were the fruit of their faith.
- This should make us ask the question, "What difference does my faith make in my life, and is it obvious to others?" In what ways can people see my faith in action?

#### **Faith in Jesus always involving turning and serving**

- v7 says the Thessalonians are a model to all believers therefore we should seek to follow their example of turning from idols to serve the living God (v9.) This raises the question, "What are my idols?" "What things or people are rivals to God in my life?" What will it mean for me to turn away from those idols and to proactively serve God instead?"

#### **Faith in Jesus often brings suffering**

- Again the Thessalonians are a model to us because they welcomed the gospel in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit (v6.) We may not suffer the sort of persecution that they experienced but faith will always be costly. This may come in the form of opposition or it may be the cost of turning away from a much cherished idol and seeking to serve God instead.

## Bible Study Questions

These are some suggested questions that you could use or adapt with your group.

I would suggest that you provide a bit of background for the group from Acts 17 to help them understand how the church came about. You don't need to tell them everything but it is worth emphasising Paul was only there a short time before he was driven out by a mob. A small young church was left behind facing persecution for their new faith.

Starter Question - Imagine someone who is not a Christian asked you, "What difference does your faith make to you and how you live?" What would you say?

- 1) The church was young in the faith and vulnerable to persecution yet Paul starts his letter by confidently giving thanks to God for them. What three things does he thank God for? (v2-3)
  
- 2) Why was Paul so confident about the Thessalonians? (v4-6)
  
- 3) How were the Thessalonians a model to other churches? How are they an example to us? (v6-10)
  
- 4) They were famous for turning from idols to serve the true and living God and wait for Jesus.
  - (a) What idols are we tempted to serve?
  
  - (b) What will it mean for us to turn from these idols to serve the true and living God?
  
- 5) This passage is full of thanksgiving for what God had done in the Thessalonians.
  - (a) How have you seen God at work in your life?
  
  - (b) How is he at work in your life at the moment?
  
  - (c) How do you see him at work in the lives of others?

Finish your time together by thanking God for these things.