

X R D S

WEEK 1

FAITHFULNESS DESPITE OPPOSITION

From Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy.

To the Thessalonians' church that is in God the
Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace and peace to all of you.

We always thank God for all of you when we mention you constantly in our prayers. This is because we remember your work that comes from faith, your effort that comes from love, and your perseverance that comes from hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father. Brothers and sisters, you are loved by God, and we know that he has chosen you. We know this because our good news didn't come to you just in speech but also with power and the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know as well as we do what kind of people we were when we were with you, which was for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord when you accepted the message that came from the Holy Spirit with joy in spite of great suffering. 7 As a result you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.

1 Thessalonians 1:1-7 (CEB)



CHILDREN
OF THE
LIGHT

TUESDAY

Thanking God for faithful believers

READ: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5

We often use the word “church” for a building or a religious organization. But the apostle Paul called his converts “the church.” “The word *ekklēsia* appears 114 times in the NT, sixty-two times in Paul... the first use occurs at 1 Thessalonians 1:1 (cf. 2 Thess 1:1) in the greeting to the Christians at Thessalonica...it is clear that Paul has in mind an actual gathering of the Thessalonian Christians. So he requests that his letter “be read to all the brothers and sisters” and that they “greet them all with a holy kiss” (1 Thess 5:26–27).” For Paul, “church” was people. (Peter T. O’Brien, article “Church” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993, p. 125.)

If the building burns down, and the preacher leaves town, what you have left is the church. What helps you understand that you may “go to” the “movies” or a football game, but “church” is who you are, not somewhere you go? What shift in thinking or acting can make that understanding of church a reality for you?

The believers in Thessalonica were not the church on their own. They were the church because of their connection to God. “Paul sends this letter to the church of the Thessalonians which is in God and the Lord Jesus Christ. God was the very atmosphere in which the Church lived and moved and had its being.” (William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians* (Revised Edition). Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1975, p. 186.)

How can you make God the “very atmosphere” in which you live and move?

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, as John Wesley’s covenant prayer put it, “thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it.” Make that a living reality in my life today. Amen.

THURSDAY

Trying to please God, not people

READ: 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8, Matthew 5:10-12

Paul spoke of the courage it took to preach in Thessalonica after he had already suffered and been publicly insulted in Philippi (cf. Acts 16:12-40). Paul didn't yet have a copy of the gospel of Matthew, but he got to live out Jesus' principle about meeting insults and harassment with joy and trust. "The presence of the heavenly kingdom turns the tables on normal expectations regarding what it means to flourish as human beings." (Eugene Eung-Chun Park and Joel B. Green, study note on Matthew 5:10 in The CEB Study Bible. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 13 NT.)

Later, Paul wrote, "If possible, to the best of your ability, live at peace with all people" (Romans 12:18). Yet like prophets before him and many godly leaders since, like his Lord Jesus himself, Paul often found himself hated and harassed. In our seemingly more tolerant age, what forms can "persecution" take? How did Jesus call us to respond when (not really "if") that happens?

Scholar N. T. Wright wrote about Jesus' words in Matthew 5, "This is an announcement, not a philosophical analysis of the world. It's about something that's starting to happen, not about a general truth of life. It is gospel: good news, not good advice." (Wright, N.T., Matthew for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-15).

In what ways does Jesus' presence in your life create an inner "climate" in which you can find God's joy and peace even in conditions that otherwise would produce only anger or depression?

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, some of your most faithful servants have focused on pleasing "an audience of one." Even as I work to live at peace with all people, keep me aware that it is you I most want my choices to please. Amen.

SATURDAY

Separated physically, but not in our hearts

READ: 1 Thessalonians 2:13-20, 2 Corinthians 3:1-3

We may see the apostle Paul as a Christian “superhero”. This brave, tireless evangelist never saw himself as a solo act. This letter named a team: “From Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy” (1 Thessalonians 1:1). Next week we’ll see that when Paul couldn’t return to Thessalonica, he sent Timothy (“our brother and God’s co-worker”—1 Thessalonians 3:1) to support the Christians there. He also told his Christian friends that, when he met his Lord after his life here ended, his own deeds were not his hope and “crown.” Their presence in God’s kingdom, he said, was his “glory and joy.” Scholar William Barclay noted, “In Greek there are two words for crown. The one is diadema...used almost exclusively for the royal crown. The other is stephanos...used almost exclusively for the victor’s crown...especially for the athlete’s crown of victory in the games. Paul uses stephanos here. The only prize in life that he really valued was to see his converts living well.”

Paul served God by preaching the gospel and planting new churches. When Paul wrote this letter, Timothy served God by checking on the churches, nurturing them and helping to relieve Paul’s concerns. Is your heart willing to serve in any role needed that fits your gifts in God’s kingdom, where “the last shall be first” and God values every member of the body equally? Paul said Christians are a letter from Christ, “written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God.”

What would a careful observer learn about God by “reading” the letter you are writing with your life? What parts of your daily routine would show others clearly that you are a God-follower? What activities or practices are you involved in that you wouldn’t be if you weren’t loyal and grateful to God for the grace and love you’ve found?

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, “fellowship” is not a church cliché. It’s the path to your kingdom that your servant Paul modelled and called all of us, including me, to follow. Thank you for including me in your family. Amen.