

# Genuine Christianity – A Study of 1 Thessalonians

## Introduction

We begin our studies in 1 Thessalonians with some background information. This will help us to understand how the Church began in Thessalonica, and why Paul wrote this first letter to them.

Thessalonica was originally named Therma. It was an ancient town and got its name because of the many warm mineral springs there. The city was founded in 315 B.C. by the Macedonian King Cassander. He renamed it Thessalonica after his wife. She was the daughter of Philip the second and the sister of Alexander the Great. Thessalonica became a large and wealthy city. It was ideally situated in the rich plains all around, and with a magnificent harbour. When Macedonia was conquered by the Romans in 168 B.C. it was divided into four sections. Because of its position and size Thessalonica was made a capital of one of its four divisions. In 46 B.C. it was made a Roman province and a major capital city. Thessalonica became an important commercial centre. This was because it was on the bustling trade route called the Via Egnatia, which started in Rome and finished by the sea.

Because it was ever loyal to Rome it became a free city. Thessalonica was only second to Rome in power, strength and influence. It was the centre of Greek civilisation. Every form of art and pleasure could be found there. It was this that pulled the heart of Demas away from serving Christ. Paul said in 2 Timothy 3 verse 10, "Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica." It had every form of pleasure and worldly entertainment. But with all of that it was a city without Jesus Christ. The people had all their heart could desire but had lost their own souls. God sent Paul to this great city to tell them that they need Jesus Christ the saviour of sinners.

Paul was on his second missionary journey. He'd arrived at Troas on the Asian coast, now modern day Turkey. Here Paul had an unusual experience. We read in Acts 16 verse 9 "During the night Paul had a vision of a man from Macedonia standing and begging him 'come over to Macedonia and help us'." He saw this as God's call to go and preach the Gospel there. Both Paul and Silas travelled by boat to the port of Neopolis, then on to Philippi. Paul was badly treated there and spent time in prison. After his release he went on to Thessalonica. We read of the founding of the church there in the book of Acts chapter 17 verses 1 to 9.

First we see, The Passage of Paul. We read in Acts chapter 17 verse 1, "When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica." We quickly read these words, but do not stop to realise that the journey from Philippi to Thessalonica was a hundred miles! It's likely Paul and Silas walked it! They did it for Christ, and for the furtherance of the Gospel. The cost, distance, and sacrifice involved was nothing. They just wanted to serve Christ and make him known.

Are you prepared to put yourself out for the spread of the good news of the Gospel? Would you even consider walking a hundred miles if it meant that was the only way for people to hear the message of salvation?

Second we notice, The Pattern of Paul. We read in Acts 17 verse 2, "As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue." Paul had a strategy. He went to the Jew first. Thessalonica had a synagogue and Paul went in to share the Gospel. He preached Christ from the Old Testament.

What is your strategy for evangelising your family, friends and neighbours? You can pray for them. Then you could invite them to your house for a meal. Help them when there is a need. Wait for the right opportunity and tell them the good news about Christ. Get

them along to a special event at your Church. Paul worked according to a structured plan.

We see thirdly, the Preaching of Paul. First it was Christ Centred. We read in verse three of Acts 17 that Paul was, "...explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead" That is our message. It is Christ crucified and risen. We have no other message. The world needs Christ. It desperately needs God's forgiveness. The world does not need more politics, new politics, new schemes and philosophies. answer to mankind's deep need is Christ. We're not called to preach a denomination, creed, or a particular church. Nor are we called to defend personalities within the church. We are called to preach Jesus Christ and him crucified. The Puritan Richard Sibbes said, "Preaching is the chariot that carries Christ up and down the world". Second it was Scripture based. Verse 2 says, "He reasoned with them from the scriptures". Our authority is the Bible. We bring God's word to people not our own ideas.

Third it was Thoughtful. We read Paul, "... reasoned ... explained ... proved". Picture a house. It is the house of salvation. On its door is an invitation "Whoever will may enter." Running up to the door is a path full of pot-holes. To get to the door the pot-holes need to be filled-in. You and are called to fill them by reasoning explaining and proving from scripture that the Gospel is true and worthy of acceptance. Salvation is by God's grace. We don't deny that. But God uses your witness and preaching to get people to the door. We should be skilled in the use of God's word.

Fourth, it was Effective. Verse 4 says, "Some of the Jews were persuaded." The word 'persuaded' translates a Greek word which means 'to win over by bringing about a change of mind'. They heard the truth thought about it and were convinced. That is our role in witnessing and preaching. To lead the thoughts of the hearers to acknowledge that the claims of Christ are true and should be accepted. We then encourage them to receive Jesus Christ as their own personal Saviour and Lord.

So began the Church at Thessalonica. It was a large congregation, one of the largest Paul founded. The work of God's grace and mercy had begun. By following Paul's principles in your witness for Christ, God can use your efforts to turn men and women to the Saviour.

## Genuine Christianity – A Study of 1 Thessalonians Encouragement and Example

### Chapter 2

Before we get into the text of 1 Thessalonians there is some more background information we need to have. We have already looked at how the church at Thessalonica was started. Now we need to see why Paul wrote this letter to them.

Whenever the Gospel is preached persecution soon follows. When heaven blesses hell blasts! So it was in Thessalonica. We read in Acts 17 verse 5, "But the Jews became jealous, so they rounded up some bad characters from the market-place, formed a mob and started a riot in the city". Things became dangerous for Paul and Silas. We read in verse 10, "As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea." Paul would have stayed to provide support for this new church. He was forced to get away as quickly as possible. He describes this in 1 Thessalonians 2 verse 17. He says, "We were torn away from you for a short time (in person not in thought)." See Paul's great love for the believers! They were ever in his thoughts. Are your brothers and sisters in Christ always in your hearts and thoughts when you are separated from them? That is a sign of real genuine Christian affection.

Paul arrived in Berea. His preaching met with success but the Jews stirred up more trouble and he went on to Athens. He left Silas and Timothy in Berea. They joined him later. Paul was desperately longing to know how the Church was going on in Thessalonica. Had the believers been crushed? Was the fellowship still there? Paul sent Timothy to find out. We read in 1 Thessalonians 3 verses 1 to 6, "When we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left in Athens. We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God's fellow worker ... to strengthen and encourage you in your faith. I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the Tempter might have tempted you and our efforts might have been useless. "Even the greatest workers for Christ need the help and support of others. We must support our Pastors, Elders, Evangelists, and Missionaries in every practical way we can.

We read in Acts 18 verse 1 that, "After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth". Later Timothy returned from Thessalonica. He came to Corinth with news of the Church. Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 3 verse 6, "But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love." The Thessalonians were standing for Christ. They were developing and growing in their new faith in Christ. This thrilled Paul was like a tonic to him. That is not surprising. Paul had been beaten in Philippi, thrown out of Thessalonica, treated badly in Berea, surrounded by paganism in Athens. He had some encouragements too. But the news from Thessalonica was what he wanted to hear. This revived his soul. Paul went on with a new vigour. We read in Acts 18 verse 5, "When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ." You see, Paul was fired up again. The news from Timothy confirmed that his ministry was effective.

When Paul wrote to the Church at Corinth he opened up to them how he felt when he first arrived there. In the words of the J.B. Phillips translation of 1 Corinthians 2 verse 3 he said, "I was feeling far from strong. I was nervous and rather shaky!" Its amazing what a good dose of encouragement can do! Someone once said, "Encouragement is like fresh water to a thirsty soul". Be an encourager in your church. It will rekindle the flame of enthusiasm in many a battle worn believer!

Timothy essentially told Paul three things about the state of affairs at Thessalonica. First, he reported that the believers were growing in faith hope and love. Second, the Jews had misrepresented and maligned Paul. They undermined his motives. They had suggested he was a travelling money maker. He was only concerned about lining his own pockets. They accused Paul of not being concerned about the people at Thessalonica. He

had left them suddenly and had not returned. Third, although things were generally good at the Church the Thessalonians needed guidance on aspects of living godly lives. They needed instruction to help them deal with fears and concerns they had about the second coming of Christ. So Paul writes to them from Corinth. We read in Acts 18 verse 12 that Paul was in Corinth, "While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia". Historians date this at 50 to 51 A.D. So Paul wrote to the Thessalonians about that time.

Thessalonians has 5 chapters. It can be divided into two main sections. The first three chapters deal with the subject of Paul's thankfulness for their steadfast faith and Christian commitment. He stirs them up to be even more devoted to Jesus Christ. Chapters 4 and 5 contain practical exhortations in areas that needed attention. There is instruction about holiness, love, and what happens to loved ones who die before Christ returns. A wrong outlook on work had developed in connection with the second coming of the lord Jesus Christ. That needed to be addressed as well.

In 1 Thessalonians chapter 1 verse 7, the Apostle Paul says of the believers, "So you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia." Despite their shortcomings they were a model church. They were the flagship church for all other churches to learn from and copy.

The title of our studies is "Genuine Christianity". We see the marks of genuineness in the Church at Thessalonica. This letter is the first one that Paul ever wrote. It provides us with insight into what the beliefs and priorities were for the early believers. We will discover in this letter the really important things to which we should be giving our time; the goals we should have and the things that will motivate us to serve Christ. We will also be genuine Christians as we apply these lessons to our lives.

## Genuine Christianity – A Study of 1 Thessalonians A Genuine Faith

### Chapter 3

You will remember from the introduction to this letter that Paul was relieved that the church in Thessalonica was fearlessly serving the Lord. This was good news to him. He'd been torn away from them prematurely and longed to hear of their condition, Timothy brings back a report to Paul who is now in Corinth. He decides to write this letter to the Thessalonians to exhort them, and to deal with a few problems in the Church.

One problem the Thessalonians faced was the accusation that they had been led astray. The Jews tried to undermine the faith of the believers. They said that they had fallen for some new styled religion and they'd been tricked by Paul. They accused Paul of just wanting to make money out of them.

In chapter 1 of this letter Paul provides evidence that this accusation is not true. He shows the reality of their experience and that it can only be accounted for on the basis that they had met with the living God. They had not merely been converted from one religion to another, They had met with God in Christ. This had transformed their lives in a remarkable way.

Have you ever had similar doubts? Have you ever asked, "Have I been misled?" "Am I following an empty dream?" "As I hear all the voices inviting me to follow them-religious, political, philosophical, social, how can I be sure I've found the truth?" The answer is found in this chapter. Especially verse 4. Paul says, "Brothers loved of God, we know that he has chosen you."

Paul emphasises two things, God's sovereign choice of us and the dynamic power he used to bring us into a realisation of that choice. How do we know God has loved us and chosen us? Because certain things will be evident in our lives.

The first thing is: You belong to the Church. Paul says in verse 1 "To the Church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Jesus said in Matthew 16 verse 18, "I will build my Church." Wherever a bible-loving church exists it's there by the power of God. It's a work of God. You belong to the Church, and have an appetite for all that belongs to the Church, because God has intervened in your life.

You had no desire to belong to a Church until God worked by his Grace in your heart. That love you have for the things of God is foreign to the unsaved person. You know it because God has put it there.

Secondly, you have a faith that works. Verse 2 says, "We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith". Genuine faith is demonstrated by action. The Thessalonians were active in evangelism. We read in verse 8, "The Lord's message rang out from you". They exercised practical love toward each other.

In James 2 verse 22 we see the important connection between faith and works. James says about Abraham, "You see that his faith and his actions were working together and his faith was made complete by what he did". How can you be sure that God is active in your life? Your faith works. You want to please God and obey him. Belief is transferred to behaviour.

Thirdly, you have a love that labours. Verse two says, "We remember... your labour prompted by love." "The word 'Labour' translates a Greek word meaning 'toilsome effort'. This effort will be seen in two ways. You will labour for God. It will be motivated by a real love for him and his Kingdom. The only type of labour pleasing to God is that which is moved by a heart full of love toward him. This is the mark of a genuine Christian. We

see it illustrated in the healing of Simon Peters' mother in law. We read in Matthew 8 verse 15 that Jesus, "touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to wait on them" She showed the reality of her deliverance in service for the Lord. We will do the same. You will also labour for other believers. In 1 John 4 verse 12 we read, "If we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us."

Genuine Christian love is practical and tangible. It isn't abstract or sentimental. It toils for the well-being of others. We read in Genesis 29 verse 20, "So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her." Jacob's labour called for toil and effort. He did it gladly. Why? Because he loved her. Our labour for each other will never be burdensome when we really love each other as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Lastly, You have a hope that endures. Verse 2 says, "We remember...your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. "This endurance is maintained by the blessed hope of the coming of Christ. When you' are tempted to give up your work of faith and labour of love ask yourself the question, "Have taken my eyes off the finishing line? Am I no longer focused on my heavenly reward?"

The most powerful motive to endurance is the Lord's return in power and Glory. Dr. R.A. Torrey said, "The second coming of Christ transformed my whole idea of life; it broke the power of the world and its ambition over me and filled my life with the most radiant optimism even under the most discouraging circumstances". Our hope is that one day our work of faith and labour of love will have ended. We enter into our reward and hear, "Well done good and faithful servant enter into the joy of your Lord".

I trust all these things are found in your life. If they are, then be assured you are chosen by God and He is at work in your life. The strength and blessing you experience confirm the reality of the message you've believed. You've not been led astray! You can thank God for all He has done for you.

## Genuine Christianity – A Study of 1 Thessalonians A Genuine Conversion

### Chapter 4

The believers in Thessalonica had been told that they'd been led astray by a travelling charlatan preacher. Paul writes this letter to them to show that they had in reality met with God and gives them evidence of this. They belong to the Church. They have a real working vibrant faith. They prove the genuineness of their experience through loving labour for Jesus Christ. They endure daily assured in their hearts that Jesus is coming again. This is seen in their patience and hope.

Paul goes on to list some more reasons why the believers shouldn't doubt the reality of their conversion. Whenever the Thessalonians faced persecution for their faith they should remind themselves how they became Christians. This in itself is an encouragement. In your moments of despair, whenever things are difficult, do the same. If you ever doubt that you're on the right track ask yourself, "How did I get on this track in the first place?"

Paul reminds us of two things. First, You had a powerful experience. In 1 Thessalonians 1 verse 4 we read, "Our Gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction." The Gospel "came to you". It had to. You would never have sought it yourself. You were too busy living for yourself! How did you come under the sound of the gospel? Maybe it was through a friend at work, a neighbour, a family member, or a tract posted through your door. God put that person or situation in your way. It was part of God's seeking grace. He brought the Gospel to you.

In John 6 verse 44 Jesus said, "No-one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him". Although Paul says the gospel didn't come in word only it did come in words. The Gospel is an intelligible communication. It has content that can be articulated. God spoke to you in words you could understand. But it is not only words. Someone once said, "The gospel is not a presentation of ideas but the operation of power". When you heard the gospel a power so accompanied it that it reached deep down into your heart and conscience. It brought conviction of sin. Your heart trembled. Your conscience awoke. The Gospel exposed your need and you cried out to the lord to save you. Are you tempted to backslide or to give up? Go back to that day when God swept into your life. Recall how the Holy Spirit made God real to you. Remember the dynamic of God in your conversion.

You also experienced "deep conviction", or "much assurance". This isn't referring to conviction of sin here. Rather, it's a conviction born in your heart of the truth of all that you have come to believe. You know deep in your heart that God does love you. Jesus did die for you. That he has chosen you and embraced you. That Jesus is the saviour of sinners and the Christ sent by God. These aren't mere words. They have become a firm conviction. Jesus spoke with the two disciples on the Emmaus road.

We read in Luke 24 verse 27, "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself". We then read of the effect this had on the two disciples. We read what they said in verse 32, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road." Only Christianity can bring the reality of the 'Burning heart' of assurance and conviction. When the Methodist leader John Wesley was converted he said, "I felt my heart strangely warmed ... and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins."

Have you got that assurance in your own heart today?

Secondly, You had a powerful transformation. One evidence of the truth of Christianity is the changed life. The Gospel gives a new direction and new desires. So a further proof

of your election is your willingness to be identified with the Apostles and Jesus Christ. Paul says in 1 Thessalonians I verse 6, "You became imitators of us and the Lord".

How is this imitation seen in our lives? First in the way you live. Paul says at the end of verse 5, "You know how we lived among you for your sake" He was asking them to remember his behaviour when he was with them. He wasn't the money-grabbing charlatan that the Jews had said. When Paul visited Thessalonica he sacrificed his own comforts to see man and women saved. As he said, "We lived among you for your sakes". All thought for self was gone. When they could not afford to support him financially he worked as a tent maker. To live a life of self-sacrifice for the benefit of others is losing your own life for the sake of the gospel and for others needs. Second, in the way you suffer. We read at the end of verse 6, "In spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit."

Martin Luther once said, "If Christ wore a crown of thorns, why should his followers expect only a crown of roses." Suffering for the Lord is to be expected. Jesus said in John 16 verse 33, "In this world you will have trouble." How can the believer cope with it when it comes? Jesus goes on to say, "But take heart, I have overcome the world." Christ gives us his abiding joy in the midst of trouble. We can be of good cheer. We see this in Acts 5 verse 41. We read, "The Apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the name."

The suffering we endure is compensated for by the joy of the Lord which is our strength. This suffering can come in many ways. It can come as direct persecution. It may be ridicule or indifference to your message. The evidence that you are chosen by God is the ability to continue joyfully even when the going is tough. Someone wrote about how John Wesley was able to cope with the afflictions he faced in his ministry, he said, "Christian joy made Wesley to accept the great blows of life, and to greet the lesser comforts with jest",

So there we see how you can be assured that God is really at work in your life. You have had a powerful experience bringing a deep assurance to your heart of spiritual realities. You have had a powerful transformation. You are living selflessly for God just like the Apostles and Jesus Christ. You have got a deep joy even in your difficulties.

I trust that is true of you today,

## Genuine Christianity – A Study of 1 Thessalonians A Genuine Experience

### Chapter 5

We are still in the first chapter of 1 Thessalonians. Today we look at the last part of the chapter verses 7 to 10. Paul is showing us the signs of a genuine Christian. The evidence of a work of grace is visible. There is no such thing as a secret disciple!

Paul ends this chapter by highlighting some more reasons why we can be assured that God has saved us. He says in verse 7, "And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. "Paul describes them as a model church. What are the marks of a model church and of a genuine Christian experience?

First, there will be A Dissemination of the Gospel. Paul says in verse 8, "The Lord's message rang out from you." You will want to spread the word of God. The words 'rang out' translate the Greek word 'echos' from which we get our word 'echo'. It means "to sound, ring, peal, or boom". In Britain when the Second World War ended church bells could be heard for miles all over the land. When you have really found Christ you just cannot keep it to yourself. You must tell others. You will sound it out, and boom it forth.

The Hymn-writer said, "The Gospel bells are ringing over land from sea to sea." Yes, we will spread the word as far around as possible. You will want to pass its message on to family, friends, and neighbours.

Look at the extent of the witness of the Thessalonians. Paul said in verse 8, "Not only in Macedonia and Achaia - your faith in God has become known everywhere." That is something when you remember that Macedonia and Achaia covered the whole of northern and southern Greece! It was all achieved by word of mouth evangelism. We are in a media centred world. We have the T.V., Satellite communication, the Internet, and Mobile phones. The emphasis is on communication in our society. Yet the Thessalonians had none of those things. It is good to harness modern technology for the spread of the Gospel. I have nothing against that. But do not make the mistake of thinking God is dependant on it for building his church, and spreading the message. God is his own advertiser When God comes down in mighty power his word spreads like wildfire. What is needed is not necessarily better technology in communication but better Christians full of faith and the Holy Spirit.

If you live in a place where you've little if any technology to use don't think you're at a disadvantage. Do you know the Lord? Then open your mouth and tell others! Do not be concerned if you have not got a T.V. Computer, or Mobile phone. Go through the towns and villages and tell people all the good things God has done for you. God will use that for his glory. In the New Testament Evangelism wasn't so much organised as it simply happened. As someone once said evangelism is "One beggar telling another beggar where to find food"!

Second, there will be, A Dedication of your life. What was it that became known everywhere about the Thessalonians? Well it was something that is true of everyone who has had a genuine conversion experience. What are the signs of such a conversion?

The first thing is Turning. Paul says in verse 9, "They tell us how you turned to God from idols". When they heard the Gospel they turned to God and asked for his forgiveness for their sins. Has there been a time in your life when you turned to the Lord; a time when you positively sought Him and his forgiveness? You must do that to be saved. They turned from their old life with its idolatry.

There are two types of idol. There are superstitious idols. Some years ago Pomare the second the chief of Tahiti, became a Christian. He wanted the rest of his tribe to be

saved and he needed to show them that their god was a false god. He did the unthinkable. He took the sacred Turtle and without observing all the idolatrous rituals he ate it in front of them. They all waited for the idol god to strike him down. Nothing happened. They saw that their god was a non-existent false god. Pomare pointed them to the true living God and Jesus Christ. Many were converted. The missionary involved with Pomare at that time said, "Idolatry bows and expires at Jesus' name". Why? Because he is the living true God!

There are sophisticated idols. These are the idols of 21st Century man. There is the idol of self-centredness and self-worship. It's seen in ambition for money, wanting power and fame. Living for these things above everything else. Making an idol out of work, sport, TV, a relationship, food, gluttony, alcohol, drugs, and sex. Many are gripped by these idols. You are an idol worshipper when these things are first in your life before God.

Have you turned to God from your idolatry whatever form it takes?

The second thing is Serving. Paul says in verse 9, "They turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God. "Genuine conversion is not only turning from an old life; it is also the start of a new life of committed service to God. The word "service" means in the Greek 'to serve as a slave'. That is the nature of true Christian service. We belong to another master. We are no longer controlled by idols and Satan. We are not their servants. We serve Christ. Paul says in 1 Corinthians chapter 6 verses 19 and 20, "You are not your own; You are bought at a price. Therefore, honour God with your body." Thomas Fuller once said, "Your salvation is God's business. His service is your business"

The third thing is, Waiting. Paul's says in verse 10, "and to wait for his son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead - Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath". It is said that as Horatious Bonar drew his curtains at night he would look out into the night and say, "Maybe tonight Lord, maybe tonight". As he drew back his curtains in the morning he would look out at the new day and say, "Maybe today Lord maybe today". You see, he was ever living with the prospect of Christ's coming before him. This motivated him to serve the Lord day by day.

The Christian both serves and waits. Are all these marks of the genuine believer found in your life? Are you proclaiming the good news, serving Christ and not the false idols you once worshipped? Are you waiting for his appearance in power and glory?

## Genuine Christianity – A Study of 1 Thessalonians A Genuine Servant

### Chapter 6

We now turn to chapter two of 1 Thessalonians. You will recall that Paul has written to the Church for a number of reasons. One reason is that the Jews had misrepresented him to the Thessalonian believers. They had accused him of self-interest. If Paul was so concerned about them, then where is he now? He left them quickly and has not been seen since. Now, we know why Paul left Thessalonica quickly. He was in danger because the Jews had stirred up trouble for him. He writes this second chapter to defend his behaviour. He does it not for his own sake but for the sake of the Gospel.

Paul does not care what people might say about him personally, but when what they say may affect the outcome of the Gospel he defends himself. In doing so Paul shows us the character of the Christian worker. Since all Christians are called to serve God in some way these characteristics should be seen in our lives as well. What then are the marks of a genuine Christian?

The genuine Christian is a Steward of the Gospel. Paul says in verse 4, "We speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the Gospel". To be entrusted with the Gospel is to become a steward of it. You will behave in a certain way. You will be:

Patient in suffering. Paul says in verse 2, "We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi." He also faced the same thing in Thessalonica when he arrived there. How many people will carry on doing something when it brings nothing but trouble? Its human nature not to continue doing something when things get tough. Especially if they are doing it for selfish reasons. To continue in the face of trials shows the sincerity of the messenger. Paul said in verse 2, "But with the help of our God we dared to tell you his Gospel.

We continue because God helps us. He will support you in the battle. You will be: Pure in motive. Paul said in verse 4, "We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts". God searched Paul's heart and approved of him. How do we know? Because He blessed his ministry with much fruit. The issue of motive before God is important. Some may serve God out of selfish interests. They want the praise of men.

They want a platform to display their ego. Some look for applause and recognition. Albert Camus said, "Too many people now climb onto the cross merely to be seen from a distance". Be sure you're serving the Lord out of a pure motive to exalt his name in the world.

You will be: Pleasing in method. Paul said in verse 5, "You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed". They did not look for personal profit, praise or power. I trust you are not like those whom William Still describes. He says of some Christian workers that they are, "peddlers of various wares, leading the people into their own power, using them for their own aggrandisement to boost their ego and indulge their desire for power." Make sure your methods are honourable and they draw men to Christ not to yourself.

The genuine Christian is like Mother to her children. A mother is gentle. Paul says, "We were gentle among you, like a mother". The picture here is of a nursing mother with an infant. See how gently she handles her baby; how soothing and calm her voice is. She carries it carefully. There is no roughness.

The words in verse 7 translated "little children" mean a mother with trying children. Some believers can be awkward! But we are to respond with gentleness. Paul showed his genuineness in the way he dealt with them. A mother is caring. Paul says in verse 7,

"Like a mother caring for her little children". This speaks to us of protection, security, safety and comfort. A mother will provide all these things. So you will care for your brothers and sisters in Christ in the same way. A mother is yearning. Paul said in verse 8, "We loved you so much ... we share our lives with you". Paul was yearning for the believers just like a mother whose child is away from home. Do we so love one another that our hearts yearns for each other's fellowship? Does our care extend to the sacrificial giving of ourselves for each other?

The genuine Christian is: Like a Father to his children. Paul said in verse 11, "You know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his children" A father acts responsibly. We read in verse 9, "We worked night and day in order not to be a burden to you." A father will do all he can to provide for his family.

Are you acting like a father in your church? Doing your duty in a responsible way. Being dependable and supportive. A father is a good example to his children in the home.

Paul says in verse 10, "You are witnesses how holy ... we were among you". We cannot underestimate the impact of example. How we live has a profound impact on others especially in church. Be an example of righteousness and blamelessness. A father is an instructor. In verse 12 Paul says that a father is, "encouraging, comforting and urging". To encourage is to get to the side of someone and spur them on. To comfort is to support someone and show concern. To urge is to implore and charge someone to be all that they should be for the Lord. Be a fatherly figure in your church.

Lastly, the genuine Christian is: A Herald. Paul said in verse 13, "When you received the word of God, which you heard from us". The only way people will hear the good news is when they hear it from us. As those entrusted with the Gospel we are under obligation to tell it to men and women.

The herald proclaims a message. That is his job. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1 verse 21 "For since in the wisdom of God the world through wisdom did not know God it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe". God's method has never changed. He brings people into the kingdom through the heralding preaching work of Christians like you and me.

The marks of a genuine Christian worker are seen in Paul. They should be apparent in your life too. May the Lord bless you as you seek to be all he requires of you as we have discovered in this chapter.

## Genuine Christianity – A Study of 1 Thessalonians A Genuine Battle

### Chapter 7

Today we are looking at the last four verses of 1 Thessalonians chapter 2. When you seek to live as a genuine Christian in the world it's not long before you meet the hostility of Satan. Paul knew he was in a spiritual battle. He says in verse 18, "For we wanted to come again to you, but Satan stopped us". What are we to make of this statement that Satan stopped him? How does it affect our understanding of the battle we are in?

We see two things. First, Satan is allowed limited activity. We read in 1 Peter 5 verse 8, "Your enemy the Devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour". But he is toothless! Christ pulled his teeth at Calvary on the cross. Satan cannot tear you apart. He is a lion on a long chain. He walks around only as far as God permits. He is under God's control. God will decide how much slack he will allow on the chain! In God's purposes for the moment Satan is allowed a certain influence.

How did this affect Paul? He says in verse 17, "We made every effort to see you". This was his honest intention when he says, "Satan stopped us", he is not looking for an excuse to justify any neglect. There was not any. For some reason and in some way Satan was permitted to hinder Paul from returning immediately returning to Thessalonica. We do not know how he did this. We do know that Satan uses human instruments to manipulate circumstances.

We read in Ephesians 6 verse 12, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against, the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms". Behind any 'flesh and blood' opposition to the Gospel lurks the evil one. We can only guess how Satan stopped Paul. He may have orchestrated a Jewish plot to kill him as soon as he reappeared in Thessalonica. So Paul stayed away. He may have stirred up a sinful scandal in Corinth simply to keep Paul occupied there. Satan is sometimes allowed a season in your life. But remember this, the scripture says in Romans 8 verse 39, "Nor anything else in creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord". Satan is a created being. When he is permitted to try you it does not mean that God has stopped loving you.

There is divine purpose in it. In that same chapter of Romans Paul says in verse 28, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him. Even Satan's malicious attacks will work out for your good in the end. What appeared to be a success for Satan, stopping Paul as he did, actually worked out to be a blessing.

There was blessing for Paul. He stayed alive. If there was a plot to take his life in Thessalonica then it was foiled by him staying away. There was blessing elsewhere. What happened when Satan had Paul thrown out of Thessalonica? He went to many other towns. The Gospel was spread further.

There was blessing for the church at Thessalonica. They had to learn quickly to stand on their own feet without Paul. This caused them to depend more on the Lord. They grew faster spiritually. We have to push against Satan to build up our spiritual biceps! There was blessing for the Church of every subsequent generation. Because Paul was separated from the believers at Thessalonica he wrote two letters to them. We would never have had these two letters of joy, instruction, comfort and insight if Satan had not stopped Paul.

So God in his wisdom will give Satan some play on the chain to fulfil his purposes for the protection of his people and the growth of his Kingdom. William Gurnall said, "The Devil sometimes borrows God's bow to shoot his arrows from."

Secondly, Satan is not allowed ultimate victory. Paul says in verses 19 and 20, "For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed you are our glory and joy". It is as though Paul is saying, "if I may never see you on earth again, I will see you in glory!"

As it happened Paul did visit Thessalonica on his third missionary journey. He teaches us two encouraging truths. First, he knew that every genuine convert in Thessalonica will reach heaven. He believed in the perseverance of the saints. He rejoiced in the security of the believer in Christ. Jesus tells you in John 10 verse 28, "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no-one can snatch them out of my hand"

Paul will see them in heaven. Secondly, he shows that Satan's malice wont stop them getting to glory. Satan has many wiles. He has numerous temptations. To quote William Gurnall again, he said, "No player has so many dresses to come in upon the stage with as the Devil has forms of temptations." That is true!

We may falter sometimes because he is such a wily character.

We may not always be what we should, and often we need to come to the Lord to seek his forgiveness. Yet Satan will never stop us from meeting the Lord in the air. So sure is Paul that he calls the believers "our hope." In the New Testament "hope" is an expectation not yet fulfilled, but it will definitely be fulfilled in the future. New Testament hope is not a vague thing, as it has come to mean in English today. It is a certain thing.

The believers are his "Joy". The growth and development of your fellow believers should be a source of real joy to you as you see them coming on in the things of God. Where do you go to find your joy? Is it amongst the Lord's people or in the world?

The Thessalonians were Paul's "crown". When he gets to heaven and sees them there, this will be the crown of all his prayers and efforts. We must have that same attitude and work to see as many people as possible in heaven. One preacher said about the goal of his ministry, "I want to see hell empty and heaven full!"

Paul says that they are his "crown" and "joy" because they were the fruit of his labour and the delight of his heart. Paul lived for nothing else but the prosperity of God's kingdom and the building up of believers. One of Satan's wiles is to fill our lives with worldly distractions. He wants our minds to be taken off the main priority of being concerned about seeing many people in heaven. He wants us to influence as few for Christ as possible.

Are we concerned enough to tell others about the Lord? The ultimate victory belongs to Christ. So live for Him. Work for Him. Win others to Him. Do not be side-tracked by Satan. When he opposes look for the good God intends to bring out of it.

## Genuine Christianity – A Study of 1 Thessalonians Genuine Help

### Chapter 8

Today we're studying 1 Thessalonians chapter 3 verses 1 to 10. When Paul was forced to leave Thessalonica it was because of persecution. The Jews were so incensed that it was no longer safe for him to stay. Paul had his share of suffering. He knew that he had left a turbulent situation. He was concerned to know just how the new Church in Thessalonica was going on. Paul says in verses 1 and 2, "So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. We sent Timothy to strengthen and encourage you in your faith. I sent to find out about your faith".

Timothy brings back the good news of the believers faith, love and patience even in the face of suffering. In this passage of scripture we're taught how to handle suffering in our lives. Suffering comes to us in many ways. There is the opposition of Satan. It can be in the form of persecution, or rejection, ridicule, contempt, and apathy. It can come from friends and even family members close to you. Paul says in chapter 2 verse 14, "You suffered from your own countrymen". But you can come through it. How? By Growing in strength.

Verse 1 says that Timothy was sent, to "strengthen you." This strength comes through the word of God. Timothy did what he helped Paul to do on his first visit to them. We read in chapter 2 verse 13, "You received the word of God, which you heard from us." He brought them the word of God.

When you hear and apply God's word it works in your life and makes you strong to face the challenges of living for Christ.

You can come through suffering by, Receiving encouragement. Verse 2 says, "We sent Timothy ... to ... encourage you in your faith". The encouragement would help them not to be "unsettled by their trials". We are encouraged when God gives us prior warning that we will face trials. When they come we are not taken by surprise. Verse 3 says, "You know quite well that you were destined for them". To be forewarned is to be forearmed. God tells us beforehand that trials will come. That encourages us to remember He is in control when we do experience them.

We are encouraged when we see personal concern. Verse 5 says, "I sent to find out about your faith". Many a struggling Christian has thanked God for a brother or sister in Christ who was concerned enough to find out how they were really doing in their faith. Paul did something practical he sent Timothy to them. It is an encouragement when someone makes practical steps to help you in your need. It shows that someone does care. We need to feel that loving support of each other in times of affliction.

We are encouraged by: Perceptive insight. We read in verse 5, "I was afraid that in some way the tempter might have tempted you and our efforts might have been useless". God gives us perceptive insight so we know what is actually going on behind the scenes. Although God permits your trials, they are part of Satan's strategy to wear you down and get you to give in. Knowing this encourages us to see the true nature of our afflictions and to stand firm. Ephesians 6 verse 12 says, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against ... the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realm."

You can help others by being an encouragement yourself. You are called to be an encourager. Paul says in verse 7, "We were encouraged about you because of your faith". Yes, even the great Apostle Paul needed encouraging! In verse 8 he says, "But Timothy has just now brought us good news about your faith and love."

The words "good news" translate a Greek which means "evangelised". Evangelism brings new life to sinners dead in their sin. Paul says in verse 8, "For now we really live". The good news of their steadfastness brought new life to Paul. It is another way of saying that he was greatly encouraged by them.

How can you encourage others in your Church? By bearing spiritual Fruit. Verse 6 tells us that Timothy, "...has brought glad news about your faith and love." There is nothing more refreshing than to see believers living for the Lord demonstrating faith in God and a real love for him and others in Christ.

You also encourage others by showing: Fondness. Verse 6 says, "He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us". Mutual fondness is vital for the health of any church. It develops unity and fellowship. Are your thoughts good toward your brothers and sister in the Lord? We read in Ephesians 4 verse 32, "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another just as God in Christ also forgave you".

Encouragement is also given through Fellowship. At the end of verse 6 Paul says, "... that you long to see us, just as we long to see you". Their hearts pulled toward each other in Christian love. The sign of a healthy church is a strong desire to be in one another's company enjoying fellowship in the bonds of Christ. Such a desire spreads encouragement amongst God's people. It also helps us in our suffering. We know that even if the world afflicts us we can find a sweet shelter amongst fellow Christians. We provide mutual support.

We see the result of this as Paul thanks God. He says in verse 9, "How can we thank God enough for you." Is your life a cause for thanksgiving in the church? Your growth in fruit, fondness and fellowship will bring glory to God because his name will be praised for all that he is doing in your life and in your church.

Paul had real joy. We read in verse 9 that he thanks God for, "all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you." A joyful church, even in the face of suffering, is a church growing in love and fellowship.

Paul prayed. We read in verse 10, "Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again". He was encouraged on in his prayer life as he saw that God had answered his prayers for the Thessalonian believers. We cope with affliction by becoming stronger daily through God's word, and by being encouraged, and by being an encourager.

I trust you will aim for these goals in your walk with God.

## Genuine Christianity – A Study of 1 Thessalonians Going, Growing and Glowing

### Chapter 9

Today we're studying 1Thessalonians chapter 3 verses 11 to 13. This passage contains a prayer. Paul prays for the believers in Thessalonica. We can learn a lot from this prayer. We see the sort of things that concerned the early church. We see priority prayer topics. It's always good to pray for one another. Paul prays for three things:

First he prays about Going. We read in verse 11, "Now may the God and Father Himself and our Lord Jesus Christ clear the way for us to come to you". Notice here: The Persons addressed. It is to the Father and the Son. They are both placed side by side. There is an equality. Both are looked to in the same way and to the same degree for guidance and help. Paul was not attempting here to teach the truth of the Trinity or to defend it. Indirectly he does. The Father and the Son are regarded as being coequal in position and authority. It would be blasphemous to speak of a mere man as though he was on the same level as God. But Jesus is God. God is the Father. The Son shares in the same divine nature.

We also see: The purpose requested. Paul earnestly wanted to visit his children in the faith. He asks God to make it possible. Do you ever feel guilty about praying for your own needs first? It is interesting that Paul prayed for his own desires before he prayed for the Thessalonians. You have probably come across an acrostic like J.O.Y. 'J' equals Jesus first. We begin with worship and thanks. 'O' equals others next. 'Y' equals yourself last! That is all right, but it need not be a rule set in stone! Sometimes your own need is so great that you have to unburden yourself before the Lord before you are able to talk to him about other things. Sometimes it is impossible to pray for others until you have dealt your own situation.

In verse 12 Paul asks that the Lord would, ".clear the way for us." "Clear" translates a Greek word meaning to "make straight." You will recall that in chapter 2 verse 18 Paul says, "We wanted to come to you, but Satan stopped us. "The word "stopped" translates a Greek word meaning "to make a road uncrossable." Satan had 'dug up the road' to prevent Paul going forward. God permitted this for the reasons we looked at when we studied chapter 2. Satan does not have the final say.

He is not in control God is! The "Divine road repair department" moves in. In answer to prayer God cleared the way for Paul. Five years later Paul visited Thessalonica on his third missionary journey. Prayer is an important weapon in our spiritual warfare. God is pleased to use your prayers to fulfil his purposes in your life and in the world, "What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer."

We also learn that we must wait God's time. Paul waited another five years. Eventually he saw the answer. In praying to God Paul acknowledged the sovereignty of God over all the affairs of his life. The key to knowing God's guidance is deepening your relationship with the guide. Trust Him, pray and He will guide you aright. Wait for God's perfect timing.

Second, he prays about Growing. We read in verse 12, "May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else." Why this emphasis on improving love? A.W. Pink once said, "Love is the queen of all the graces'." All we do for Christ must flow out of love for him or it is vain. Love is the fulfilment of the law. F.B. Meyer said, "Whatever of outward service or obedience we render to God or man, if love is withheld, the law is not fulfilled."

Paul says our love must overflow. The original Greek word means, "an exceeding measure; something above the ordinary." Our fellowship with each other should have an

abounding amount of love. That will soon sort out disunity and discord. The Scriptures tell us in 1 Corinthians 13 verse 1, "If I have not love I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal."

This extraordinary abounding love should be felt by others. Paul said it should, "overflow for each other." Someone once said, "Love looks after number two, not exclusively number one." Biblical love is never merely sentimental, abstract or emotional. It's always practical. Love visits the widows and the fatherless. It provides for the needy. It comforts the hurting. It never backstabs. Love builds up it never tears down. Are you displaying that sort of love wherever God has placed you?

The third thing Paul prays about is Glowing. We read in verse 13, "May He strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and the Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones."

The most powerful motivation for following the Lord is the truth of the second coming of Jesus Christ. When he comes he wants to find us blameless and holy. To be like that we need to look to God to strengthen us.

We cannot even begin to live holy lives without his help. This strengthening is God's part in our sanctification. His goal in our lives is to present us blameless in his presence. When the Lord Jesus comes we shall be perfectly holy and blameless.

Now we are to 'glow' with Christ-likeness. We must shine as lights in the world. We are to glow in holiness in all areas of our lives. He is coming with all his "holy ones". This is not a reference to the angels. Paul is talking about saved loved ones who have gone before. They are the spirits of just men and women made perfect.

We must live in constant readiness and preparation for that great day. Augustine said, "He who loves the coming of the Lord is not he who affirms it is far off, nor is it he who says it is near. It is he who whether far off or near awaits it with sincere faith, steadfast hope, and fervent love."

May that be true of all of us as we wait for the Saviour's appearing.

## Genuine Christianity – A Study of 1 Thessalonians Pleasing the Lord

### Chapter 10

We have now arrived at chapter 4 of Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians. We are studying verses 1 to 12. After reading the first three chapters you may think that the church at Thessalonica is the perfect church! They receive Paul's commendation for the healthy progress they have made.

There is always room for improvement in our walk with God. Remember Paul said to them in chapter 3 verse 12, "May the Lord make your love increase and overflow". We must never think that we've arrived in our devotion to God and to other believers.

In chapters 4 and 5 Paul deals with the present need for improvement as well as looking to the future. He moves from commendation and explanation to instruction.

What will motivate us to improve ourselves when there are deficiencies in our Christian living? Paul gives the answer in verses 1 and 2. He says, "Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God". Our motive is to please God. The more we seek to be wellpleasing to him, the more quickly we will deal with our shortcomings.

The word "instructed" in the Greek is like a military command. You are under orders. You have no choice. The Commander has spoken. There is no argument, he has stated what you must do and you are expected to do it. It is not that they were not pleasing God at all, they were. Paul reassures them in verse 1 when he says, "As in fact you are living". But they needed to improve in some areas in order to please God even more.

Paul says that this was always the thing that motivated him. He said in chapter 2 verse 4, "We are not trying to please men but God." The Thessalonians are showing great potential. Having reassured them, he also encourages them. He says at the end of verse 1, "Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more." The Thessalonians were pleasing God, but there is the ever present danger of weakening resolve. I hope that you are always looking at ways in which you can improve the way you serve the Lord.

How do we know what pleases God? Paul says in verse 2, "You know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus." This authority is his apostolic authority. When he wrote to the believers at Colosse, Paul said in Colossians 1 verse 1, "Paul, an Apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God". He speaks by divine authority. The Apostolic teaching found in the Bible is part of the Scriptures. To know what pleases God you need to be in the Scriptures written by the divinely appointed and approved apostles.

You may know your Bible from cover to cover, but it is only as you practice the Bible that you'll please the Lord. Pleasing God shows that you are what you profess to be, a follower of Christ. It delivers you from a legalistic approach to Christian living that implies Christianity is only rule-keeping. You want to please God because you love him. Paul now addresses two areas of church life that needed attention. He says in verse 3, "It is God's will that you should be holy hat you should avoid sexual immorality". How is this to be done? It is done by exercising self-control. We read in verse 4, "Each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy". Our sexual appetites must be brought under the control of the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit.

Paul contrasts this with the heathen. He says in verse 5, "Not in passionate lust like the heathen. "The word "passionate" is passive in the original Greek. It has the idea of being under the control of lust. Your profession to be a Christian means nothing if your

daily living is controlled and shaped by the passionate lusts of the flesh. Paul says those who act like that do not know God.

There appears to be some sexual laxity in the Church at Thessalonica. Paul rebukes someone who has got himself involved in a wrong sexual relationship. He says in verse 6, "...that in this matter no-one should wrong his brother". The word "wrong" translates a Greek word meaning "to overreach", to go into someone else's territory'. Someone in the Church was involved in an affair and adultery. They had invaded another mans territory by having an adulterous relationship with his wife. We are told in verse 7, "God did not call us to be impure". Illicit sexual activity is impurity and must be confessed to God and forsaken before you can be blessed. God will strengthen you to overcome. Verse 8 says, "God ... gives you his Holy Spirit".

The second area that needed attention was that of brotherly love. Two things should distinguish the Church from the outside world: Holiness and love.

Paul did not need to say a lot about love. He says in verse 10, "In fact you do love all the brothers in Macedonia. There were some in the church who fell short of real brotherly love. Paul had preached about the second coming of the Lord while he was with them. Some had assumed this coming was near and gave up their jobs. They thought this was a very spiritual thing to do. After all, they thought, "We are waiting for the Lord without any distraction". The problem was that they began to live off the believers who were still working. This gave the Church a bad testimony outside. The unsaved came to see Christians as lazy idle scavengers.

So Paul tells them in verse 11, "Mind your own business and work with your hands". He gives them the reason. He says in verse 12, "So that your daily life may win the respect of the outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody". Be sure that you do nothing that would spoil your testimony or that of the Church.

How does this relate to brotherly love. Love is always outgoing. It is more prepared to give than to get. You are not showing brotherly love when you are always on the receiving end. Being gainfully employed means you can earn money and be a giver to God's work not a taker. You can give love to those who need to feel it.

I trust you are pleasing God in your life. That you are not pleasing yourself by following your own desires and being selfish in your behaviour.

## Genuine Christianity – A Study of 1 Thessalonians A Living Hope

### Chapter 11

We continue our study of 1 Thessalonians. Today we're looking at chapter 4 verses 13 to 18. This passage deals with the subject of the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. This truth wasn't given to us as a issue to debate. It was given to comfort us in our trials, and sanctify us in our lives. It's given for a practical purpose. Some argue over the finer details of the events leading up to and including the second coming

If the doctrine doesn't make you more holy in your daily living then you've missed the whole point of it. Charles Spurgeon, a well known preacher once said, "The fact that Jesus Christ is to come again is not a reason for star gazing, but for working in the power of the Holy Ghost!". God has given us this passage for one reason-to encourage believers. Paul says in verse 18, "Therefore encourage each other with these words".

When Paul had been with the Thessalonians he had preached about the return of Jesus Christ. As time passed they saw their generation dying off. Some died because of age, some because of illness or an accident. The believers were troubled. They wondered whether their dead relatives and friends would miss out on the coming of the Lord because they were no longer alive. Paul assures them that saved loved ones who have gone to the grave wont miss anything. Do you struggle with these sorts of questions? Do you ask, "Where are they? Is it goodbye forever to saved loved ones never to be seen again?" These are the issues dealt with in this passage. We do not believe that death is the end. We do not accept that when we die everything is over. The basis of the Christians hope is the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Paul says in verse 14, "We believe that Jesus died and rose again". On the strength of that the resurrection of believers will happen. We read in verse 14, "So we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him." Sleep is a nice term to use of believers who have died. In a sense everyone who dies may be said to be asleep because the body is motionless. In a special way sleep presupposes waking. One day we will awake in the grave and rise.

The fulfilment of our hope is the return of Jesus Christ. We read in verse 16, "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of an Archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first" Perhaps they are being honoured in experiencing death, burial and resurrection like Jesus himself. What we do know is that there will be an earth- shattering summons and the graves will open and give up their dead.

This summons is pictured in three ways: a shout, a voice and a trumpet. This may not be three separate sounds but the picture of an overwhelming irresistible call to resurrection. A Puritan called Thomas Watson said, "We are more likely to rise out of our graves than out of our beds! "

In chapter 3 verse 13 Paul says, "Our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones". In chapter 4 verses 16 and 17 he says, "The dead in Christ shall rise first, we will be caught up with them to meet the Lord in the air". How do we reconcile Christ coming with his people yet his people going to meet him in the air? Can the dead in Christ come with him and at the same time go to meet him? The answer is yes when you bear in mind that you have two natures - a physical nature and a spiritual nature. At death the body returns to dust in the grave where it sleeps. Your spirit goes to heaven to consciously enjoy fellowship with the Lord. When the trumpet sounds Christ brings with him the disembodied spirits of his people. He raises your body from the ground. This comes to meet him. The spirit and body are fused together and form the immortal body God has

promised us. This happens in the twinkling of an eye. Don't worry God has got it all worked out! No problem will arise concerning your eternal future.

Another problem that the Thessalonians had about the second coming was, what happens to those who have not died when the Lord appears? The answer is in verse 17: "We who are still alive and are left will be caught up with them to meet the Lord in the air". The words 'caught up' translate a Greek word meaning 'to seize with the idea of suddenness'. Christ will sweep us off our feet! He will seize us and lift us up to be with him. As the gospel song says, "People from every nation will lose their gravitation".

The words 'meet the Lord' translate a Greek word that was used of an official visit of a dignitary, or the return of a conquering hero. It was the custom that as the dignitary approached the city the leading citizens would go out to meet him, and join him in the final stage of his journey and escort him back. In the eyes of the world we are insignificant and Christ is despised. In reality we are the leading citizens of heaven, and Christ is the conquering Saviour. We join him in his triumph and glory. Those loved ones

who have already died in Christ will be there. We'll be "caught up with them". There is going to be a great reunion with saved family and friends. Best of all we will see the Saviour. Verse 17 says, "And so we will be with the lord forever" As lovely as it is to be reunited with saved loved ones who have gone on before, being with the Lord makes heaven what it is. Verse 17 also tells us, "We ... meet the Lord in the air".

In Ephesians chapter 2 verse 2 we have a description of Satan. We read he is, "The ruler of the Kingdom of the air". Satan may hinder us sometimes but he will not hinder this great meeting. Christ displays his victory right in Satan's own territory!

I trust that this great truth that Christ is coming again thrills your soul. It should change your life and behaviour. You need to be ready for his appearing. We read in 1 John chapter 3 verse 3, "Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure".

## Genuine Christianity – A Study of 1 Thessalonians Be Ready

### Chapter 12

In this study we look at 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 verses 1 to 11. Paul finished chapter 4 with teaching on the second coming of Christ. He continues with this theme in this passage of scripture. Here Paul deals with another question that the believers had about the second coming. They were concerned that they would be truly ready for him when he appeared.

The truth of the second coming is wonderful but it can also be disconcerting. If a member of the Royal family was coming to visit your home you'd tidy up and try and get it as spotless as possible. You'd be worried that your special visitor might pick up some dirt or dust. Christ is the spotless saviour. You might be thinking like the Thessalonians, "If I knew the exact date of his coming, then I could make sure that he finds me just as he wants me to be ". You might be worried that when he comes you will be rejected. God encourages us in this passage. The Lord tells us what we need to know about the coming of the Lord. We can't know when Christ will come again. We read in Mark chapter 13 verse 32, "No-one knows that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." It isn't for us to know. Jesus said in Acts 1 verse 7, "it is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority"

There are two things we can know. First, his coming is sudden and unexpected. Verse 2 says, "The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night". The thief never announces his visit. Jesus said in Matthew 24 verse 50, "The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of". You must always be watchful.

Second, the Lord's coming will be sudden and unavoidable. There is no prior warning, and there is no escape. Verse 3 says, "While people are saying, 'Peace and safety', destruction will come on them suddenly, as labour pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape". When pregnancy has started labour pains are inevitable, and unavoidable. It has to happen. So Christ's coming has to happen to finally rid the world of sin and give birth to the new heaven and new earth that will be full of righteousness. It is interesting that just before the Lord does appear there will be a lot of talk about peace and safety.

We hear a lot about this today. It is only recently that nations have been discussing the safety of our planet which is under threat because of pollution and global warming The coming of the Lord draws near! The Lord tells us what we need to know about our conduct as we wait for his coming.

Paul uses some vivid imagery to teach us what we should be like. We read in verses 4 and 5, "But you brothers are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all sons of the light". In verse 6 and 7 he says, "Let us not be like others who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. For those who sleep, sleep in the night, and those who get drunk, get drunk in the night". The unsaved are caught unawares because they are in darkness, in the night of sin's blackness. They are sleeping so totally inattentive. They are drunk and more concerned with physical pleasures than spiritual realities.

Christian friend, Christ has brought you out of darkness into his marvellous light. As verse 5 says, "You are all sons of the light and sons of the day". In other words, as believers, you should be living a disciplined life in control of your faculties, alert, aware, awake. In fact, you will be like a soldier on active service. We read in verse 8, "Since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breast-plate

and the hope of salvation as an helmet." The breast-plate covers the heart. Your heart will be full of love for God and faith in his word. The helmet of the hope of salvation covers the head. Our minds will be full of thoughts about Christ's coming. A mind fixed on heaven will shape our thinking so that we live our lives by heaven's standard.

Jesus said in Matthew chapter 6 verse 10, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." It will be done in our lives as we live in the light of the near return of the Lord. We read in Ephesians chapter 5 verse 14, "Wake, O sleeper, rise from the dead." To be ready for the Lord's return means getting out of your pyjamas and into your armour!

The Lord tells us what we need to know to bring comfort to our hearts as we think about the second coming of Christ. Remember the concern that these believers had about being ready when Jesus, the glorious perfectly holy Saviour, appears.

Maybe you are conscious of your own sins and failings. You may ask, "how will I go on when I stand before the Judgement seat of Christ?". Verse 9 says, "For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. Your sin has been dealt with all of them, past present and future. Verse 10 says, "He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him"

Awake or sleep in this verse means whether we are physically alive or dead when he comes, we will be with Him. Our sin was punished in Christ. That is why He died for us to bear our judgement so we could be free from sins condemnation. You must confess your sin and forsake it. We read in 1 John 1 verse 9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

The second coming may fill you with some apprehension. But do not be anxious. He's on your side. He died for you so you would be with him, and not be dismissed from him. He's no longer your Judge but your heavenly Father. Paul says in verse 11, "Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing". We need to support each other as we wait for the lord. He is coming to release you from all sin and the evil of this fallen world. Look forward to it. Do not have a fearful apprehension. He's coming so that you will be with Him.

## Genuine Christianity – A Study of 1 Thessalonians Genuine Fellowship

### Chapter 13

Today we are studying 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 verses 12 to 28. This is the last section of the letter. Our attention is directed to matters of Church fellowship. Paul begins by dealing with the relationship between the church and its leaders. We read in verse 12, "Now we ask you brothers to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you". It would appear that there were some in the Church who were failing in their support of the leaders. He tells them that they should respect them. He gives reasons for this. He says in verse 13, "because of their work". The work he has in mind is the shepherding of the flock. It especially refers to the preaching ministry of the Elders.

Sadly we're living in an age when authority is rejected in society. This has the potential of slipping into Church life. People do not like to be told. The world's philosophy that there are no absolutes can easily begin to influence the minds of believers. The outcome is a lack of regard for those who proclaim God's truth. The thinking is, "Well that is their view". Maybe in Thessalonica some didn't like to be told that giving up their job to wait for the Lord was not spiritual. Others may not have liked the forthrightness of the leaders when they admonished certain wayward members of the congregation. Every church needs faithful leaders who'll guide the fellowship according to the Bible. If you got such men then do as verse 13 says, "Hold them in the highest regard in love".

Another reason they should receive your support is given in verse 12. We read they are, "over you in the Lord". Your Pastor and Elders are not over you as dictators. The word carries the idea of divine authority. The Lord has put them in that position. It is your duty before the Lord, who has given the gift of leaders, to give a biblical response to them. The words in verse 13, "highest regard" translate a Greek word meaning "superabundant." In his paraphrase translation of this verse Eugene Peterson says, "Overwhelm them with appreciation and love ". When was the last time you gave your leaders a word of encouragement?

We are also called to support each other. Verse 14 says, "We urge you brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone". Do not assume that because you have a Pastor and Elders that they are totally responsible for caring for the flock. You are involved too! The Scriptures teach the mutual sacrificial pastoral care within the body. We read in Galatians 6 verse 2, "Carry each others burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ". The law of Christ is fulfilled through love. Those who are idle need to be spurred on. The timid need your encouragement. The weak need your assurance that they are not alone in the battle. Stick with them and get to their side and help to strengthen them. You will do all these things when you really love your fellow believers in Christ

Our own attitude has a lot to do with how we relate with each other in fellowship. The Thessalonians were facing intense trials. It's easy to become despondent at times like that. Paul says in verses 16 to 18, "Be joyful always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." God's purpose is that the Christian life is a joyful life. You may ask, "How can be joyful in the midst of troubles?". You must pray at all times. You see, you don't have to carry the burden alone. If you try to you'll soon lose that joy. You can unburden yourself on the Lord. We read in 1 Peter 5 verse 7, "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." Take your trials and problems to the mercy seat. God will hear and will help. He will help you to develop a good relationship with your leaders if you ask Him. He will help you to be a good influence in the church. If you ask Him, He will give you the spiritual ability to be a helper to the weak and the timid. A constant prayer life creates a heart of joy. That

leads to an attitude of thankfulness whatever your circumstances may be. This attitude will be felt by others in the church. It will create harmony.

Paul moves on to deal with the issue of how to listen to the preaching of God's word. He says in verse 20, "Do not treat prophecies with contempt." Prophecy is the communication of God's word. It is the preaching of scripture. Some were holding preaching in low esteem. This can happen in churches today. You must never reject preaching or treat it lightly.

Why? Paul says in verse 19, "Do not put out the Spirit's fire."

God the Holy Spirit speaks through the preaching of the word. You must listen intently to it. God is talking to you as the word is expounded. Charles Spurgeon said, "If there be a place under heaven more holy than another it is the pulpit where the Gospel is preached". We read in verse 21, "Test everything". You must test the preaching. Compare all the preacher says with the scripture. If his words agree and are a good exposition of the text, then obey that word. Put it into practice.

This is what Paul means in the second part of verse 21, "Hold on to the good". Treasure God's word. So often we forget the message once we've left the Church building. How can we apply it when we have let it slip from our minds?

Paul says in verse 22, "Abstain from every kind of evil". This is found within the context of your response to God's word. It means reject anything you hear that is heretical or untrue. When we hear God's word preached you must be discerning and responsive listeners.

Paul finishes his letter with a prayer that God will continue to sanctify us in every part of our being. He says in verse 23, "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through."

We will be genuine Christians as we develop holiness in our spirit soul and body. The benediction in verse 28 is the key: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you". Grace has led us safe this far and grace will lead us on.