



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

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 Paul's 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



CG Guide - 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

This study

The third sermon of 1 Thessalonians covers 4:1-12. Paul starts to give instructions to them how to live.

Overall worldview: Living between Christ's two comings

Principle (v1-2): Living to please the one who is already pleased with you

Application 1 (v3-8): sex, desire & holiness

Application 2 (v9-12): work, money and love

The questions try to cover all of these. Most of the sermon addressed v3-8, which is a much bigger issue in our culture than laziness.

Questions

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

Just open sharing as people like to do.

2. Paul in this letter constantly refers to Christ's return (1:10, 2:19, 3:13, 4:13-5:11, 5:23). How do you think Christ's return should affect Christian living?

A bit of a nose-up question. Kevin made the point that Christian living is living between Christ's first and second coming. Our life and the way we live should be in the light of that reality. One area is today's topic of pleasing God, but having hope, being watchful, persevering when it's hard etc are all applications.

3. What principle does Paul give for Christian living in 4:1-2? How does this make knowing how to live easy, and how does it make it difficult?

Paul gives a simple principle: Christian living is pleasing God. Doing what pleases him. In a way it is easy - you just have to ask a simple question: what pleases God? You don't have to weigh up consequences, or please lots of different parties. It is simple (like "love God, love your neighbour"). On the other hand, it requires thought. Giving us 10 rules is in some way easy to keep. Pleasing God is one all-encompassing command that has an infinite number of applications.



4. In 9-12, what might it look like to love people at work? Anything challenging for you?

In the sermon this was covered first. Some Thessalonians were not working and living off other people, probably as Jesus would come back soon anyway. Paul mentions loving people by not meddling in their business and working to provide for yourself. Now laziness and not working are usually not problems in HK but the self-centered heart behind it may be an issue for some.

5. Why is sex and desire such an important topic for Paul to address?

It is an area where the culture is so different from God's way, whether in the Roman Empire or the 21st century. It is interesting how sexual behaviour is one of the most common areas of sin in the NT. Nearly every church Paul writes to he mentions it (probably not in Philippians). Likewise Hebrews, 1 & 2 Peter, Jude, Revelation.

6. In v3-8 Paul gives many different reasons for pleasing God in this area. Which one stands out to you? How does it help you?

You can see quite a lot of reasons in this short passage, both 'negative' and 'positive'. Negatively, it's against God's will (v3), it's like the pagan world (v5), it wrongs other people (v6 - so not just yourself), it is disregarding God (v8)... Positively we know God (v5), he has given us the Holy Spirit (v8), he has called us and set us apart (v3, 7 - that's what holiness means)... So it's living in the light of our identity of what God has done for us.

NB I'm not here asking "what areas of sexual behaviour do you need to change?". It might be good to split into men and women for this. So the last question is about how are you going to respond.

7. How does the gospel change living to please God? How do you feel about the Christian life in light of the cross?

As Kevin put it, Christians don't try to please God to win him over, or to appease him, to make up for our sin, to pay him back, or anything like that. We please the one who is already pleased with us. We know God is on our side and pleased with us, because through the cross we are made right with God. So we can please him within a relationship of love, like a child pleasing her parents who she knows love her so much.



8. What has God said to you through his Word today, perhaps especially v3-8? How are you going to respond personally?

Sharing personal applications. If you think it might help, you might want to split into men and women for this. V3-8 might bring up areas of behaviour that are best shared in single-sex groups, rather than in a mixed group. Hence the focus on v3-8. Though people are welcome to share applications in other areas.

Prayer Points

1. Give thanks that God has called us to himself and is pleased with us despite our sin.
2. Pray we would remember Christ's coming and live in the light of it
3. Pray we would seek to please God in every area of our lives, and have wisdom to know what that means in every situation.
4. Pray we would abstain from sexual immorality and live out our holiness in this broken world. Give thanks that Jesus paid for all our sins in this (and every other) area.
5. Pray we would be faithful and good witnesses in our workplaces.



Pre-sermon questions - 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11

This study

This 4th study is different from the previous ones. With the retreat pushing the series back, this week we will discuss the passage before it is preached on the next Sunday. So it is not looking back but rather looking forward.

- It means people haven't looked at the passage before. So rather than regurgitating Sunday we can discover God's Word for ourselves rather than hearing a sermon
- It also means you don't need to have all the answers. If people have a rough idea but still have questions, that's OK! On Sunday questions will be answered.
- It also means people get much more out of Sunday. They have studied the passage beforehand, have questions they want answers to, and so are 'primed' to listen.

As it's meant to set up for Sunday, you don't need to lead people to "the answer" as in a normal inductive study. It's good for some tension to remain rather than have everything answered and people don't feel they need to listen Sunday. The questions should be sufficient for a good discussion. So even though I've put some notes, don't feel you need to get people there or explain it. Only if people get completely lost it may be helpful to get them back on track.

Also don't feel you need to ask every question. Depending on the group discussion, people will probably already naturally get there. So see how it goes.

The questions generally follow the usual order of COMA - Context, Observation, Meaning, Application

Questions

1. (Context) How would you divide up the passage? Is there any overarching theme?

Two clear sections, 4:13-18, 5:1-11. Overall theme is Jesus' return

2. (Observation) What aspect of this is he addressing in the first section? What group of people is the topic?

He is talking about Christians who have died (those who have fallen asleep (14, 15), the dead (16), they are grieving (v13)), and how they will be part of Christ's return. Jesus will bring them with him.



3. (Meaning) What question does he seem to be answering? How does he answer it?

The Thessalonians seem to think those who died won't be part of Jesus' kingdom. Only those alive at his return. That's why they are grieving. But Paul explains, first, that Christians follow Jesus who died and rose (v14) and so they will rise. Death is no problem for Jesus. He then explains they'll be part of it, they'll rise at his return and we'll all meet Jesus together when he comes.

(NB some Christians believe this takes place at another time than his return, at "the rapture". But there is no indication in the text that it is a different time.)

4. (Application) How would it encourage the Thessalonians? When would we ourselves need this?

It's great that their brothers and sisters who died will be there and they will see them again. They won't miss out. So they don't need to be discouraged.

(Of course be sensitive if a group member has just lost a loved one who died in unbelief)

5. (Observation) In the second section, what is Paul reminding them of? What do you think of his description?

Paul continues on the topic of Jesus' return and reminds them that we don't know when it will happen. It will come suddenly on an unsuspecting world and will be a terrifying shock. "Sudden destruction", "labour pains", "no escape" is not a pretty prospect. (v1-3)

6. (Meaning) How should the Thessalonians feel about what will happen? Why?

The Thessalonians shouldn't worry. They know what's coming and they're ready because they are "children of light / the day" as opposed to the darkness/night. They belong to Jesus and his kingdom. (v4-5). They are not destined for wrath but for salvation (v9)

7. (Application) How does Paul want them to live in the light of this? What would it look like from this passage?



They should live as children of the light. They don't belong to the current darkness but to the light. If that is who they are that is how they should live. The contrast is between night and day, between ignorant sin and soberminded faith, hope and love.

8. (Application) Do you see yourself in the same way? How does Paul challenge you?

If we are Christians we should see ourselves like this, as fundamentally different from this world of darkness and sin. Many of us don't see ourselves or live this way.

9. (Application) Any repeated command? Why is this important? How can we do this as a CG?

Both passages end with "encourage another" (4:18, 5:11). They and we should remind each other of Jesus' return, as it is invisible and easy to forget.

10. Any questions you still have?

Priming people for Sunday. If questions can be answered in the group, good to do. Or bring it on Sunday and see if Kevin answers them.