

# **Commentary on 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10**

## **By L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.**

The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Series*) for **June 6, 2010**, is from **1 Thessalonians 1:1-10**. Five **Questions for Discussion** follow the Bible Lesson Commentary. These are my preliminary verse by verse study notes before writing my Bible Lesson for *The Oklahoman* newspaper. They may help you in your class preparation and discussion. I do encourage you to write your own verse by verse notes and questions before reading the notes and questions below.

### **1 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.**

Because letters were written on scrolls, the letter begins with the names of the senders, so the scroll would not need to be completely unrolled to see who the letter was from. Silvanus sometimes wrote as a scribe for Paul and both sometimes accompanied Paul on his journeys. Paul wrote 2 letters to Timothy that have been preserved in our Bible. The church rightfully acknowledged God “the Father” (as Jesus revealed the Father to His disciples) and the church also obeyed the commands of Jesus, because Jesus was their Lord. The true God (Father and Son mentioned here, the Holy Spirit later) gives “grace” (unmerited favor and divine power) to the church and these gifts also bring “peace” (with God and among themselves through forgiveness of sins).

### **2 We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly**

Imagine serving the Lord in a church that the Apostle Paul could write about and say that he gives thanks to God for “all of you.” What wonderful characteristics that church must have demonstrated! Paul also prayed for them, knowing that God’s grace and peace would help them continue to do what the Lord expected of them.

### **3 remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Here Paul mentioned the three most important virtues, that Paul also prayed to God for them to have the will and strength to keep on demonstrating. These virtues involve “work” — faith involves or leads to work, and a virtue always includes our choice and our work to achieve with God’s grace; and “labor” — “love” leads to labor (continuous work, sometimes backbreaking work) for what will promote the interests of God and the highest well-being of others; and remaining “steadfast” (persistent and persevering) in “hope” that our work and labor will not be in vain because our virtues and labor are “in our Lord Jesus Christ,” Who empowers us and in His behalf.

**4 For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he has chosen you,**

Paul reminded them that God the Father loved them; therefore, He chose them, not because of their virtues, but to save them from sin so they could live a virtuous life by His grace. Love motivated Him to make them a part of His family; His children, that He could care for as a devoted Father. The Lord Jesus Christ would be their older Brother (He was the only begotten Son, we are the Father's adopted children).

**5 because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of persons we proved to be among you for your sake.**

Paul knew all of these things about their everlasting relationship with God, because Paul knew them by their fruits, the fruits the Holy Spirit inspired within them. They responded to the preaching of the good news about Jesus and believed and acted accordingly; therefore, Paul knew God had chosen them. What characterized Paul and them was their mutual desire for and reception of divine power to live a holy life pleasing to God after learning that God had forgiven them for their sins through the death and resurrection of Jesus. The Holy Spirit led them to call God "Father" or "Abba," as Paul wrote in Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6. The Holy Spirit convinced them that Jesus reigned as their Lord.

**6 And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit,**

The work of the Holy Spirit is mentioned here a second time. The Holy Spirit gives joy to Christians. Their joy was greater than their suffering from persecution. They looked upon Paul's way of life and the life of Jesus as they learned about Jesus and His virtuous life as a life to be imitated. Living virtuously, as Jesus and Paul demonstrated, brings joy instead of grief and regret.

**7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.**

They so imitated Jesus and Paul that they became an example to others. How wonderful to live our lives so much as Jesus would live in our day and age that people could see Jesus Christ in us and be drawn to Him and want to live as He lived!

**8 For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it.**

The achievements most noted by Paul were their imitation of Jesus Christ and the proclamation by them of His teachings, life, death, resurrection, and second coming as visible Lord over all. So many had heard about their good work for the cause of Jesus Christ that Paul did not need to tell others about them.

**9 For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God,**

Paul received reports from others about them; they lived their lives with a total commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord worth talking about—they became good examples! They did not “just believe” in Jesus as Savior. They believed in Jesus and so truly believed in Jesus that they turned their lives completely around—from serving idols to serving the true God.

**10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead — Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.**

While they waited for Jesus to come they served God with faith, hope, and love, steadfastly and strenuously. The gospel, and the right response that believers should make when they hear the gospel, are proclaimed in these verses. Judgment is coming and Jesus will rescue true believers from the judgment of God, Who loves the sinner, but hates the sinner’s sin so much that it leads God to just judgment upon those who refuse to receive His grace, mercy, and forgiveness made possible in Jesus Christ.

**Five Questions for Discussion**

1. Today, what might a church look like, or behave like, for the Apostle Paul to be able to thank God for all of her members? How might it look or behave differently from the church in Paul’s day?
2. Today, do we use a different measure from the one Paul used to know whether or not a person is “chosen by God”? What are the benefits from knowing this fact about ourselves and about others?
3. How does the Holy Spirit give us joy? How does living a virtuous life in the Holy Spirit give us joy? How does this type of joy help us when we are suffering?
4. What kind of examples does your church provide others? Are there any “bad” examples in the life of your church that need to be changed? Pray about changing the examples that need to be changed, and give thanks to God for the good examples you show others.
5. Why must the gospel be both demonstrated and explained, both “caught” from our examples as well as “taught” with our words from the Scriptures, both seen and heard?

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