

I Thessalonians 1:6-7 The Condition of the Thessalonians

I Thessalonians chapter 1 verses 4 through 7. We actually took verses 4 and 5 last week, but we will take them again in review and finish up with verses 6 and 7 today.

I Thessalonians chapter 1 is entitled The Testimony of the Thessalonians. Remember that Paul and Sylvanus and Timothy passed through Thessalonica during Paul's second missionary journey. And they moved on from Thessalonica after a lot of trouble came against Paul and the others. Paul left Thessalonica [with] Silas and Timothy and went to Berea. And from Berea trouble was caused there as well. Paul left Berea by himself and went down to Athens. We are over in Greece now, a long way from Jerusalem. When he was in Athens, he wondered what happened to the Christians in Thessalonica.

Remember the underlying statement about the Christians in Thessalonica is *they received the Word of God in much affliction*. We will see that today in our text. They received beatings, lost their homes, were rejected by their families, right off the bat. As soon as they received Christ the whole town was in an uproar to come up against Paul and Sylvanus and Timothy and all the others. So by the time Paul made it down to Athens he wondered what had happened to the Christians in Thessalonica. Brand-new believers, and they were suffering such horrible afflictions. So he called for Timothy, and sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to find out what the report was as to how they are doing. This first letter is written to them in response to the report the Timothy brought as to how they are doing. And we will see that they are doing pretty well.

He starts off the letter by saying, **Paul and Silvanus and Timothy to the assembly of Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**. He writes to them there and his theme is *grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*. *Grace* is the greeting in Greek and *peace* is the greeting in Hebrew. And this is a spiritual grace and peace. It is from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Characteristics of the Thessalonians. Paul says, **We give thanks to God** - that is the main verb of the chapter - **we give thanks to God always concerning all of you**. How are we giving thanks? **By making mention of you upon our prayers**. What he is praying, he is **Remembering without ceasing** (three things) **your work of faith, and labor of love, and patience** (or *endurance*) **of hope of our Lord Jesus Christ before God and our Father**.

Three things, and as I have mentioned before the Greek text has it such that it is expressing work of faith. Work is not doing the faith. Faith is doing the work. The work of faith. He says, "Remembering your faith that is working."

Secondly, *labor of love*. That is, love that is laboring. Love that is motivating you to labor. The word *labor* means to work to the point of exhaustion. So the **ἀγάπη** (*agapē*) love is the motivation for them laboring to the point of exhaustion when it comes to the things of the Lord.

And thirdly, *the patience of hope*. Or more literally, *the endurance of hope*, the remaining under that hope produces of our Lord Jesus Christ. *Hope* is a word means more than to wish. *Hope* is a word of certainty.

The example I keep giving is the best one that I know of. A person is shipwrecked out in the sea and they are floating around, they are hoping to be found, hoping someone would see them and rescue them. That is a wish. This word *hope*, **ἐλπίς** (elpis) is a hope of certainty. In other words, a ship has seen him and signaled to him, "We are coming to pick you up." That is a hope of certainty, not a hope of wish. That is the word *hope* here. We will see next week that they remain under because of the hope, the hope of Christ coming to get them and to deliver them. So he is remembering these three things about them: work of faith, labor of love, and endurance of hope.

This brings us to The Call of the Thessalonians in verses 4 and 5. **Knowing, brothers.** The word *knowing* is a participle, it is an -ing word, shows continuous action. **Making mention in prayers** is the first participle coming off the main verb in verse 2. But we are remembering without ceasing knowing something about you brothers. And we studied that last week. Paul uses it affectionately in a family way calling them brothers. **Knowing, brothers, having been loved by God**, being the objects of God's love, **knowing your election**. God's people have been elected. There is an election.

Election means *to call out*. **ἐκλογή** (eklogē) is the noun used here. There is another adjective that comes from this, **ἐκλεκτός** (eklektos) that is the word for the Jews. They are the elect of God. They are the only ones who are called the elect. We experience the election of God. He is saying that you are called out ones. God has called you, and you have responded, and you have come to Him.

The example - we took John chapter 10 verses 3 through 5. But reading verse 4, concerning the shepherd that stands at the sheepfold door and calls for his sheep to come out. When he brings out his own sheep he goes before them, and the sheep follow him for they know his voice. The sheep know the shepherd's voice and they follow him. They are called out by God. God is going to call them, and they are to respond.

When they came to Jesus in John chapter 6 and began to argue with Him, Jesus told them in John chapter 6 verse 44, **No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up in the last day.** The Father has to draw people to Jesus. He calls people. People respond to the call, and it is called *the election*. All of the people who are saved have experienced the election. That is why Paul is telling these Christians in Thessalonica, I am certain of your election by God, not just because of your characteristics, but because of the call God has given you.

Now in verse 5 he starts out with word *because*. There are four things that he is going to list where he is going to tell them, this brings the certainty of your election. And all four of these phrases have the word *become* in it. It is not in the English translations, your literal English translation has it.

- 1) The first phrase is in verse 5, **Because our gospel did not become to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance.**
- 2) Secondly, the second phrase he uses to express his certainty about their election, **According as you know what kind we became among you on account of you.**
- 3) Verse 6, the third phrase, **And you yourselves became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction and with joy of the Holy Spirit.**
- 4) And fourthly verse 7, **So that you became patterns to all the ones believing in Macedonia and in Achaia.**

So four things that he knows about them where he can say, "You have experienced election of God," and to the point that they became the pattern. If anybody wants to know, has a question, "Have I experienced election of God?" this is a good text to use.

Because our gospel did not become to you in word only, going back to the first phrase in verse 5, **not in word only but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance.** So our word to you when we spoke the gospel to you was not just words.

I remember someone telling me a long time ago the reason why he does not come to our Bible studies is because Bible studies are just *verbal garbage*. It is just *verbiage*. It is just words on a page, not life. They are words on a page, but they are life to those are listening.

He says, "When I preach the gospel to you, it did not become word only." **But**, secondly, **but also in power**. So not just words but words with power. The word *power* designates a transformation, a change. So he says, "My words, when I preach the gospel to you were transformation and they changed you."

Thirdly, it was spiritual. It was not human. It was not religious. It came to you in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is what applied all this power to change your life, and to make it not word only. **And in much assurance**, which means confidence. So they were confident in the very things they were hearing and that they had come from God.

Secondly, the second phrase with word *become* in it: **According as you know what kind we became among you on account of you.** So, "We changed our lifestyle," Paul is saying, "We became whatever is necessary to minister the gospel to you."

When we get into chapter 2 and we study The Testimony of the Apostle Paul - here we are studying The Testimony of the Thessalonians. But in chapter 2 the testimony of Paul is that he said, "We worked night and day to make sure the gospel was ministered to you." So they got a job, and they were making tents; and they got a job and then they ministered at night so that they would not be a burden to these new believers. That is how Paul approached new believers.

He says, "We can show you Scripture that tells us that those of us who are apostles are to be supported." Jesus said, "You preach the gospel, you live by the gospel," and it supports you. It is supposed to but to some people that is an offense. So what Paul would do is he would go get a job. Because he would rather get a job and minister to the people at night and support himself, than show them in Scripture where it is their responsibility to show support and to give support but then have them get offended. People get offended over money.

So he says, "What we had to become on account of you. Where you are at in the Lord, that is where we have to be." In chapter 2 he is going to describe himself as a parent, as a nursing mother and a father take care of their family. He says, "So we took care of you much like parents do their children." So it is taking into account what kind of people they are, where they are at in the Lord.

In verse 6, the third phrase that he used to describe their election of God. **And you yourselves became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Spirit.** *You yourselves became*, there is our word again. It means *to become something you were not before, a change*.

You yourselves became imitators or followers of us and of the Lord. The word *imitators* or *followers* is the Greek word which means *mime*. You became a mimic of us. It is the same word Paul used in I Corinthians chapter 11 verse 1 where he says, **Imitate me just as I also imitate Christ.** Let the mime of your life be the same as mine, no play on words intended.

μιμηταί (*mimētai*) is a Greek word that is actually a theatrical term. We get our word *mime* from it, *mimic*, as I just said. In Paul's day the *mime* or *mimic* was an actor, not somebody that answered verbally according to a script but someone who acted it out with expressions. They would put a mask on, and they would put costumes on, and they would come out. They would act out a message for people to receive, without saying a word. Takes a lot of talent to get a message across without speaking.

So Paul was saying, "As the expression of Christ is in us, you began to follow that expression because the same Christ is in you." I hope you are catching on here that by time we get through this letter Paul is going to say, "I am ministering to you the things of Christ and in order for you to be following Christ accurately you must be living like we are, the same expression. We have the same Christ in us as you do." Paul's ministry is different. He is an apostle. He was chosen by God to write most of the New Testament. But His message was, "To become like us, one with us. As you see Christ express Himself through us, so imitate us, express Himself through you."

And you yourselves became imitators. So they became expressions of Christ just like Paul. **You became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction and joy of the Holy Spirit.** Here is one of the catchphrases in all of his presentation. Your receiving the Lord is not human. You received the word of the gospel in much affliction. The word *affliction* is the word **θλιψις** (*thlipsis*) and it means *distress* or *pressure*. So right away you received the word with much affliction, much distress, much pressure.

In Acts chapter 14 verse 22 it says that while Paul and Sylvanus and Timothy were going on the second missionary journey they revisited some of the churches from the first missionary journey telling them, **They were strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying we must through many afflictions enter into the kingdom of God.** They kept telling everybody, "Through many afflictions we enter into the kingdom of God. Much distress is going to come upon you. Much pressure is going to come upon you." And that has been appointed for God and from God to His people, that they are going to be afflicted.

And here is the bottom line, we are not really who we really are until our obedience to Jesus Christ has been challenged by trials. When we are challenged by afflictions, that is who we really are. Do we stay obedient to Christ? See that is what he is telling the Christians in Thessalonica. He said, "You became expressions of Christ just like us having received the Word though much affliction." That is not human, that is not right, that does not make sense, it has to be the Lord. Why would you want to receive the Lord and then experience a lot of affliction? See Satan comes against us. When we surrender to Christ Satan becomes our enemy and he tries to create afflictions and trials and hardships in order to challenge our obedience to Christ.

Not only did they receive the word in much affliction, but it says, **With joy of the Holy Spirit.** The word *joy* is the word **χαρά** (chara) and it means *satisfaction*. So they received the word in much affliction but they were satisfied in the Holy Spirit. Spiritual. That is insane from a human perspective to have the joy of the Lord, the satisfaction in the Lord knowing that you are following Him and you are being afflicted for it. That was Paul telling them something that they already knew and that is that afflictions come upon God's people. It has been appointed that way. And so if they can rejoice in that it is an indication that they belong to Christ.

And then verse 7, the fourth thing, **So that you became patterns to all the ones believing in Macedonia and in Achaia.** Again, the word *became*. You became examples, you became patterns. The word *patterns* is the word **τύπος** (tupos) for *type*. You became a pattern for what it is to be elected of God, called by God, coming to Christ, living under the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit even in the midst of afflictions and hardships.

So Macedonia and Achaia are two provinces near Thessalonica. And so people wanted to know, What is it like to be saved? What is it like to be called by God and having responded to Him? What is it like to experience the election of God? You become a pattern, become an example to other Christians. What is it like to be saved?

And this is a pattern and type for us that the word of God is received not in words on a page, but with power. There is conviction. There is change. Sometimes it is gradual. There is transformation that takes place in the hearing of the Word. So it is **not in word only but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and with much assurance** that this is from God, because it lines up with His word and His will.

To the point that people become imitators of Paul, mimics. Paul ministers his word not so people can get their head filled with Bible knowledge but rather so that they would learn to live the expression of Christ in their life like he does. He is a type. He is an example.

But also following the Lord in much affliction - not looking for a way out, not quitting - with the joy of the Holy Spirit. Satisfaction that this is the Lord's will, this the way things are. Satan will come up against us and there will be afflictions. We must have faith and trust the Lord. We too become patterns. We become patterns of what it is like to be the expression of Christ, what it is like to receive the Word.

Next week we will attempt to finish out this chapter, verses 8 through 10, as Paul continues the testimony of the Thessalonians. It is quite a testimony in the Scriptures.

Let's close with prayer.