

Imitators: 1 Thessalonians 1

Introduction: “Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ; Grace to you and peace.” It makes sense for Paul to include Silvanus and Timothy since they were present when the gospel was first preached in Thessalonica. Paul, after a sharp disagreement with Barnabas, departed and chose Silas as a travel companion on his second missionary journey. Silas was a member of the church in Jerusalem and considered to be one of the “leading men” along with being a prophet ([Acts 15:22, 32](#)). Before we make it to Acts 17, we’ll learn how they traveled all the way from Jerusalem to Macedonia and their imprisonment in Philippi (which was 100 miles away from Thessalonica). We’ll also learn how Timothy joined Paul and Silas in [Acts 16:1-5](#) towards the beginning of this second missionary journey. Timothy joined them in Lystra. His mother was a Jewish believer and his father a Greek. By the time of Paul’s arrival, Timothy had a good reputation among those in Lystra and Iconium. Timothy’s grandmother, Lois, was also a believer. Did Paul teach them the truth the last time he was in Lystra? The text doesn’t say, but it’s not a stretch. It’s very likely that Paul was a part of his mother and grandmother’s conversion during his first trip to Lystra. If my understanding of [2 Timothy 1:5](#) is correct, they obeyed the gospel before Timothy. Again, by the time Paul arrives in Lystra, Timothy had been a believer long enough that he was thought well of by those in the city and Iconium which was nearby. Timothy end up being Paul’s closest companion. As Paul told those in Philippi regarding Timothy, “I have no one like him” ([Philippians 2:20](#)). There’s much we could say about Timothy, his time spent with Paul and the brethren and churches he served. He was indeed a soldier of Christ. By the time of this letter, Paul sent Timothy back to the church and Timothy returned giving his report to Paul.

Background - [Acts 17:1-9](#): Paul, many times, was front row seat to the power of the gospel. He also wasn’t a stranger to the frustration it caused resulting in personal persecution (though it was really God who was persecuted and rejected - [Acts 22:7](#)).

Though we think of Paul as the “apostle to the Gentiles” (and indeed he was - [Acts 9:15](#); [Romans 11:13](#); [15:16](#); etc.), the reality is that he typically always began proclaiming Christ in a synagogue upon arrival. In this text we learn how Paul reasoned in a synagogue for three Sabbaths. We learn that “some” Jews were persuaded along with a “great many” of devout Greeks (or God-fearing Greeks), and “not a few” of the leading women (perhaps wives of chief men). We then read about Jews forming a mob and stirring the city up. Apparently they were staying with a man named Jason. Since they couldn’t find Paul & Silas, they took Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities. They made false accusations and took what was said out of context. The authorities took money from Jason and the brothers and let them go. Timothy is not specifically mentioned, but was present as he appears again in verse [14](#).

It’s unlikely that Paul was only there for 3 weeks. Why? Because he clearly had a great impact on the brethren in Thessalonica. He’ll talk about being role model to the brethren, the bond they shared, how he worked and did not burden them, and in [Philippians 4:16](#), we learn that

the brethren in Philippi sent him help twice while in Thessalonica. Philippi was 100 miles away. More time would have been needed for this to occur. How would you harmonize that with Luke's writings? Well, Luke just didn't mention it, and there very well could have been a lengthy amount of time between Acts 17:4 and 5. In that case, he comes into town, sees an initial response to the gospel after three weeks of teachings, but remains. At some point the Jews create the mob and stir the town up resulting in running them out of town.

1 Thessalonians 1:2-5:

- Paul's prayer practice never ceases to amaze and humble me. He was thankful to God about brethren. This is abundantly clear. This wasn't a "little" thing. Anytime we discuss Paul's pattern of prayer, I feel the need to reiterate what he focused on in prayer. Compare it to how you pray and what's most important. Should there be some consideration about his marriage status and role in the church? Yes, I believe so. You pray for your family. You pray about obstacles in life that affect your marriage, parenting and work. You're not an apostle. You're not traveling all over the known world spreading the gospel. I think Paul would have prayed like those of us who have spouses and children (the majority typically do). However, I still think we need to take note of what Paul prayed for.
- Faith, hope and love. Faith can work. Love can be labor-some. Hope requires steadfastness. This is what Paul had in mind when he thanked God for them. He was seeing the change in their lives, brethren. We'll talk about this again in the next section.
- These brethren were chosen by God. How did Paul know that? Because when he looked back at how the gospel was proclaimed he took note that it came in three ways:
 - Not only in word, but power
 - In the Holy Spirit
 - With full conviction
 - Either God has preselected these individuals to be saved (based on no condition), or Paul is simply seeing the power of work behind the preaching and considers those who responded to be chosen by God. We learn that God will choose/elect, but that doesn't mean other's will continue in the faith.
 - **2 Thessalonians 2:13-14** But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.
 - **2 Peter 1:10** Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.

1 Thessalonians 1:6-10:

- They imitated the life of Paul and Christ. They knew what it was to suffer and how to be filled with the joy of the Holy Spirit. So much so that others in Macedonia and Achaia followed their example. Not just those in Thessalonica, but in the district of Macedonia and Achaia.
- Not only that, but their example of faith in God spread around. Those in Macedonia and Achaia heard how the apostle and the brothers brought the truth to Macedonia and the result among those in Thessalonica. What was the result? Repentance. They turned away

from idols to serve God and to wait for Jesus' return who would save them from the wrath to come.

- **Question:** how do you think this occurred? How do you view the church? Is "church" something you do once a week on Sunday? Do you think "Sunday worship" is how we evangelize? Do you think their meeting one day a week is what others heard about and spread? Or was it because all these men and women were changed? The communities around them saw and heard of this new community within theirs - how they loved, had faith and hope. Don't you think the ones who lived around them were impacted because of their interactions with the brethren?
 - God bless you for holding to God's truth. We're so blessed to come together on Sunday and worship the living God. But brethren, that's not all what we do or when we're seen. In fact, most people won't even see that. People in our neighborhood may find out that we worship at the school, but that doesn't say anything about who we are. What do people experience from us with they come among us? But let's get away from just one day a week. What do they experience when they encounter you? What do they hear about from you? Do they meet other brethren because we spend time with one another. Do they hear about and see our faith, love and hope?