

- This morning, we are going to pick back up with our new study in 1 Thessalonians.
 - Last week was our introduction week, which (as you always hear me say), over and over again, the introduction is almost always one of my favorite parts of any new book or letter of the scriptures.
 - We did a fair job last week of explaining the background of the letter. If you missed it, please go to our website and listen to it!
 - Dave does a great job editing the teachings. Remember that if you feel led to tell someone about our Church, and they want to know what it's like (at least in part), send them to our website and let them begin to listen.
 - It seems like several times a month, we have visitors, and when I introduce myself to them, many times they will say, I know who you are, I've been listening to your teachings online.
 - So, even though I am probably the most technologically challenged guy in the building, I guess this internet stuff works sometimes.
 - I mean, who would have thought the internet would have caught on so well? lol!
 - So please use the website as a tool to reach other people, and from there, we will let God do the rest!
- Now, as we begin this morning, I would like to back up and just quickly highlight our introduction from last week.
 - I won't spend all day on it, but I do want to refresh your memories and let those of you who weren't here last week get brought up to speed on the introduction.
 - Why do I care so much about the introduction?
 - Remember, understanding the scriptures correctly is all about context.
 - As a matter of fact, without context, you might as well be reading some devotional, which, many times, is more detrimental to your spiritual health than not reading or studying the Bible at all.
 - I get asked all the time about different devotionals, and overwhelmingly, Jesus Calling is the big one that comes up a lot.
 - You may be a big fan of this devotional, but I would simply tell you to stay away from it, and why?
 - Well, if you study the history of the woman who wrote it, then you will be shocked at what you find, and I will give you a little bit of the history now.
 - And yes, unlike Politics, I have fact-checked what I am about to say!
 - The woman who wrote it was a lady named Sarah Young. She has recently passed away, but several years ago, Sarah tells how she received a book from two anonymous female "mystics" who wrote a book called God Calling.
 - Once again, Sarah received a book anonymously, called God Calling, written by two female mystics, and this is what she says, and just FYI (once again), I am not making up what I am about to say.
 - Anyways, she receives this book and decides to write "Jesus Calling", and here is a quote from her own book:

She says – the following year, I began to wonder if I, too, could receive messages during my time of communing with God. I had been writing in prayer journals for years, but that was one-way communication. I did all the talking. I knew that God communicated with me through the Bible, but I yearned for more. Increasingly, I wanted to hear what God had to say to me personally on a given day. I decided to listen to God with pen in hand, writing down whatever I believed He was saying. I felt awkward the first time I tried this, but I received a message. It addressed topics that were current in my life: trust, fear, and closeness to God. I responded by writing in my prayer journal. My journaling had changed from monologue to dialogue. Soon, messages began to flow more freely, and I bought a special notebook to record these words. This new way of communicating with God became the high point of my day. I knew these writings were not inspired as Scripture is, but they were helping me grow closer to God.

- So, Mrs. Young received a book called God Calling, and she doesn't know who wrote it, other than the fact that it was written by two mystics, and from that book, she was inspired to write "Jesus Calling".
 - So, what seems to be the problem with all of this? It's simple.
 - First, anytime someone claims to have a new word outside the Word of God, be very leery.
 - Second, if you have a copy of Jesus Calling or you've ever read it, or if you read it, Mrs. Young writes as if she is speaking the words of Jesus Himself, while at the same time, saying her words are not the inspired words of God.
 - And then let me say one more thing, the whole devotional movement is meant to help people shortcut studying the Bible.
 - The problem is that there is no shortcut with God.
 - And you cannot outsource your own spiritual development.
- Now, before I get off this topic, I had someone send me a quote from Jesus Calling a few months back, and they wanted me to read that day's devotion and tell me what I thought.
 - So, I did, and I would like to read it to you quickly, just to kind of drive home the point I am trying to make.
 - And so, here is what Sarah had to say on this day:
 - I am with you and for you:
 - When you decide on a course of action that is in line with my will nothing in heaven on or on earth can stop you. You may encounter many obstacles as you move toward your goal, but don't be discouraged –never give up!
 - With my help, you can overcome any obstacle. Do not expect an easy path as you journey hand in hand with me, but remember that I, your very-present helper, and omnipotent.

- Much, much stress results from you wanting to make things happen before their times have come. One of the main ways I assert my sovereignty is in the timing of events.
- If you want to stay close to me and do things my way. Ask me to show you the path forward moment by moment.
- Instead of dashing headlong toward your goal, let me set the pace. Slow down and enjoy the journey in my presence.
 - And then she quotes Romans 8:31 which says, “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us.”
- I don’t have all day to spend on this, except to say, when you read this, it sounds harmless enough but therein lies the danger.
 - First, let me say that Mrs. Young speaking as if she were Jesus is seriously dangerous, especially when she speaks for our Lord.
 - And then takes what He says, completely out of context, as she quotes [Romans 8:31](#) at the end of all this.
 - Paul’s writings here in [Romans 8:31](#) do not deal with the point she is trying to drive home.
 - And secondly, let me just break down her first sentence in the devotion for you quickly.
 - When you decide on a course of action that is in line with my will, nothing in heaven or on earth can stop you.
 - Here’s the issue: you are not the center of the universe.
 - And I am not sure how you can decide on a course of action that is in line with His will if you don’t know what His will is.
 - The only way you can know that is to study your Bible.
- So, the person who read it and sent this to me said: I really struggle with this.
 - And I said, yes, I would too, because you don’t know what His will is.
 - So how can you choose a course of action that is in line with His will if you don’t know what His will is?
 - All Mrs. Young’s words managed to accomplish for the person who sent this to me was to confuse them.
 - Which was evidenced by their own words!
 - In other words, folks, you can read what God said directly, or you can spend your time reading what someone else says God says.
 - Seems to me that it would be a whole lot better if we just got it straight from the horse’s mouth.
 - And let me say one more thing before I press on, the undertone of many of these devotionals has, as its focus, you and me!
 - But scripturally speaking, we are never the focus in God’s dichotomy.
 - Yes, we are part of His creation, but God is always the main focus in the Bible.

- It's all about Him all the time, and we are described as His slaves
- We are men and women who He ransomed from sin with the blood of His Son, Jesus Christ.
- And so, context is key when studying God's Word, and without it, you will (most of the time) end up in La La land, wandering down the incorrect path.
 - And let me say, when you head down an incorrect path, then you lose the correct teaching and subsequent application for your life.
 - And in its place, you end up venturing down some road and establishing some doctrine or theology that is incorrect.
 - Which means, essentially, you lose the power contained in His Word.
- Now here is the sad part: if you attend a church, and the Pastor does not use a systematic approach to the scriptures, I assure you that he will at some point teach you something that is so way off base that it is ludicrous.
 - However, if you aren't grounded in the Word, then you won't know the difference, because a lot of it sounds quite good. Just as it does with Jesus Calling.
 - There is no better example of this than with the prosperity movement and its teachings on healing.
 - That's exactly what they do. The promoters and teachers of healing take scriptures completely out of context and contend that God wants to heal you.
 - But honestly, the verses they derive this from don't teach this at all!
 - As a matter of fact, when you stay in context, you will not find a single letter, book, or verse, or set of verses that teaches that concept.
 - How in the world could we have so many faith healers out there teaching that stuff, with people following them, if in fact, the Bible doesn't teach this!
 - It's because someone they respect taught them that doctrine, and then (because they weren't grounded in God's Word) they thought to themselves – This makes sense based on what the pastor taught, and before you know it, they themselves are teaching and espousing the same thing, and then of course the cycle continues.
- Does God heal? Yes, he does. Does he heal someone based on the level of their faith? No, He does not.
 - As a matter of fact, I would tell you if He did heal based on a certain level of faith, then I highly doubt anyone would be healed.
 - God's healing is based solely on His discretion, His plans, His purposes, and His will!
 - Which by the way, always aligns with His Glory, that's it, the end.
- Now, you might be sitting here today, or listening online, and say to yourself, Well, I don't believe you.
 - And I say, I am glad you don't believe me, because I don't want you to believe me.
 - I want you to study for yourself to find that these things might be true.
 - Don't just take my word for it. Begin studying God's Word today for yourself, and do it correctly, and see what you discover.

- I will say this: I can help you shortcut the topic of healing really quickly (that's if you're confused about it), and all it takes is a little logic, which is one of the rules of Hermeneutics.
 - Hermeneutics is a set of guidelines on how to interpret (not just the Bible) but any ancient document of antiquity
 - Logic is one of the rules, and here is my logic statement.
 - If healing is available for everyone, then why don't all people get healed?
 - And I know the proponents of this doctrine try and tie it back to faith.
 - Therefore, they might say, that is not the best Logical statement you can make
 - But what about this statement – It is a fact that 100% of people die.
- So based on that truth, you can know for sure that the prosperity concept of healing is not true, and what's funny about all of this is that the unbelieving world knows better than we do in these matters.
 - As they watch Christian men and women push these types of things, they just laugh because they know, logically speaking, that there is no way anyone gets permanently healed.
 - Because, as I said, all people die!
- So, I will digress on this topic only to say that if you want to know the truth, then study, study, study, and stay in context, and when you do, you will arrive at the correct doctrine.
 - Context is the Key!
- Moving on, and back to 1 Thessalonians.
 - Who wrote the Book? Paul
 - Who was it written to? The Church in Thessalonica
 - Why is the letter called Thessalonians? Because it was written to the people attending the church in Thessalonica, which is self-explanatory, I know. Still, you would be surprised at some of the theories I hear on this type of stuff.
 - Anyway, so where was Thessalonica? In “Northern Greece”
 - And where is it today? “Northern Greece”
 - As a matter of fact, it's the second largest city in Greece.
 - And what is the largest city in Greece? “Athens”
- So, why did Paul write the letter?
 - Same reason he wrote most of his letters.
 - Admonishment, lifting them up, exhortation, and correction as it relates to what they are being told – and how they are conducting themselves because of what they are being told, and so Paul does what he does.
 - Paul writes his letters to get them back on track, reminding them of the right way to look at things, doctrinally speaking.
 - Which then in turn, instructs the way they live.

- And the same is true for you and me. All we must do in studying God's Word correctly is to reach into the old and bring it into the new and then apply it to our everyday lives.
 - And that's my job as your Pastor, and that's your job as a believer as well!
- And when we do this, then we will experience what Paul says we should experience in [Romans 12:1-2](#), listen to what he says:

[Rom. 12:1](#) Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship.

[Rom. 12:2](#) And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

- Let me comment on this, folks.
 - Inside these two verses lies what is the crux of my ministry
 - And why?
 - Because we have never seen a time in human history where the world has gone so crazy, and that includes the church.
 - And why is the case?
 - Because everyone is confused, and the world doesn't know what it believes, and neither does the church.
 - People are clueless and confused on both sides of the aisle!
 - And you will find this to be the case, because, for the most part, for you to become a solid believer, you must have a basis/foundation for your belief system.
- Therefore, if you don't know God's Word, specifically, who He is, what He expects from us, and then even more specifically, who He is in His character, you will absolutely be confused!
 - This past week, I received a phone call from someone, and they said, I have a question?
 - This individual said, If I do Yoga, am I worshipping Satan?
 - Now, at first, you might think to yourself, my word, what a silly question.
 - But it's not if you don't have a super solid foundation in the Bible.
 - And so, essentially, my answer was: What does the Bible say? Does it say that Yoga is Satanic?
 - She said, I don't think so.
 - I said that no, it doesn't, but why did you ask me that question?
 - She said, because I was in a Holistic Medicine Store this past week, and the lady told

me that if I do Yoga, I would essentially be worshipping the Devil.

- I said, and I am paraphrasing here for a moment, okay, why did she say that?
- I said, Is Yoga demonic in its origin?
 - She said I don't know.
- I said, Is Halloween demonic in its origin?
 - She said, I am not sure.
- I said, yes, it is! I also said, When I was a kid and I dressed up like Batman and went door-knocking for candy, neither my mom, nor dad, nor anyone for that matter, ever said to me,
- Hey, guess what, little boy? Do you know what you are doing is demonic? Nor did they say that I was somehow worshipping Satan.
- The topic of Halloween has been met with a whole lot of controversy throughout the years.
 - And yes, it began as a Pagan holiday, so did Christmas and Easter.
 - Uhhh O!!! Now what do we do? Houston, we have a problem!
 - Well, let's say, for discussion purposes, that Yoga originated in some Pagan ritual over 1000 years ago, and let's say you do it every day. But when you do it, you never have a single thought in your head about Satan. Nor does the instructor ever teach anything about Satan or teach anything about a higher power other than God and Jesus.
 - You aren't thinking about any of that; all you are trying to do is become a healthier Christian man or woman as you live out your life on this earth.
 - So, you just show up, stretch and meditate, calm your mind for an hour or so,
 - Do I think that you are worshipping Satan? NO!
 - In everything we do, it all boils down to the heart.
 - It's always a heart issue, and God knows the heart.
 - And the same applies to Halloween, Christmas, and Easter.
- If you are doing it for the right reasons, then God knows that. So quit trying to live by the Law, because it makes you appear to be a Jewish Counterfeit.
 - We live under Grace, not under rules.
 - The rules guide us so that we can please our Father in heaven, but they are not there just to be checked off, so we can say, 'I am following all the rules.' Look how righteous and Holy I have become.
 - The whole reason Jesus came and died was to fulfill the Law, because not one single Christian follows all the rules.
- So, I said to the lady who called me, Let's say, for discussion purposes, Yoga did originate with some kind of Pagan worship ritual, or, let's say, the hard-core Yoga people teach Satanic principles of some sort.
 - Then don't do that part, or find something else to do.

- Maybe CrossFit, which I will tell you, I do believe that is Satanic because I tried it one time, and I believe it's designed to seek, kill, and destroy.
 - Anyway, I personally have done Yoga, and it is amazing for your health.
 - So, take all the good out of it, meditate on God during meditation, and get to doing those downward dog poses.
- Once again, as I said, everyone is confused, and it's all because we don't have a foundation in "Absolute Truth".
 - And there is only one "Absolute Truth", and that comes from "the Creator" of the Universe.
 - Back to what Paul said in [Romans 12:1-2](#). In my translation, Paul begins verse 1 by saying:

[Rom. 12:1](#) Therefore "I urge you", brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship.

[Rom. 12:2](#) And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

- My translation says, "I urge you".
 - But in the Greek, it says, I exhort you. The definition being "to call to or for, to exhort, to encourage".
 - Renewing your mind daily can mean replacing unhealthy thought patterns with godly ones.
 - And here are some tips for renewing your mind:
 - Study the Bible – Read the Bible and meditate on verses that address issues you are struggling with.
 - Identify thoughts that don't align with scripture – Notice when you have thoughts that don't align with scripture and choose not to keep thinking them.
 - Write down verses – Write down verses that address issues you are struggling with and put them in places where you'll see them every day.
 - Listen to a podcast – Listen to a podcast like Renewing Your Mind by Ligonier Ministries, which provides Bible teaching and helps Christians understand God.
 - Journal – Journal about what God shows you and then submit those areas of your life to the truth of scripture.
 - The key to all of this lies in your ability to study scripture correctly, in context, and then begin applying what you have read to your everyday life.
 - And I know I keep driving this home, but it is so important, because it's the difference in you struggling in confusion your whole life versus arriving at a "peace that passes all understanding".

- So, back to 1 Thessalonians – where I will back up and re-read verses 1&2 from last week, and then press into the next set of verses. [1 Thessalonians 1:1-1](#) is titled *Thanksgiving for These Believers*

[1 Thess. 1:1](#) Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.

[1 Thess. 1:2](#) We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention *of you* in our prayers;

[1 Thess. 1:3](#) constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father,

[1 Thess. 1:4](#) knowing, brethren beloved by God, *His* choice of you;

[1 Thess. 1:5](#) for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

[1 Thess. 1:6](#) You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit,

[1 Thess. 1:7](#) so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.

[1 Thess. 1:8](#) For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything.

[1 Thess. 1:9](#) For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God,

[1 Thess. 1:10](#) and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *that is* Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.

- Now, in this epistle, there is evidence that Paul has conflicting emotions regarding the new church in Thessalonica.
 - On the one hand, he was joyful and satisfied with what God had accomplished.
 - On the other hand, he felt concern about the perils in which the new Christians lived.
 - This letter differs from most of Paul's others in that it does not deal primarily with a doctrinal issue or a departure in belief or behavior.
 - While the teaching on the Rapture of the church is a doctrinal contribution, Paul did not write primarily to expound on that truth or to defend it.
 - He was simply clarifying the events that he had previously taught the Thessalonians.
 - This new revelation was, in a sense, secondary to Paul's argument.
- Nevertheless, the Lord's return was prominent in Paul's mind from the beginning to the end of this letter.
 - As a matter of fact, he referred to it in every chapter. Paul wrote this epistle primarily

to comfort and encourage those who were suffering for their Lord.

- Their hope was an essential emphasis in view of this purpose (cf. 1 Pet.), and both Thessalonian epistles are very pastoral.
- The epistle deals with the hope of the Lord's return, specifically as it relates to Christian experience.
- So, Paul began this letter with a greeting (as he often does), and he mentions his running companions, Timothy and Silvanus – and Silvanus is also Silas
 - Silvanus is the Roman Latin form of Silas
 - And as we know, these two men spent a lot of time with Paul in his travels and various other experiences, such as being beaten and imprisoned.
 - So, you could say that they were pretty close to one another.
- Anyways, Paul extends his greetings, where he says Grace and Peace be with them (which we touched on last week), and then he mentions how he gives thanks for them always making mentioning of them in his prayers. Next, he says:

1 Thess. 1:3 constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father,

1 Thess. 1:4 knowing, brethren beloved by God, *His* choice of you;

- Paul says that he constantly bears in mind their work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God the Father.
 - In verses 3&4, Paul paints a picture of what we are supposed to be.
 - He identifies these people as those who have been working diligently in their faith, and he calls what they do a labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.
 - The sense here is that they are putting forth the effort!
 - Taking their faith seriously
- So, the question for all of us sitting here today is, are we doing the same?
 - Another way to say it is that if Jesus were to comment on our faith, would He say the same about us?
 - Are we taking our faith seriously, or are we simply going through the motions?
- Let me say something on this topic. Paul often speaks in athletic and military terms, and he is always encouraging believers to stay focused.
 - To keep their eye on the prize.
 - Don't quit running the race.
 - And this is so important because throughout my Christian life, I have encountered so many Christian men and women who ran the race for a long time, but eventually, they gave up.

- So, when Paul speaks about their dedication, it's a big deal because this life has a way of always dangling the shiny things in this world in our faces, all to distract us. What's even more concerning about all of this is how parents often succumb to these pressures, and, for example, they put other stuff in front of God.
 - In other words, they allow other things in this life to take precedent over God.
 - Especially, as I said, when it comes to their children.
- I am not going to head down this road too much, other than to say, you get one shot at making an impression on your children, and if you don't do anything else right in this life, don't allow other things to take *precedence* over your children's personal development, as it relates to God.
- It's so easy to do, because there is always something trying to pull you away and keep you out of church.
 - Paul commends the Thessalonians on their dedication, and then he reminds them in verse 4, how God chose them, where once again, he says:

1 Thess. 1:4 knowing, brethren beloved by God, *His* choice of you;

- If you are a believer, then you need to know that God chose you to be one of His children.
 - And our mindsight around this thought is very important because so many times we look at it (subconsciously) as if we choose Him.
 - But that is not the case; God chose us before the foundation of the earth, and He knew us before he formed us in our mother's womb.
 - Paul's point is that what a privilege it is to be called one of God's.
 - That He chose us, and that should affect our level of commitment to the calling by which we have been called.
 - Next, he says:

1 Thess. 1:5 for our gospel did not come to you *in word* only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

- Another way to say what Paul just said is that our life speaks to what we say we believe.
 - Our life testifies to our faith; we aren't just giving you lip service.
 - Which begs the question – Would those around you, in your everyday life, say the same about you?
- Do you give a lot of lip service, or do you live it out in deed and not just in word only?
 - And then finally, we will close with this, in verse 6-8:

[1 Thess. 1:6](#) You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit,

[1 Thess. 1:7](#) so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.

[1 Thess. 1:8](#) For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything.

- There is one thing that I want you to see in these verses, and it will speak to the heart of why I continually harp on knowing and understanding your Bible.
 - Notice the repeating emphasis on God's Word.
 - Verse 6 – they received the Word, and they did so in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit.
 - All so that as they developed through the Word, they then, because of who they had become, that became “a witness.”
 - To all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.
 - And then in verse 8, he finishes by expounding on how it was the Word of the Lord that had sounded forth from them.
 - And it had done so in a way that it left Paul speechless, as it related to the outward working of their faith.
 - As he says at the end of verse 8: "but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything."
- The concept put forth is this: Once you get filled up with God, through the ingestion of His Word, then the by-product of your actions will be that your life will become a living testimony.
 - That's the concept, and that's why I continually drive home this point
 - So, as we close, ask yourself the question – Does this accurately describe you?
 - Are you feeding on God's Word so much that it is changing you from the inside out?
 - Or not so much?
 - If not, I say change it and begin today doing what is required of you as a believer.
 - Amen - Amen