

## THE THESSALONIAN EPISTLES: DIRECTION FOR THE LAST DAYS

### **I. Gaining God's Orientation For This Life**

(1 Thessalonians 1:1-10)

#### **I. Introduction**

- A. Paul's epistles to the believers at Thessalonica addressed new converts out of raw paganism who faced persecution and false teaching, a recipe for spiritual defeat if they failed to get adequate spiritual insight.
- B. These needs are similar to what many believers face in today's godless world, so we view 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 on gaining God's orientation for this life so we can function with stability and peace in living this life:

#### **II. Gaining God's Orientation For This Life, 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10.**

- A. In his opening greetings in both of his letters to the Thessalonians, Paul claimed that his readers were spiritually positioned in **both** God the *Father* and His *Son*, the Lord Jesus Christ, 1 Thess. 1:1a; 2 Thess. 1:1a, This claim is not found in the introduction of any of Paul's other letters, indicating he wanted the new converts to realize how **SECURE** was their spiritual position in the Lord in contrast to the dreadful insecurity of the paganism from which they had come and the insecurity that marked the godless world around them!
- B. Paul then wished for God's grace, His unmerited favor, and its resulting peace from God their Father and the Lord Jesus Christ to be directed to them, ministering to build them up in their Christian faith, 1 Thess. 1:1b.
- C. Having thus stated how **stable** was their spiritual position in the Lord, Paul provided God's *orientation* that his readers were to adopt regarding living in this life in a spiritually godless world, 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10:
  - 1. Paul always thanked God for his readers' work of faith in God, their labor of love toward one another and the apostle's missionary team and for their patient hoping for Christ's return, 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3.
  - 2. These evidences of conversion made Paul realize that these believers were chosen of God, that from eternity past, God had known they would trust in Christ, so He chose them based on that foreknowledge to live a godly Christian life (1 Peter 1:1), to be raptured to heaven (2 Thessalonians 2:13) and to end up in God's heavenly presence holy, blameless and in love (Ephesians 1:3-6); 1 Thessalonians 1:4.
  - 3. These readers had accordingly truly responded to the Gospel presentation in the power of the Holy Spirit and in much assurance as backed by the godly lives of the Apostle and his coworkers. Consequently, Paul's readers had become followers of the Lord and of Paul and his ministry team, 1 Thess. 1:5-6a.
  - 4. Furthermore, these readers had believed in Christ with joy regardless of much affliction they suffered from unbelievers for doing so (1 Thessalonians 1:6b) and we explain this affliction as recorded in Acts 17:1-10:
    - a. Though many devout Greeks and prominent women of the pagan community at Thessalonica had believed Paul's Gospel, envious unbelieving Hebrews stirred up evil men, setting the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, trying to bring Paul and his coworker Silas out to the crowd to harm them, Acts 17:1-5.
    - b. Failing to find Paul and Silas there, the mob dragged new believer Jason and some of the other believers before the city authorities, slandering Paul and Silas by charging they were inciting rebellion against Rome's Caesar in claiming that there is another king besides Caesar, a king named Jesus, Acts 17:6-7.
    - c. This news greatly upset the city authorities who thought Paul was preaching insurrection against Rome, so they took money as a security bond from Jason and the other believers and then let them go, Acts 17:8-9.
    - d. The Thessalonian believers then quickly sent Paul and Silas away from their city by night, Acts 17:10a.
  - 5. These believers still became examples to all believers in Macedonia and Achaia, 1 Thessalonians 1:7-10:
    - (a) they spread the Gospel to these realms, (b) news of their faith spread abroad as reports told of (i) their responsiveness to Paul and Silas, (ii) their turning from pagan idols to serve the living and true God and (iii) their waiting for the return of Christ from heaven, 1 Thessalonians 1:7-10a. (iv) News had spread of the belief these new converts had in Christ's resurrection from the dead and God's deliverance from God's wrath to come, His wrath in the Great Tribulation and in hell, 1 Thessalonians 1:10b.

***Lesson:*** Paul oriented the new converts to Christ at Thessalonica who were fresh out of paganism amid joy in the face of stiff persecution by informing them that their salvation was absolutely secure in God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, that they were to keep trusting in God, to keep loving fellow believers and to keep hoping for the rapture to take them out of the world before the expression of God's wrath in the Great Tribulation or hell.

***Application:*** For orientation in today's unsettled, anti-God world, may we believers realize that our salvation is fully secure in God the Father and in Christ, that we keep living by faith in God, keep loving each other in Christ and keep hoping for Christ to take us to heaven in the rapture before God's wrath in the Great Tribulation or hell.