



CG Guide - 1 Thessalonians 1

Series Outline

In September-October, we are looking at 1 Thessalonians on Sundays and also discussing it in our CG's. We're doing 5 sermons but with guest speakers, prayer meeting and retreat it is a bit inconsistent, with some sermons discussed afterwards, some beforehand. Passages are

- Ch.1 (after sermon)
- Chs. 2-3 (after sermon)
- 4:1-12 (after sermon)
- 4:13-5:11 (before sermon)
- 5:12-28 (before sermon)

You may remember the situation from this week's sermon, or you can read through 2:17-3:13, or maybe you read it in the reading plan over the summer. Paul and his colleagues come to Thessalonica and plant a church (Acts 17:1-9). But persecution comes quickly and after three weeks they are forced to leave. As they travel, they are worried about the young church, send Timothy on a mission, who comes back and reports that the church is doing well (though they could do with some encouragement, some reminders and are confused about Jesus' return). So Paul writes this letter to them.

This study

The reminders and additional teaching come in chs.4-5, but in chs.1-3 Paul is mainly encouraging. Particularly in ch.1 he wants to encourage the Thessalonians that God is genuinely at work in them, this is the real thing, so that they will press on in the Christian life.

The study is meant to make sure people grasp that main point of God being at work in us and hopefully is mainly encouraging.

Questions

1. Anything that struck you from last Sunday's sermon?

Just open sharing as people like to do.

2. Remember the Thessalonians' situation. The guys who planted the church left after 3 weeks and haven't been back. Lots of persecution. How would you feel if you were the Thessalonians?



Good to set the context. As Kevin explained from Acts 17:1-9, Paul, Silas and Timothy planted the church, but the Jews responded badly. Due to the persecution the believers sent them away but it's been tough and Paul hasn't been back for a while. They must be wondering if this was all real or just a scam.

3. What is Paul's main encouragement for them in these chapters?

I think it's good to have some kind of main point for people to go away with. Paul is pointing out how God has been and is at work in them. V4 - we know God has chosen you because... That's how they know this is genuine.

Some people may remember it from the sermon, but otherwise the next question will help. So if people don't get there, move to question 4 as two sub-questions rather than give the answer.

4. What kind of things does Paul point to in their lives? Where do these come from?

Various things that were Kevin's three points

- *Their response when the gospel came (4-5) - not just words but power, conviction and a clear work of the Spirit*
- *Fruit in their lives of faith, hope and love (2-3), further explained in 9-10, and enduring persecution*
- *God, working through them. Others have heard of it - they have become an example to other churches around the region (7-8)*

5. What do we learn about how God works? What implications might this have for us?

Good to see. You can notice an emphasis on the Word (the gospel came (4), they received the Word (6), the Word sounded forth (8). At the same time, clearly the Spirit worked through the Word (5, 6) to produce conviction and joy. Finally you could say it is supported by the example of others, whether of Paul and his colleagues to the Thessalonians (5-6) or their example to others (7-8).

It is why we as a church want the Word to be central to all our meetings, including CG's. It is why we need to pray for the Spirit to work. And finally these are best done in communities where we can learn from the example of others.



6. (If we don't see much fruit in our lives, what might be possible reasons?)

I've put this between brackets as the chapter is supposed to be encouraging, which is the next question. However, depending on your group you may also want to challenge them a bit, so you can ask this. I've put this first so that the study doesn't end on a downer.

7. How have you seen the gospel at work in other members of your CG? Be specific and encourage them with how you see God at work in their lives.

The passage is supposed to be encouraging, so good to spend time doing that. Maybe go round the group and people encourage each person with ways they see God at work.

8. How would the Thessalonians feel after reading this passage? How would they want to respond? For each of us, what might that look like for us?

They would be encouraged in their faith, and as a result, press on. "More and more" as Paul says later (4:1). Could be enduring suffering, loving others, sharing the gospel, living holy lives... The last subquestion is meant to make this more personal. Not just press on, but maybe a particular area of the Christian life where a member is struggling but now has renewed conviction.

Prayer points (from the prayer time after the sermon)

- Thank God for the gospel, by which we can be saved.
- Ask God for his gospel Word to be at work in our church.
- Help us to imitate Christ and embrace suffering for the gospel.
- Pray that our faith may also "sound forth" across Asia.
- For those whose faith is struggling, to be assured of His grace.



CG Guide - 1 Thessalonians 2-3

This study

The second sermon of 1 Thessalonians covers chapters 2 and 3. Paul talks about his ministry to the Thessalonians (2:1-12) and explains things since then - how he couldn't visit, that he sent Timothy, how happy he was that they're doing well, etc.

Not sure if Paul is really defending himself or just explaining, but he wants them to know what good Christian leaders are like. Either so they will trust him again or keep trusting him (and not trust the wrong people). The reason this matters is because there is an undertone in the passage of Christians having to endure to the end. We will face affliction and opposition but need to keep going until Jesus' return. Hence Paul's concern for them, and why it's important they trust the right leaders and not the wrong ones.

The sermon had two points:

1. We need authentic Christian leaders
2. Because Christians need to endure to the end

(Just a note on 2:15-16: These verses sound quite jarring. Paul is full of loving concern for the Thessalonians and now talks about "the Jews" who persecute Christians as those who displease God and oppose mankind. For those who find it jarring: I think Paul's strong feelings are a result of his love. The Jews hinder them from sharing the gospel to Gentiles so that they might be saved (v16), and they persecute Christians to make them give up their faith. If you care about people being saved, no wonder Paul is upset. Imagine if Timothy came back from his mission and shared that there was no more church in Thessalonica. All the Christians had given up, there was no more gospel witness, no one was being saved. You'd feel very angry about what the persecutors had done.)

Questions

1. Anything that struck you from last Sunday's sermon?

Just open sharing as people like to do.

2. How important do you think Christian leaders are for your faith? How have you seen this in your own or others' lives?

It's a nose-up question, thinking about the topic rather than looking at the text. Maybe we think leaders are not that important. But if we look at the Christian world,



we can see that people have really benefitted from good ones, and that bad ones have done enormous damage. Maybe we've experienced that ourselves.

3. What are some of the characteristics Paul describes in 2:1-12 of authentic leaders? Which stands out to you and why?

Paul mentions willing to suffer (v1-2), faithful to God's truth (v3-4), selfless loving care (v5-8), exemplary conduct (v9-12) - note that each of these sections starts with 'For'. All a very high bar.

4. What is the picture of the Christian life we get from these chapters? How do you feel about it?

"Enduring to the end" is how the sermon put it. Clearly we will face lots of affliction and opposition (2:2, 14, 3:3-4, 7...). The Thessalonians weren't an exception, they were the rule - "you know we were destined for this" (3:3). Our goal is standing before Jesus when he comes (2:19-20, 3:13) but that is a hard journey, so we need to stand fast and not give up.

5. What would it look like for us as a CG to truly believe that enduring to the end is the most important thing for each of us?

Applying this point - do we have a real concern for each other? Do we just hang out and have fun, or are we here to help each other make it to the end? Good to think of practical ways.

6. What do good leaders have to do with enduring to the end? What are some things you would do if you believe this?

If we need to make it to the end and leaders have a big impact on our faith, we'd want to support our leaders (with prayer, encouragement, correction - e.g. CG leaders, ministry leaders, elders), or in making decisions seek out the right leaders and avoid the wrong leaders (e.g. when changing church). You can probably think of more ways this applies.



7. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24. What comfort is there in these verses? What would be the wrong way to apply these verses, and the right way?

Paul points us to God's faithfulness. He will bring us to the end. The wrong application is to become lazy - God will do it so I don't have to. This makes no sense of Pauls' anxiety for the Thessalonians. Instead, as we endure God keeps us. As Paul says in Philippians, after saying that God will complete the good work he has begun (Phil. 1:6), he tells us to "work out your own salvation... for it is God who works in you" (2:12-13). God preserves as we persevere, and that should help us trust him as we press on.

Prayer points (from the prayer time after the sermon)

- Give thanks for leaders who brought us the gospel
- Pray for leaders among us to be Christlike
- Pray each one of us would endure to the end
- Pray for protection from untrustworthy leaders
- Give thanks that God will faithfully keep us