

1 Thessalonians

I. Introduction

A. It has been five weeks since we last looked at **1 Thessalonians**. At that time we were looking at **vs 6-7** of chapter one and considering the wisdom of observing the life of Christ and the lives of godly Christians in order to learn from them about how to live the Christian life. We concluded that Sunday's teaching with a reminder that we also ought to be an example of godly, sensible living to those around us.

B. **1 Thessalonians 1:1-10** . . . Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace. [2] We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; [3] constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father, [4] knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you; [5] for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. [6] You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, [7] so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. [8] For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything. [9] For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, [10] and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.

C. Pray

II. 1 Thessalonians 1:8-10 – what kind of Christians should we be

A. [8] **For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you**, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything.

1. Just to remind you, Macedonia and Achaia were located in Greece. Macedonia was a province that covered much of the northern and

central portion of Greece, and the city of Thessalonica was a major port city in that region. Achaia was a province that covered the southern part of Greece, with Corinth as its capital.

2. There are two main points I want us to consider from this verse – reputation and evangelism. We will begin with reputation.
3. **Reputation** is a powerful friend or foe. A good reputation is neither easily nor quickly earned. Yet a good reputation can be tarnished or lost in moments.
 - a. When a good reputation is tarnished or ruined, it often takes longer to change it for the better than you want. And if you make one mistake, or take a step backward during that process of change, those around you will likely say, “See, nothing has changed!” My advice is to patiently accept that since you are the one who tarnished your reputation in the first place.
 - b. Your reputation is made up of people’s view you, and specifically their view of your character. For example, people evaluate your reputation based on such things as honesty, responsibility, dependableness, sensibleness, love, kindness, humility, work ethic, and follow through.
 - c. The message of vs 8 is that the Thessalonian believers had gained a good reputation within the Christian community for several reasons, and these reasons included:
 - (1) Their quick and seemingly whole-hearted response to the gospel while being persecuted for such a response, their repentance from worshiping and serving idols, their commitment to go in a new direction of worshiping and serving God, their deliberate choice to imitate the life of Jesus Christ along with the lives of Paul, Timothy, and Silvanus, and their work of faith, labor of love, and steadfastness of hope.
 - (2) I don’t suppose these believers were perfect or fully mature at the time Paul wrote this letter, yet their faith in God and pursuit of godliness was so whole-hearted and sincere that they were considered by those who heard about them as being the kind of godly Christians you would look up to in spite of any failings or weaknesses they might have.
 - d. What about you? And maybe more importantly, what about me? What is my reputation – in my home, with my spouse and my children and grand-children, in my workplace, among my fellow believers, among my friends, among my neighbors, and beyond?

- e. How do people see you? The reality is, you have a reputation. The question is, is it good, mediocre, bad, or mixed?
 - f. Which brings us to the most important truth of all about reputations. We are Christians, and as such we represent God and the Christian community in the world around us. Therefore we ought to work hard at building a good reputation for the sake of God's honor and the honor of Christianity in the world.
 - (1) Jesus put it this way in **Matthew 5:16**, "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."
 - (2) Certainly we ought to have a good reputation for our own sake, but even more important than that is having a good reputation for God's sake. Why? Because our reputation either helps or hurts God's reputation among unbelievers.
4. The second thing I want to talk about from **vs 8** is evangelism. And the reason for this is because our personal reputation and the reputation of Christians at large either helps or hurts our evangelistic efforts.
- a. Paul said that the "**word of the Lord has sounded forth from**" these Thessalonian believers. And we learn from this letter that it sounded forth in word and in deed. In other words, these Thessalonian believers lived the "word of the Lord" and spoke the "word of the Lord" to those they encountered in the daily affairs of life.
 - b. This takes on even greater significance when you consider that Thessalonica was a port city on a major trading route.
 - (1) In other words, traders would be coming and going all the time – which means the locals, including the Thessalonian believers, would be doing business with the traders on a repeat basis. And this would give these believers repeated opportunities to live and speak the gospel in a business setting.
 - (2) In addition, these believers would not have had to travel far for their evangelistic efforts to have effects well beyond their own city.
 - c. Here again, I ask, what about you and what about me? You may not have the gift of evangelism, but you can intentionally and thoughtfully be the light of Christ before those you live with, live near, work with, do business with, or deal with in a market place you repeatedly visit.

- d. As for your reputation being tied to your evangelism, I want to remind you that how you live, how you deal with people, how you verbally present the gospel, and your attitude when presenting it are all part of your reputation – a reputation that either helps or hurts your evangelistic efforts.
- B. [9] For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you **turned to God** from idols **to serve a living and true God**.
1. Notice the theme of repentance in the phrase, “how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God.” These believers made the decision to turn from worshiping and serving idols to worshiping and serving God – and they did it in the midst of being persecuted for making such a decision.
 - a. In other words, they heard the gospel, and in thinking about what they heard they recognized that the gods they were serving were not only incapable of doing anything for them, but the system of beliefs, ceremonies, and practices that come along with their idol worship was doing far more harm than good to them personally, their families, their community, and their world.
 - b. The reality is, idol worship includes beliefs, values, practices, cultural norms, and ceremonies that end up destroying what good there is in life, in relationships, and in the community.
 2. Most idols are inanimate objects. They have no life of their own, which means they cannot do anything for you in spite of what you believe about them.
 - a. And those idols which have some form of life in them – such as the sun, a tree, or an animal – they still lack the ability to do what God has done and continues to do for those who worship and serve Him.
 - b. The reality is, idol worship makes no rational or logical sense. Yet because people believe idols help them, or because they like the benefits that come along with idol worship, or because they fear what will happen if they don’t worship the idol, people do what is irrational and illogical.
 - c. However, idol worship in one form or another is widespread in our world. In fact it is so wide spread that it can be found among those who worship and serve the true and living God – Jehovah Elohim.

- d. We see this mixture of religious practices among the Israelites of the OT. They had the Temple, the priests and Levites, the sacrifices, the Law of Moses, the feast days and the fast days - and they used all of these to worship Jehovah. Yet they often **also** worshiped in the high places, kept Asherah poles, and worshiped the various Baals.
 - e. True, Jehovah worship was culturally first and foremost for most Israelites. Yet there were times when they worshiped Jehovah and an idol or two or three. And though they kept their idol worship in a secondary position, it was their go-to god when Jehovah wasn't enough for them.
3. Fortunately, we are too advanced – intellectually, scientifically, socially, and religiously – to follow the mixed religious practices of the Israelites. Or are we? And I ask that of myself, too. And because I know all too well the ease of mixing my religious practices, I urge you to seriously think with me about this for a few minutes.
 4. About 18 months ago I reminded you of these words from A.W. Tozer's book, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us," and the reason for this is because "we are not simply what we say or do, but what we, in the deepest reaches of our heart and mind conceive God to be."
 - a. If we take Tozer's words as true, and I do, and if we apply this truth to the worship of any god, then we begin to see just how powerfully the "who" or "what" we worship effects the way we think, speak, and live.
 - b. The reality is, we order our lives according to our conception of the god or gods we worship and serve. In other words, the god or gods we worship and serve colors how we see life, interpret events, deal with people, do business, care for our neighbors, treat our spouse, raise our family, and care for the poor and needy.
 - c. One interesting fact about this is that just as we can figure out what we really believe by observing how we live, so we can figure out which god or gods we worship and serve by looking at how we live.
 - d. For example, if you worship and serve Jehovah, it will show in such areas as our humility, integrity, general morality, helpfulness, fair and honest business practices, treatment of

others – especially those nearest and dearest, and our care for the genuinely needy and weakest among us.

e. But Jehovah is not the only god our culture worships and serves. People also worship and serve money, financial security, science, technology, medicine, doctors, personal freedom (*license*), fame, entertainment, pleasure, power, and personal significance.

(1) And we can see the proof of this in how people live, because who or what people worship and serve is revealed by how they live – day to day – in the home, the community, the workplace, and beyond.

(2) I know this is true in my life – for when I carefully examine what I am valuing, what I am turning to for security or comfort or happiness, where I am finding significance or a sense of well-being, and if I am practicing any sin, and when I compare my findings to God and His word, I am able to see **if**, and if so, **where**, I have invited an idol or several idols back into my life.

(3) And if I have, then I am living a religiously mixed life just like the Israelites of old.

III. Conclusion

A. What about you? Having turned to God from serving idols, do you now worship and serve only God?

1. Or upon a careful examination of what you value, your home life, your closest relationships, your activities, your entertainment choices, your work ethic, or any of your business dealings, do you find there is an idol you never threw out, or that you have invited an idol or two back in?

2. I am not suggesting you have stopped worshiping and serving God. But given our human nature, the pressures of our culture to conform to their values and practices, the wealth of our nation, and the temptations of the devil, it is tempting to worship and serve one or two idols along with God.

B. And so I ask again, is it possible you are mixing God worship with idol worship? If so, you can repent and take the action necessary to throw out the idol or idols and return to only worshiping and serving the true and living God.