

DAILY READ – 1 THESSALONIANS

Devotional notes on 1 Thessalonians adapted from Matthew Henry's Commentary.

Introduction

Though "placed after the other letters" of Paul to the churches, it "is thought to have been written before them, about AD51." The letter expresses Paul's thankfulness to God "for the effectiveness of his preaching among the Thessalonians," and aims "to strengthen them in the faith, and to convince them to lead holy lives."

1 Thessalonians 1

v1: The church was the real deal. "They believed in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ." Within the church were Gentiles who "had turned to God from idols," and Jews who "believed Jesus to be the promised Messiah." Whether Jew or Gentile, "all of them were devoted and dedicated to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: to God as their chief good and highest end, to Jesus Christ as their Lord and Mediator between God and humanity."

v2: Thankfulness to God "for the favours we ourselves receive but also for the benefits given to others," is what believers in Christ should be known for. "Even when we do not actually give thanks to God by our words, we should have a grateful sense of God's goodness in our hearts." To our thanksgiving we should pray, seeking from God for ourselves and others, more of His grace.

v3: Evidence of faith, love, and hope in the lives of others is always a reason for thanksgiving to God. Faith is seen in the influence it has on their hearts and lives. Love shows itself in service to God and neighbours. Hope reveals itself "in a patient bearing of the adversities of the present and a patient waiting for the glory to be revealed."

v4: "Whenever we give thanks to God" for the faith, love, and hope seen either in ourselves or others, "we should trace the streams back to the fountain, giving thanks to God for his electing love" from which they flow. Those who are "from eternity elected and chosen for salvation" will in the fullness of time be "effectually called and sanctified" because of God's "own good pleasure and sheer grace," and not due to any merit in them.

v5: "Wherever the Gospel comes in power, it is to be attributed to the activity of the Holy Spirit. Unless the Spirit of God accompanies the word of God, to make it effective by his power," it will not deeply affect our hearts, convict our consciences, or reform our lives when we hear it, so that we put to death our sinful desires, are weaned from the things of the world and raised up to heavenly things, and are "fully convinced of its truth, so as not to be easily shaken" in our minds "by objections and doubts."

v6: It is not just church leaders who are to imitate the example of the Lord Jesus by living a way of life that corresponds to the message they preach. This way of life includes a willingness "to share in the sufferings" that come from "accepting and professing Christianity."

v7: The Thessalonian believers became an example to many others around them. Their example was effective, "their way of life had a good influence on them," and it was extensive, "others who received the Gospel... were built up by their example." What example are we setting to those around us? Does it show and encourage others how to follow Christ?

v8: How does the Word of God go out? It goes out, not only when believers share the good news they have received. It also happens when the gospel brings about change in a person's life, and this change becomes a topic for conversation, and when others are *"encouraged to receive it and to be willing, when called, to suffer for it"* by the example of those who have already done so.

v9: Those who have responded rightly to the gospel have abandoned their idolatry. They have *"turned from their idols and abandoned all the false worship they had been brought up in."* They have also given *"themselves to God, to the living and true God, and devoted themselves to his service."*

v10: We believe that Jesus will come again and we believe that *"his coming will bring us joy."* We can be certain that He will return *"because God has raised him from the dead, which is full assurance to all that he will come for judgment."* We wait with excitement for Him to come again, because *"he will bring salvation with him, full and final deliverance from sin, death, and hell, from the wrath that is still to come."*

1 Thessalonians 2

v1-2: Opposition and suffering will not stop true and faithful gospel ministers from preaching the gospel. Paul reminds the Thessalonian Christians that *"he was not discouraged either by the suffering he met with or by the opposition raised against him."* The gospel of Christ has always been met opposition since it was first declared.

v3: One mark of a true gospel preachers is that they are what they appear to be. The message they preach will be *"without deceit... not erroneous, nor a cleverly invented story,"* and the way in which they speak will be *"free from deceit and trickery,"* not saying one thing but meaning another.

v4: All who are called to preach the gospel have been entrusted with this message. It does not belong to them, but to God, so *"they must not dare corrupt"* it and *"they must... make use of what has been entrusted to them, as God has allowed and commanded, knowing they will be called to account."* It is God they are to please, not people, remembering that *"God not only sees all we do but also knows our thoughts"* too.

v5-6: Speech that flatters and greedy motives are two sins that preachers are tempted by and which they must avoid. They must not *"aim to influence the affections of human beings by glorying in them and fawning over them,"* nor should they seek to make themselves *"rich by preaching the Gospel."*

v7-8: Like a nursing mother, pastors and elders should care for those they lead with gentleness, and with affectionate concern for *"their spiritual and eternal welfare and salvation,"* and be willing to do all they can to this end.

v9-10: What are some of the characteristics of those who are ministers of the gospel? They *"work hard for the salvation of souls"* by faithful preaching and teaching the gospel, and their behaviour is *"holy toward God, just toward all people, and blameless,"* so that it does not cause *"scandal or offence."*

v11: Church leaders have the responsibility of not only informing believers in the church about their duty, but also of *"stirring them to actually do it, with proper motives and arguments"* for why they should. Like spiritual fathers, they are to give encouragement and support when *"difficulties and discouragements"* are encountered.

v12: *"The Gospel calls us into the kingdom and state of grace here and to the kingdom and state of glory in the future, to heaven and happiness as our goal and to holiness as the way to that goal."* Therefore, it is our duty to *"live lives worthy of God."*

v13: *"We should receive the word of God as the word of God." Unlike the words of human beings which "are frail and perishing, like human beings themselves, and are sometimes false, foolish, and fickle... God's word is holy, wise, just, and faithful and, like its author, lives and lasts forever." We should receive the word, and when we do by faith, it does us good, converting our souls, enlightening our minds, and bringing joy to our hearts.*

v14-15: It should not surprise us if we must suffer for the sake of the gospel. If in the past, enemies of the gospel killed the Lord Jesus, and persecuted his followers, can we expect them to treat us differently?

v16: *"When the limit of any person's sins has been reached, and they have sinned fully, then wrath comes fully." Nothing leads more to this "than opposing the Gospel, obstructing its progress, and hindering the salvation of precious souls."*

v17: *"This world is not a place where we are always together, nor are we together for long." It is only in heaven that those who trust in Christ will be together never to part again.*

v18: *"Satan is a constant enemy of the work of God and does all he can to obstruct it."*

v19-20: When Jesus returns, *"everyone must appear in his presence, or before him."* Both ministers and the people they serve will be there. On that great and glorious day, *"faithful people will be the glory and joy of faithful ministers."*

1 Thessalonians 3

v1: Church leaders will willingly make sacrifices for the good of those they are responsible for taking care of. *"Ministers who cannot deny themselves in many things for the establishment and welfare of their people do not value their people properly."*

v2: We always will have the need of being strengthened and encouraged in our faith. Firstly, concerning the object of our faith, that *"Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the world"* and that he is *"so wise and good and so powerful and faithful that [we] can rely on him."* Secondly, concerning the reward of our faith, which is more than enough to counterbalance all the losses we experience in this life.

v3: Trials and persecution can be unsettling for us as believers, and cause us to waver in the faith, even give up following Jesus. This is why we need to be regularly strengthened and encouraged to keep believing the gospel.

v4: Those who follow Christ must *"count on times of testing and trouble."* These times do *"not come about by chance, merely by the wrath and hatred of the enemies of religion,"* but *"according to what God has determined"* for our good, in order to test or to grow our faith.

v5: *"The Devil is a subtle and tireless tempter, who seeks an opportunity to deceive and destroy us, and he uses every opportunity to take advantage of us, both in times of prosperity and in times of adversity."* He also seeks to stop the gospel bearing fruit, by hindering those who preach and teach from being able to, or if he is unable to do that, by hindering *"the effectiveness of their labour."*

v6: How encouraging it is when we hear of believers standing firm in the faith and not turning aside from their profession when trials come upon them.

v7-8: News of a Christian backsliding or giving up the faith altogether, is always discouraging to hear. However, we should always be encouraged by news of someone standing firm in the Lord and faithful to Him and use this as a reminder to keep going in the ministry God has given us to do.

v9: "When we are most cheerful, we should also be most thankful. We should give thanks for what we rejoice in." Why? In order to give the glory to God for the joy and encouragement we have received.

v10: "Those we give thanks for still need to be prayed for" because they remain "in this world of temptation and imperfection" and while they do, will have something lacking in their faith. This could be truths about God "that are insufficiently known or believed by them" or they are still in the dark about, or the effects of these truths are not being displayed in their lives as much as they ought to be.

v11: "Providence directs all our affairs... God our Father directs and orders where his children will go and what they will do." So let us acknowledge the LORD in prayer concerning all our ways, and trust that He will direct our paths.

v12: What Paul prays for the Thessalonians, is what "we should seek for ourselves and friends," that not only would we love one another, but also that we would have a "proper concern for the welfare of everyone." To grow in this area, we need the Spirit's influence, "and the way to obtain this is through prayer."

v13: "Our desire should be to have our hearts strengthened in holiness before God and be preserved safe until the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ—to be, already now, blameless before God, even our Father, and then be presented blameless before the throne of his glory when the Lord Jesus comes with all his saints."

1 Thessalonians 4

v1-2: "We must not only persevere [in the faith] to the end; we should become even better and walk even more consistently and closely with God." God is pleased when we make progress in holiness and pleasing God "should be the aim and goal of every Christian." This means we need to be taught not only what to believe but also how to live.

v3-5: All kinds of sexual immorality, "either in the married or unmarried state," are sins that are directly opposed to sanctification or the holy life we are to live as followers of Jesus. It is God's will for our lives that we keep our bodies pure from defiling sinful desires and do not indulge them. We are not to behave like those who don't know God or Jesus as their Saviour. Purity in heart, speech, and behaviour, is "one thing that God commands in his law and that his grace brings about in all true believers."

v6: "The sin of sexual immorality, especially adultery, is a great act of injustice that God will punish." Adultery and other acts of sexual immorality not only pollute the soul and body of the person who is guilty of this, it is act of injustice to others, "especially to those joined together in the marriage covenant forever." Christians are to flee from all forms of sexual immorality for their good and the good of others.

v7-8: "The Holy Spirit is given to us to protect us against these sins and help us to put to death these acts of the body, so that we may live."

v9-10: Love for one another is "the uniform of Christ's family." This side of heaven no one loves perfectly, and so we need to be urged and encouraged to love one another more and more. The love for one another in the church is to extend "toward all the saints, no matter how distant they are from [us] in location, and no matter if they differ from [us] in certain opinions or practices of less significance."

v11: Leading a quiet life is something that followers of Jesus should seek to live. They are not to be "given to strife, conflict, or division," nor are they to be "busybodies, interfering in other people's affairs."

v12: Laziness can lead to people finding themselves in difficult circumstances and being a burden to their friends. It is not behaviour that is appropriate for someone who believes the gospel.

v13: There are some things about those who die in the Lord *"that we need not and should not be ignorant of."* Though *"we may weep for our own loss,"* we do not weep for relatives and friends who have died in the Lord. For them, death is gain, as *"they are now with God and are therefore better off where they are than when they were here."* This is the certain hope we have for them.

v14: *"The doctrine of the resurrection and the second coming of Christ is a great remedy for the fear of death and excessive sorrow for the death of our Christian friends."* Christ, having been raised from the dead, is the first fruits of those, who, having died are now asleep *"under his special care and protection,"* will one day, like Him, *"be raised from the dead and woken up from their sleep"* and *"when God comes he will take them with him."*

v15-16: When Jesus returns, descending from heaven to earth, His first concern *"on that day will be for his dead saints,"* for *"he will raise them before the great change comes on those who will be found alive."* Those who have died in Christ will not miss out on the joy and happiness there will be for those who follow Jesus at His second coming.

v17: Those who are alive when Jesus returns *"will undergo a mighty change"* with their bodies *"made fit to inherit the kingdom of God, which flesh and blood in its present state are not capable of."* Along with those who are raised, those who are changed *"will meet with their Lord to congratulate him on his coming, receive the crown of glory he will then give them, and be assistants to him in the judgment, approving and applauding the sentence he will then pass on the prince of the power of the air and all evildoers, who will be doomed to destruction with the Devil and his angels."*

v18: Isn't the hope of being *"with the Lord, to see him, live with him, and enjoy him forever,"* something we can encourage one another with?

1 Thessalonians 5

v1: *"Christ will come, and a certain time has been appointed for his coming,"* but we don't know when this is. It is not necessary for us to know, nor would it do us good to know either.

v2: When Jesus comes again, it *"will be sudden and a great surprise to most people."* Knowing that His return will be sudden and surprising is more useful than knowing its exact timing, *"because this should wake us up to stand on guard, so that we may be ready whenever he comes."*

v3: It will be terrible for the ungodly at Christ's coming because *"the righteous God will bring ruin"* on them, *"and their destruction will be total and final."* This punishment will fall on them while they are full of *"worldly self-confidence"* and amusement, *"dreaming of happiness and pleasing themselves with the worthless amusements of their imaginations or their senses."*

v4-5: Followers of Jesus can hope to stand with *"confidence before the Son of Man,"* when He returns, because they are not in the dark about His coming. They know that He will come again and have been given *"sufficient help to prepare for that day"* so *"it would be their own fault"* if they are not ready.

v6-7: With so many things surrounding us that tempt *"our natural desires and appetites"* to excess regarding worldly things, if we are to be moderate and keep them *"within appropriate limits"* we must be watchful and be on our guard *"against sin and temptation."*

v8: There are spiritual enemies against us that *"are many, mighty, and malicious,"* and will attempt to make us negligent, self-confident, arrogant, and indulgent. *"We need to arm ourselves against their attempts"* by putting on the spiritual armour of faith, love, and hope. Faith believes *"that the eye of God is always on us, that we have spiritual enemies to fight with, [and] that there is a spiritual world to prepare for."* Love is for *"God and the things of God."* Hope is our salvation and eternal life. These three graces will keep us alert and self-controlled and *"prevent us from being intoxicated with the pleasures of sin, which last only a short time."*

v9-10: It is because of God's appointment and by Christ's atonement, His death for us, that we belong to Him, and we can *"live for him while we are here and live with him when we leave here."*

v11: We have a responsibility to encourage and edify those who are part of the same local church that we are members of. We can do this by sharing *"our knowledge and experiences with one another,"* by joining *"in prayer and praise with one another,"* and by setting *"a good example before one another."*

v12-13: Church leaders are *"called to labour, not to be lazy."* They are to work hard in instructing, encouraging, and building up the members of the church. They are to *"direct them as spiritual guides by setting a good example to the flock."* They are also to correct publicly and privately, as need be, *"when they neglect the right or do the wrong."* The members of the church are to know who their elders are, appreciating the teaching, direction, and correction they give.

v14-15: In every church there will at times be those who need to be warned about *"the wrong they are doing,"* those who need to be encouraged because they are downcast *"and discouraged at the thoughts of danger, losses, and suffering,"* and those who need help in their weakness. It is the responsibility of both the leaders and members of the church to do this by speaking God's Word to them.

v16-18: *"The way to be always joyful is to pray continually. We would be more joyful if we prayed more."* And *"if we pray continually, we will not lack reasons for giving thanks in everything... in adversity as well as in prosperity."*

v19-20: The preaching of God's Word, *"the interpreting and applying of the Scriptures,"* is to be prized and valued. We need *"to have our minds stirred, our love and resolutions"* awakened by the Word as it is preached so we grow in knowledge and holiness and have our confidence in God strengthened.

v21-22: *"Although we must value preaching, we must not take things on trust from the preacher but test them"* by searching *"the Scriptures to see whether what they say is true."* After we are satisfied that what we have heard is right and true, we must *"hold on to what is good,"* and avoid *"whatever looks like sin, leads to it, and comes near it,"* because those *"who do not avoid opportunities for sin or temptations or approaches to sin, will not long abstain from actually committing sin."*

v23: We are to pray for one another's sanctification - for God to sanctify their whole person (spirit, soul, body) and continue the good work He has already begun in them, so that they become more and more devoted to Him and live increasingly holy lives. We are also to pray for one another's preservation - for God to complete and perfect his work by protecting and preserving them until they *"are finally presented faultless before the throne of his glory with exceeding joy."*

v24: Can we be sure that God will hear our prayers for Him to sanctify and preserve His people? Yes, because God is faithful, and it is the faithfulness of God, not their faithfulness, that assures us that they will persevere to the end. *"Our faithfulness toward God depends on his faithfulness toward us."*

v25-26: Pray for your pastors. *"Ministers need their people's prayers, and the more people pray for their ministers, the more good things ministers may receive from God, and the more benefit people may receive from their ministry."*

v27-28: God's Word is to be made known. It must be publicly read when God's people gather for worship. It must also be translated into a language that people are able to read and understand.