A New Way to Live:

Discovering the Life-changing Message of 1 Thessalonians

Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians is an invitation to live life in a whole new way. Most likely the earliest document in the New Testament, the Apostle tries to unwrap the practical implications of a daily walk with Jesus as Guide and with the Holy Spirit as the source of power. This letter addresses the difficult struggle of facing opposition and is a timely reminder to us today as we face our own life challenges. While it is a fresh window to view the early Christian community, it also provides a mirror with which to reflect on our own sense of purpose, here and now. That is, if we have the courage to look.

Here is just a brief look at some of the highlights of this tremendous document. They are meant to awaken your hunger for experiencing God at a deeper level and inspire you to take that pathway that will prove to be the greatest adventure of your life!

Chp./Verse Narrative

1: 2 Paul begins his letter with a profound sense of **gratitude**. It is this experience of thankfulness that colors his world. Practicing it ourselves can lead to a whole new outlook on life.

1: 6 One can experience both tribulation *and* joy. Sounds strange but God's gift of joy can strengthen you for a tough road ahead (see Nehemiah 8:10b).

2: 4 Learning to work with the "God who examines our hearts" helps us to be more conscious of our thoughts, feelings, and actions. As we become more aware of ourselves (motives, feelings, hurts, talents, etc.), we are more changeable so as to become more and more like Jesus.

2: 7-11 Paul's closeness to the young Thessalonian church is described in terms of a mother's tender caring and a father's encouragement to become all God has designed you to be. Paul mirror's the tender and tough love of God Who is available to *re-parent* us to greatness, especially where our earthly parents have fallen short.

3: 3 While God isn't the author of evil or destruction, Paul still had a strong sense that God's purposes were being fulfilled even as he suffered pain and hardship from the selfishness of the local Jews. He had a peace in the midst of his swirling, painful circumstances. You can too.

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3: 12 Real God-based love always expresses itself for "all people". It doesn't pick and choose who is worthy. It is unconditional, no strings attached. When we can practice this quality of love toward ourselves and others, we are miraculously freed from the prison of our protective egos.

4: 6 Sanctification is becoming more like God. This happens as we trust God to "make things right" in our lives rather than always striving to fix others, ourselves, and our circumstances. It's exchanging our self-made expectations for the surprising expansiveness of God's Ways (Isaiah 55: 8-13).

4: 11 Part of trusting God means we have the power to "lead quiet lives", not needing to fix people (for our own comfort). This "contentment" is a powerful invitation to others (v. 12) to taste the wonder of God! (Psalm 34: 8; Philippians 4:11-13).

4:13 The second coming of Christ is a time when the resurrection power of God will conquer death. While many in the Church tremble in fear over *tribulations* to come, Paul refocuses our attention on the *triumph* of Christ over destruction and death! God is in the business of providing hope to a lost and frightened generation!

5: 9 God loves us and works constantly for our good. But even His most loving actions can be experienced as "wrath" when we choose to separate ourselves from God (see handout "Understanding the Wrath of God"). God desires salvation (which also means "wholeness" and "healing") for us, which also means always living connected to God's love and power.

5: 17 **Prayer** is learning to live in a continuous listening to and acting out of the movement of the Holy Spirit. Jesus likened the Spirit to wind. Which way is the wind blowing in your life right now?

1 Thessalonians is an immersion into the possibilities of living a life surrendered to God. And it's no easy journey. We, like the young Thessalonian church of 50 A.D., face daunting challenges that feel overwhelming and destructive. Yet they don't have to hold the power they do. There is a candle burning somewhere out in the darkness that beckons us. It is the simple light of Christ, a whisper to come and see. Come and see what it means to take the hand of Love Himself and follow Him into the greatest story ever told!

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