STANDING FIRM

Part One: an exemplary church

September 3, 2023

Acts Chapter Seventeen tells us the Apostle Paul planted a Christian church in Thessalonica around 50 A.D. during his second missionary journey. Paul wanted a Christian church in Thessalonica because it had the chief seaport on the Aegean Sea and was a principal stop on the main road from Rome to the east (Via Egnatian). While ministering in Corinth, Paul wrote two short letters to the new Christians in Thessalonica to encourage them to continue to witness, work, and wait for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul's Greeting 1 Thessalonians 1:1-2

Letters written in first-century Greco-Roman culture began with the writer's name, the addressee's name, and a formal greeting. So, Paul begins his first letter to the Thessalonians by identifying himself and his co-missionaries (Silas and Timothy).

Paul uses his standard greeting – "Grace and peace to you." Grace is God's unmerited favor, which brings peace to our lives. Paul concludes his greeting by telling the Thessalonians that he, Silas, and Timothy thank God for them and continually pray for them. The Thessalonians needed all the prayers they could get because they were living in a pagan culture and were being persecuted for following Christ.

Paul's Thanksgiving 1 Thessalonians 1:3-10

1st – Paul is thankful for the Thessalonians' <u>faith</u>, <u>love</u>, and <u>hope</u>. Vs. 3

"Their work of faith" refers to when the Thessalonians chose to turn from their idols and accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior (1:9). "Their labor of love" refers to the Thessalonians striving to show love to others (4:9-10). And "enduring hope" refers to the Thessalonians patiently awaiting Christ's return (1:10).

2nd - Paul is thankful for the Thessalonians <u>receiving</u> the Gospel message. Vs. 4-6a

Paul tells the Thessalonians he is positive that God loves them and has chosen them to be His children. This is just one of many times Paul writes about the doctrine of Election in his epistles.

What is the doctrine of Election?

• The doctrine of Election states that God chose who would be saved and who would not be saved before He created the world (Ephesians 1:4-5).

There are two opposing views on the doctrine of Election:

1. Some Christians believe the Bible teaches <u>unconditional</u> election.

Christians who believe the Bible teaches unconditional election believe people are saved because God has chosen them to be saved. God's chosen will receive His Word, repent of their sins, and trust Jesus as their Lord and Savior. The elect must be saved because God has willed them to be saved.

2. Some Christians believe the Bible teaches <u>conditional</u> election.

Christians who believe the Bible teaches conditional election believe people are saved because they choose to be saved. People can receive God's Word, repent of their sins, and receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Salvation is a personal choice.

What is the proper way to view the doctrine of election?

• Before He created the world, God predestinated that all who receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior will be saved, and all who reject Jesus as their Lord and Savior will be damned.

Did God choose who is going to be saved and who is going to be lost? Yes! God created the plan of salvation and ensures every human being is judged according to His plan. Those who choose to receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior are forgiven of all their sins and given eternal life in Heaven. Those who choose to reject Jesus as their Lord and Savior are not forgiven of their sins and will be cast into the Lake of Fire. That is God's sovereign plan of salvation (John 3:16-18, 36).

3rd – Paul is thankful for the Thessalonians <u>following</u> the Lord. Vs. 6b

Paul rejoiced that the Thessalonians had given up their pagan lifestyles and imitated Paul, Silas, Timothy, and, most importantly, Jesus. They were living for Christ in an anti-Christian city!

4th – Paul is thankful for the Thessalonians' <u>example</u> to other believers. Vs. 7-10

The Thessalonians were examples to all the other believers in Greece. The Church at Thessalonica was a blueprint for other churches. They were sharing their faith with others. And they were looking forward to the return of Jesus – the one who rescued us from condemnation (Romans 5:1; 8:1-2)!

The Takeaway...

The church in Thessalonica was exemplary! The church was working, witnessing, and waiting for Jesus! Every Christian church should strive to be like the Thessalonian church.