

# Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, September 29, 2021 – First Baptist Church Buda  
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

## CATCHING CHRISTIAN: A Study of 1 Thessalonians

**“What Does It Mean to Really Live?”**  
*1 Thessalonians 3:9-13*

We want to get back into our study of 1 Thessalonians this evening. We are calling this study, “Catching Christians.” Let me remind you of what we have been saying, in the way of explanation and clarification of that title. As we said last time...

***Clarification:*** *The Christian faith can’t be “caught” like someone catches a cold (or COVID). Rather the Christian faith comes by placing your faith and trust in God through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. However, the faith of a believer, should be one that draws other to Christ and doesn’t repel or push other away. Your faith, as a Christians, should be contagious. In other words, others ought to want what you have and you should be a “Catching Christians.” What will make us this way? The church at Thessalonica was full of “catching Christians” and Paul writes to them commending them for their contagious, catching on faith.*



As we said last time, emerging from ancient Macedonia was a dynamic body of people who lived in the busy, free, affluent metropolis of Thessalonica (show map). This town's citizens were influential, its economy was stable, and its location along the earliest know, "freeway" – Via Egnatia – was enviable. Goods from the east and the west poured into this city. In its heyday, when the population was around two hundred thousand, some consideration was given to making Thessalonica, rather than Constantinople, the "capital" of the world. In the first century A.D., the evangelist and apostle Paul ventured into Thessalonica and, during a brief visit, formed a body of believers there who comprised the city's first Christian church. And what a dynamic group they were! With determination, zeal, confidence, and a Pauline style, they proclaimed the good news of Christ like thunder rolling through a canyon. As we shall see through our study of 1 Thessalonians, these first-century saints were models of authentic Christianity. They made Christianity contagious to many in their day. As a result, the example they left us is worthy of our attention and application to our lives.

Let me remind you of some of the background information for this important letter... some important facts about the book/letter of 1 Thessalonians:

#### **Background Review of 1 Thessalonians:**

- (1) 1 Thessalonians is a letter written by the Apostle Paul and was the first letter ever written by Paul**
- (2) The church of Thessalonica was established during Paul's 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey \*show map**
- (3) The Thessalonian church was very important/strategic because Thessalonica was the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia**
- (4) 1 Thessalonians was written after hearing good news of their church from Timothy, and is the only of Paul's letter that was not written with a problem in the church but rather for the sole purpose of commending the church**
- (5) Paul only stayed in Thessalonica for a month, and that is all it took for this church to become an active, strong and vital church in the spread of the gospel.**

With that brief back ground let's look let's get back into Paul's letter to the believer/Christians in 1 Thessalonians.

*<sup>9</sup> For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God, <sup>10</sup> night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith? <sup>11</sup> Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you. <sup>12</sup> And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you, <sup>13</sup> so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints."*  
**-1 Thessalonians 3:9-13 (NKJV)**

We are bombarded with propaganda on "the good life." Numerous appeals, some subtle and other bold, invite us to buy into a philosophy of life that will make us happy. Some, in the church today, even boldly proclaim that "God want you happy!" That "God want you healthy, happy and prosperous!" ***What is wrong (if anything) with this kind of teaching and idea?***

***“If you want success, if you want wisdom, if you want to be prosperous and healthy, you’re going to have to do more than meditate and believe; you must boldly declare words of faith and victory over yourself and your family. God will make you prosperous if only you declare words of victory.”***

**–Joel Osteen, “Your Best Life Now”**

#### **A WORD ON THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL...**

Instead of stressing the importance of wealth, the Bible warns against pursuing it. Believers, especially leaders in the church (1 Timothy 3:3), are to be free from the love of money (Hebrews 13:5). The love of money leads to all kinds of evil (1 Timothy 6:10). Jesus warned, *“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions”* (Luke 12:15). In sharp contrast to the prosperity gospel emphasis on gaining money and possessions in this life, Jesus said, ***“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal”*** (Matthew 6:19). The irreconcilable contradictions between prosperity teaching and the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is best summed up in the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:24, ***“You cannot serve both God and money.”***

Usually these appeals are hedonistic and materialistic to the core... each one promising us things that will really bring us satisfaction. But none of them ever fulfilled their promises in any lasting way. Why? Because nothing that is external and temporal is capable of meeting our deepest internal needs... in other words, the deepest needs of our life. The Apostle Paul realized this truth. He also knew that the so-called “good life” needed to be replaced with the “real life” and real living in Christ Jesus. The “good life” provides us with only fantasies and fakes, while this “real life” in Christ brings us, at least the possibility, of an abundant and fulfilling relationship with the all-good God. Would you like to taste the real life? Then this study is for you, if you open up and apply what you discover.

#### **LEFT TO OURSELVES, WE SUBSTITUTE**

When we fail to consult God about what it means to really live, we come up with substitutes for the real life... cheap substitutes. King Solomon, in his journal titled “Ecclesiastes,” referred to these replacements as “schemes” or “devises.” Ecclesiastes 7:29 says, ***“Truly, this only I have found: that God made man upright, but they (man) have sought out many schemes.”*** ***What do you think Solomon meant by that?*** The root term of the Hebrew word translated there as ***“schemes”*** means ***“to think through a plan, to arrange clever and imaginative ideas.”*** When we turn from God’s way and create our own, we replace the real with the fake, the authentic with the artificial, the means to true fulfillment and satisfaction with the means to emptiness. Here are some specific substitutes we have devised.

### **3 dangerous substitutes we often make in life:**

- (1) **Mentally, we substitute knowledge for wisdom** – Wisdom is more than simply memorizing data... taking in information... head knowledge. Yet so many of us spend our time acquiring information, while we live as fools.
- (2) **Emotionally, we substitute feeling for facts** – Often we opt for pleasure today while ignoring the pain it will bring tomorrow. We choose comfort rather than seriously considering what the consequences will be.
- (3) **Spiritually, we substitute a temporal perspective for an eternal one** – We work on the horizontal and forget the vertical. We often live for the present with no eye toward eternity

### **LISTENING TO GOD, WE CHANGE**

How can we really live? How can we experience real living... the only avenue to a truly satisfying life regardless of the external circumstances? In 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13, the Apostle Paul answer that question by giving us a grasp on reality rather than fantasy. He takes us away from “the good life” and transports us into four elements that comprise the real life.

### **4 elements that comprise the real life Paul speaks of:**

- (1) **Joyful in gratitude (1 Thessalonians 3:9)** – *“<sup>9</sup> For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God.”* Paul expressed his gratefulness to Thessalonians for all the joy they brought to him. Their friendship and loyalty gave Paul a deep sense of happiness, even though he was going through rough times.
  - 1 Thessalonians 2:17-18, *“<sup>17</sup> But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire. <sup>18</sup> Therefore we wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but Satan hindered us.”*
  - 1 Thessalonians 3:7, *“<sup>7</sup> Therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith.”*

He, Paul, did not let his own circumstances dictate what his attitude toward life would be. Instead, he counted the blessings God had granted him through his association with the Thessalonians. As a result, he faced life with a smile rather than a frown.

- (2) **Earnest in prayer (1 Thessalonians 3:10)** – *“<sup>10</sup> Night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?”* Paul and his fellow workers earnestly prayed “night and day” for the Thessalonian believers. They were fervent and consistent in their petitions to God for these Christians. They were also specific in their prayers. One request they regularly made to the Lord was that they be given the opportunity to see the Thessalonians again. Paul desires that God would override Satan’s successes at keeping him from reuniting with his Thessalonian friends. The second request was that Paul and his ministerial workers would have the opportunity to complete what was lacking in the faith of the Thessalonians. In other context, the Greek term rendered “complete” carries the idea “to restore a fellow Christian who has wandered” (Gal. 6:1). IN other ancient Greek literature, the word us used to describe such things as the setting of a broken bone, the outfitting of a fleet of ships for battle, the equipping of an army or the mending of torn nets. The word is always used in a constructive way to communicate that help and assistance are needed. Thus, Paul was praying that he and his fellow workers would be given the opportunity to strengthen and deepen the faith of the Thessalonians. **A Personal Challenge:** If you’re not already, then begin to get serious about prayer. Start your day with prayer.

Permeate your day with prayer. Even end your day with prayer. You don't have to pray hours upon hours, but take at least a few minutes at a time to turn your eyes toward heaven and commune with the living God. Turn your day and situation over to Him. Intercede in behalf of others for their physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual needs. None of the time you spend in prayer will ever be wasted.

- (3) **Abounding in love (1 Thessalonians 3:11-12)** – *“<sup>11</sup> Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you. <sup>12</sup> And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you.”* In these verses we discover the third element in real living... love. Paul wanted the Thessalonians to know that there was a connecting link between the Lord and their love for others. Only the God who is love (1 Jon 4:8) could cause an unselfish love to increase in the lives of the Thessalonian Christians. And notice that their love was to overflow toward one another and **“all men”**... Christians and non-Christians alike. Indeed, the Greek preposition translated in verse 12 as “to” (or you Bible may have the word “for”) conveys the idea of **“getting down deep into something.”** Paul desired that the Lord would cause the Thessalonians to reach deeply with their love into the lives of those within and without their midst. Their love was to be as boundless as the love Paul, Timothy, and Silas had for them. What kind of love were they to express? We could think of it in relation to the letters that spell the word L-O-V-E

**The love we are to express:**

- (1) **L = Listen** – We respect and accept people enough to graciously hear what they have to say
- (2) **O = Overlook** – We are quick to pass over and forgive the minor, unpleasant flaws of others
- (3) **V = Value** – We demonstrate toward others a sense of respect and honor that clearly overshadows whatever critical comments we may find necessary to make
- (4) **E = Express** – Love is demonstrative! We don't just feel love or say loving things, but we manifest our love by doing what is in the best interest of others.

When this kind of love is exercised, both the love and the loved experience real life.

- (4) **Established in holiness (1 Thessalonians 3:13)** – *“<sup>13</sup> So that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.”* The result of joyful gratitude, earnest prayer, and abounding love is a life characterized by holiness. Paul says that we are to do these things “so that He may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.” Our standard for purity comes not from human beings, but from God. That why the verse reads that the Thessalonians would be established in holiness before God. The Apostle Peter made the same point in these words in 1 Peter 1:15-16, *“<sup>15</sup> But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, <sup>16</sup> because it is written, “Be holy, for I am holy.”* How long are we to strive in God's power for this standard of holiness? Until the wonderful day when we will finally be with Christ. Paul wrote one chapter later in 1 Thessalonians 3:13, “So that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.” For at that time, “We shall be like Him” (1 John 3:2), and therefore, we will be holy just as He is holy. Then

our striving and struggle will be over; we will have achieved by God's enabling grace a life free from sin and pure. What a perfect end for real life!

### **LEARNING THIS, WE GROW**

Now that we know what real living is, let's replace our substitutes with the real thing. Let's summarize the step we need to take this way...

#### **Steps to take to experience real living:**

- (1) **Mentally**, let's grow **wiser** – Let's commit ourselves to applying the knowledge we already have rather than simply acquiring more facts.
- (2) **Emotionally**, let's grow **stronger** – Our decisions should be based on the facts that we know rather than just on our feelings
- (3) **Spiritually**, let's grow **purser** – We should strive to live holy lives by pleasing God rather than man