

As We Wait for Jesus

1 Thessalonians 1:6-10

Strong! (Books of 1 & 2 Thessalonians)

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Listen to the words of Puritan John Flavel:

“Did Christ finish His work for us? Then there can be no doubt but He will also finish His work in us.” – **John Flavel** (1627-1691).

Introduction: Open your Bible to 1 Thessalonians 1. I want to bring a teaching to you tonight entitled: “The Maturing of the Saved.” God promises in this miracle of salvation that He will bring to maturity all who are saved to be conformed to the image of Christ.

The promise of Christ’s return is very real and palpable in 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Chapter 1 closes with a real reminder that we are waiting for Christ to return. What are we doing while we wait? According to 1 Thess. 1, we are to be maturing – growing and changing – imitating Christ!

“Those whom free grace chooses, free grace cleanses. We are not chosen because we are holy, but chosen to be holy: and being chosen, the purpose is no dead letter, but we are made to seek after holiness.”¹ With these words Charles Haddon Spurgeon trumpeted the Scriptures’ promise of progressive sanctification for every believer.

Justification and Sanctification Cannot be Separated

Archibald Alexander Hodge of Princeton Seminary showed how sanctification always proceeds from justification:

“If there was ever one who attempted to receive Christ with justification and not with sanctification, he missed it, thank God! He was no more justified than he was sanctified.”²

Certainly there are baby Christians, but even baby Christians are guaranteed to manifest some measure of holiness as weak and immature as it may be. There are different levels of holiness in the life. We are all growing and changing at different rates, but for the believer there is always a pattern of progressive spiritual growth in the life that begins the moment regeneration occurs. Christians can and do struggle with carnality in their life on the way to maturity. The point is there is a battle. There is a difference in attitude toward sin in the Christian.

A Christian longs to be holy. Why is that? God has ordained it to be so and secured their holiness by sealing their soul with the divine impression of the *Holy Spirit* (1 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13-14). He has made sure that sanctification would occur through regeneration, which gives the person a new nature that longs for holiness. He made certain that holiness would occur by

¹ Charles Spurgeon. *Exploring the Mind and Heart of the Prince of Preachers* (Oswego, IL: Fox River Press, 2005), 228.

² Archibald Alexander Hodge. *Popular Lectures on Theological Themes* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1887), 358-359.

putting His Spirit inside of believers to “*cause*” them to walk in holiness and obedience (Eze. 36:27; cf. 11:19-20).

So it is that Paul considers how the Thessalonians began to **imitate** the apostles, and most importantly, the Lord after their justification by faith. It was so obvious that they had what we might call a “testimony.” That is others could witness of the change in their lives.

I. Grow in Your Testimony (of joy in suffering), 1:6-8

1 Thes. 1:6, “And you became **imitators** of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit.”

Now Paul commends the Thessalonians for the way they “became imitators of us and of the Lord.” They are growing in discipleship. To be a disciple of Jesus is to be an imitator or follower. The word disciple literally means “student” or “learner.”

God sets up His family so that each of us can grow and learn from each other. There are many secondary things that we have various preferences and customs and traditions that differ within families. Those differences can sometimes be celebrated, or if they might cause someone to stumble, they can either be given up or kept private (as long as it is nothing sinful).

Yet in the fundamental practices of the Christian faith, we are to be teaching each other and imitating the love and faith of mature believers.

Joy and Affliction

It’s interesting that the Thessalonians received the Word “in much affliction.” Yet they clearly had the “joy of the Holy Spirit.”

We don’t grow on easy street. We grow through trials. James 1:3 says we should “count it all joy” when we go through trials.

This is why the current “prosperity gospel” is so damaging. It is unkind. It does not and cannot deliver. God promises affliction in the Christian life. It is by carrying His cross that we grow.

Paul’s Example at Thessalonica

As recorded in Acts 17:1–7, we see that as a result of the transforming impact of that gospel ministry, the Jews hurled tremendous persecution and opposition against the apostle:

Acts 17:1-7, “Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. ² And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³ explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.” ⁴ And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. ⁵ But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and **attacked the house of Jason**, seeking to bring them out to the crowd. ⁶ And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, ⁷ and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.””

Paul's Example at Lystra (Stoned)

Consider Paul's experience at Lystra in **Acts 14:19-23**, "But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead.²⁰ But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on **the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe.** ²¹ When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, ²² strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying **that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.** ²³ And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed."

You are going to suffer as you serve the Lord. **2 Timothy 3:12**, "Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted..."

John 16:33, "In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

Romans 5:1-5 tells us suffering is a big part of Christ's sanctification process. "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ²Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³Not only that, but **we rejoice in our sufferings**, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

Examples

1 Thes. 1:7, "so that you became an **example** to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia."

Example is the Greek word *tupos* ("exact reproduction"), from which the English *type* derives. The Thessalonians became like blueprints for others throughout the region to build their lives on (cf. 1 John 2:6). **Macedonia** was the province in northern Greece that contained Thessalonica, as well as Philippi and Berea. **Achaia** was the southern province of Greece that included such prominent cities as Athens and Corinth.

In stewardship to the Corinthians, the Thessalonians were great examples. The Thessalonians were among those believers Paul cited to the Corinthians as models for giving and financial stewardship. The Thessalonians were in deep poverty, likely because of the persecution they underwent. Yet they gave liberally and sacrificially to help the needy believers in Jerusalem (2 Cor. 8:1-5), thus demonstrating a pattern of godliness, and again in a sacrificial way proving the reality of their election.³

Testimony Went Everywhere

1 Thes. 1:8, "For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth **everywhere**, so that we need not say anything."

The example of the Thessalonians echoed throughout Macedonia and Achaia and beyond, and encouraged 'all the believers' to stand firm through the storms of persecution and not to give up. What a testimony: 'your faith in God has become known everywhere'! Without them really knowing it, they had become missionaries and evangelists to the world by report.

³ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2002). *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (p. 26). Chicago: Moody Press.

John Wesley's Concern with Not Suffering

John Wesley was riding along a road one day when he was horrified at the thought that he had not been persecuted for three whole days. Not a brick or an egg had been thrown at him during that time. Alarmed, he stopped his horse and exclaimed, 'Can it be that I have sinned, and am backslidden?' He slipped from his horse and fell on his knees, crying out to God to show him where, if any, there had been a fault.

A rough fellow, on the other side of the hedge, heard Wesley's prayer and, recognizing the preacher, said to himself, 'I'll fix that Methodist preacher.' He picked up a rock and threw it at him. It missed its mark and fell harmlessly beside Wesley, who leaped to his feet joyfully exclaiming, 'Thank God, it's all right. I still have his presence.'⁴

II. Grow in the Transformation of Your Character, 1:9

Growing in Godly Character

1 Thes. 1:9, "For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God."

Turning from Idols to God

John Calvin, early on in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* said "the heart is an idol making factory."⁵ We don't need to worship gods of wood and stone to be idol worshippers.

Our idols are almost always good things, like marriage, or a sense of peace, or materialism and wealth, or control, or getting my ways.

Christianity transforms the way we live and how we see everything. We used to be so addicted and so affixed to the things of this world. We were all in for our idols. Yet Christ has a way of awakening us!

There is a Constant Humble Repentance

We have "turned" to God! There is true repentance from the heart. The Old Testament says it this way: "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil" (**Prov. 8:13**).

True repentance is a deliberate turning from sin to God. The Thessalonians had deliberately "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (**1 Thes. 1:9**). How true is the saying: 'Man repents, God renews'⁶

Until repentance comes, change is impossible. Repentance is a radical change of worldview and mindset.

A Life Long Process

Repentance is a continual activity for the Christian. **Psalm 139:23-24** says it best: "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! ²⁴ And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!"

⁴ Shenton, T. (2006). *Opening up 1 Thessalonians* (pp. 21–22). Leominster: Day One Publications.

⁵ John Calvin. *Institutes of the Christian Religion, Volume 1* (London: T. & T. Clark, 1863), 53.

⁶ Ibid., 23.

As God reveals idols in our lives, we repent. “Whom the Lord loves, He corrects/disciplines” (Prov. 3:12; Heb. 12:6).

Turning to God from idols is something that will take place in every Christian’s life.

The Promises of Sanctification

How does all this work out? **Ephesians 4:15–16**, “we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.”

Romans 8:28–29, “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son”.

Jude 24-25, “Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.”

Philippians 1:6, “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”

2 Thessalonians 2:13, “God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.”

Ephesians 2:10, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

1 Corinthians 1:8-9, “God will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

III. Grow in Your Fixation of Christ’s Coming, 1:10

Faith / Perseverance / Expectation

1 Thes. 1:10, “and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.”

2 Peter 3:8-13, “But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

¹¹ Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, ¹² waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! ¹³ But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.”

Hallelujah!