

Paul Commends the Thessalonian Believers

1 Thessalonians 1:8-10

1 Thessalonians 1:8-10 - *“For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything.⁹ For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,¹⁰ and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.”*

Background Notes

The church at Thessalonica was composed of both Jews and Gentiles. Many of the Gentiles had formerly been involved in the pagan Greek and Roman religions, but they had trusted in Jesus Christ and were now part of the local church. *“You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (v9)*. That comment would not have applied to Jews or to devout Gentiles, because they would not have previously been involved in idolatry. So converted pagans were part of the church at Thessalonica.

The church at Thessalonica included Jewish believers as well. When Paul came to Thessalonica on his second missionary journey, he went into the synagogue to preach, and some of the Jews believed in Jesus as their Messiah (Christ) and Savior. Acts 17:2-4: *“Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.” And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas.”*

The *“devout Greeks”* were God-fearing Gentiles who did not follow the Greek and Roman polytheistic religions. They realized that there was only one true God, and that one true God was the God of the Jews. The God-fearing Gentiles would have attended the synagogue, and there they heard Paul’s message. The Jews who were saved and the devout Greeks who were saved were also part of the church at Thessalonica.

Acts 17:2 reveals that Paul reasoned with the Jews in the synagogue for three Sabbaths. Only three weeks - that’s not a long time. Was the church in Thessalonica founded in just three weeks? Well, most commentators believe that Paul’s stay in Thessalonica was longer than three weeks - maybe as long as three months - but that Paul taught in the synagogue on only three Sabbaths. The rest of the time he spent preaching in public areas, such as the *agora*, or the marketplace. And that’s where the pagan Gentiles heard the message of Jesus, and turned from idols to serving the true God.

But the point I want to make here is this: even if Paul's stay in Thessalonica was only three months, it's amazing how much he was able to teach them in such a relatively short time! Paul moved quickly from the "milk" of the Word to the "meat" of the Word, as we will see from the rest of the content of his letters to the Thessalonians.

We need to follow Paul's example. "Baby Christians" certainly need "milk" - but we shouldn't keep them in diapers forever! Move them on! Follow Paul's example, and start feeding them the "meat" of the Word early. You will be amazed at how much new Christians can learn in a short time. Remember – the Holy Spirit is at work in their hearts and minds, enabling them to learn and grow strong in faith and knowledge!

I tell my students at Emmaus Bible College that if they *really* want to learn the Word of God, they will be amazed at how much they can take in, just in one short school year.

Doctrinal Points

1. The phrase *"to wait for His Son from heaven"* implies the Lord's imminent return for His Church.

In verse 10, the apostle Paul said that the Thessalonian believers were to "wait for God's Son from Heaven." They were to wait patiently - but expectantly! The Lord arose from the dead and ascended into Heaven, and from there He will return - so we should wait expectantly for Him.

This verse certainly sounds like Paul believed that the Lord Jesus could come back at any time. It doesn't sound like Paul thought that the Lord's return would occur thousands of years in the future – or he wouldn't have told the Thessalonian believers to wait expectantly for the Lord's return! So we believe that Paul's phrase "to wait for His Son from Heaven" implies the Lord's *imminent* return for His Church. Paul expected that the Lord could return during his lifetime.

If we say that a future event is "imminent," we mean that it could happen at any time. We don't mean that the event *will* take place in the near future – we mean that it *could* take place in the near future. The fact that the Lord has still not returned for His Church, even though 2000 years have gone by, does not detract from Paul's encouragement to the Thessalonian believers. They were to wait expectantly for the Lord's return – and so are we!

If this was the only verse in the Bible on the subject of the Lord's return for His Church, we could not be so bold as to draw the implication of an imminent return. But it's not the only verse in the Bible on this subject! In fact, in 1 Thessalonians 4, we believe the imminent return of the Lord for His Church is explicitly taught - not just implied.

The Lord's return for His Church is still imminent. Obviously it's nearer now than ever before – and maybe it will be this year! There are no prophecies that must be fulfilled before the Lord returns. The fact that we see Bible prophecy being fulfilled in the Jewish people and in the land of Israel only emphasizes that the Lord's return for His Church is that much closer.

Are you waiting expectantly for the Lord's return? Here's a good idea. Every morning when you get up, say expectantly, "Maybe the Lord will return today!" That would help us stay focused on the imminent return of the Lord for His people. Remember, the phrase "to wait for His Son from heaven" implies the *imminent* return for His Church.

2. The phrase "*who delivers us from the wrath to come*" implies the Lord's safe removal of His Church.

Verse 10: "*To wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.*" What is the "*wrath to come*" from which Jesus will deliver us? Certainly Jesus has delivered His people from the wrath of God's judgment against sin. Unbelievers will face God's wrath at the end of the age.

However, I believe Paul was thinking here of *all* the wrath of God, including the wrath of God during the Tribulation period. The Bible speaks about a time of Tribulation that is to come upon the earth in the future. In this world, there has always been tribulation, and throughout history believers have experienced tribulation. But that kind of trouble is not the same as *the* Tribulation. The Tribulation is not just a time of trouble or trial. It's a time of God's wrath on this world.

The Lord Jesus spoke of this time period in Matthew 24:21-22: "*For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened.*" Obviously this time is still in the future. It is known not only as "the Tribulation," but also as "the time of Jacob's Trouble" (Jeremiah 30). We believe it will be a seven-year period, based on the prophecy of Daniel 9. During this future seven-year Tribulation period God's wrath will be poured out on this world. The evil and corruption in this world will not go unjudged.

It is our belief that the Church (composed of all true believers in Christ) will be delivered - not only from the wrath of God against sin in the final judgment, but also the wrath of God during the Tribulation period. It is our belief that, before the Tribulation begins, the Church will be safely removed from this earth. The Lord will come for His people. This event is often called the "Rapture" - a term that's derived from 1 Thessalonians 4. Thus the Church will be delivered from this wrath of God during the Tribulation period.

Here are two reasons why I favor this implication.

a. The content of both 1 & 2 Thessalonians indicates that Paul included teaching about the return of the Lord in his relatively short time in Thessalonica.

Call it "Eschatology 101." We know Paul talked about "the Day of the Lord," and the Tribulation is part of "the Day of the Lord." Paul would have taught from both the Old Testament Scriptures and the teachings of our Lord Himself.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:9, in the context of his discussion of the Day of the Lord, Paul said, *“For God did not appoint us to wrath.”* In other words, since the context of that chapter has to do with events associated with the Day of the Lord, most likely the *“wrath”* of verse 9 refers to **all** wrath of God, including the wrath of God on this evil world during the Tribulation period. So most likely in 1 Thessalonians 1:10, **all** wrath of God is in view – including the Tribulation period, and not just the final wrath of God upon the sin of the unbelievers.

b. The phrase is “who delivers us,” not “who delivered us” from the wrath of God.

This phrase is in the **present tense**, not the past tense (as in some Bible translations). Here’s the point: we have **already been delivered** or rescued from hell and from the wrath of God against sin in the final judgment when we trusted Christ. If Paul were speaking only of the wrath of God against sin in the final judgment, we would expect him to have used the past tense. But he used the present tense. This implies our rescue and removal from *“the wrath to come”* in the coming Tribulation period.

Once again, this verse alone would not be sufficient to prove the safe removal of the Church at the coming of the Lord. But the Lord’s return will be discussed further during our studies in Thessalonians. Remember our doctrinal point: **The phrase “who delivers us from the wrath to come” implies the Lord’s safe removal of His Church.**

Practical Application

Do we evangelize - or just witness?

What’s the difference? We can be a good *witness* by just living a godly life. But to *evangelize*, we must communicate the gospel. And we are commanded to evangelize!

Verses 7-8: *“So that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything.”* The Thessalonian believers were not only good examples and a good witness – they also evangelized! They communicated the gospel so well that Paul said that there was nothing left for him to say. They had evangelized!

What about us? Do our neighbors and our fellow students and our colleagues at work see our godly lifestyle as a good witness? If so, that’s good. But have they actually heard the gospel? That’s our responsibility.

Do we evangelize - or just witness?