

The Many Faces of the Gospel

1 Thessalonians 1:6–10

Small Group Bible Study Series

Source: Dr. C Norman Sellers · SellersBibleInstitute.com

① THE TEXT	② DEVOTIONAL	③ COMMENTARY	④ SELF-STUDY GUIDE
Foundation	Personal prep	Leader / Teacher	Group together
Everyone	All group members	Teacher / Leader	Small group

*Commentary Mode A — Sermon-Based · Free Grace / GES theology follows the sermon's own framing throughout
Additional resourcing drawn from the Free Grace & DTS-Aligned Resource Library (FGR)*

① THE BIBLICAL TEXT

NKJV · Read together before the study begins

6 And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit,

7 so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.

8 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.

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② DEVOTIONAL

Heart preparation · Read on your own in the days before your group meets

“Joy is rooted in God, and it can grow in a climate happiness could never survive.”

There's a version of ourselves we become when someone worth following is watching us closely. Paul says the Thessalonians became imitators — of him, and through him, of the Lord — in the space of a few short, difficult weeks. They didn't have years to get it right. What they had was a life put on display in front of them, and something in them wanted what that life had. Before you open your Bible this week, ask God who has been that kind of life for you, and who might be watching yours the same way.

They received the word “in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit.” Not joy instead of affliction — joy inside it. If this week has been hard, that's not evidence that something has gone wrong in your walk with God. The Thessalonians' hardest days and their most genuine joy arrived at the same door, in the same season. Let that be permission, this week, to bring both to God honestly: the affliction and the joy, without pretending either one away.

And they turned to God from idols, not to earn His favor, but because they already had it — a living, true God had captured hearts once given to lifeless things. As you prepare your heart, spend a few minutes simply naming what has quietly competed for first place in your affections lately. You don't have to fix it before you come to the group. You only have to turn, again, toward the God who is already living and already true.

Reflect

1. Whose life has shaped the way you follow Christ, and have you told them?
2. Where have you experienced joy and affliction together, rather than joy after affliction ended?
3. What is one thing right now that quietly competes with God for your devotion?

Lord, thank You for a joy that doesn't wait for easier days.

③ COMMENTARY

Teacher preparation resource · Full text organized under outline headings

PROPOSITION: This passage teaches that the gospel, once truly received, becomes visible in a transformed life, unstoppable in its spread, and certain in its future hope — leaving no room for a merely private, silent, or present-tense faith.

Introduction

Every family has a story they tell about themselves — the version of events that gets repeated at reunions, the shorthand that explains who they are. Paul had a story like that about the church at Thessalonica, and he tells it in the opening verses of this letter. He does not begin by correcting them, or by defending his ministry against critics, though he will do both of those things later. He begins by rehearsing what God has already done among them, and what God has done is remarkable for a church that was perhaps only a few months old.

Paul had preached in Thessalonica for what may have been as little as three or four weeks before opposition drove him out of town. A church born under that kind of pressure might be expected to be fragile, uncertain, still finding its footing. Instead, Paul writes as though this infant congregation had already become a landmark — a church whose reputation had outrun Paul himself, so that when he arrived in other cities, people had already heard about Thessalonica before Paul said a word.

In these five verses, Paul shows us the gospel from three angles — three faces of the same reality. He shows us the gospel in person — what happens when the message takes hold of a life and reshapes it into someone worth imitating. He shows us the gospel in proclamation — what happens when a transformed life cannot stay quiet, and the message spreads on its own momentum. And he shows us the gospel in prospect — what happens when the gospel points forward, past this life, to a coming Christ who will rapture, raise, and rescue His people.

Before we look at the text, it's worth remembering what a young church this was. Paul, Silas, and Timothy had arrived in Thessalonica on the second missionary journey, reasoned in the synagogue for perhaps three Sabbaths, and then been forced out by a riot. There was no years-long discipleship program behind these believers — there was a handful of weeks of teaching, followed almost immediately by suffering. And yet everything Paul says in these verses describes a church that any pastor would be thrilled to plant today. That should encourage every one of us who feels like our faith is still young, or untested, or unfinished. God does not wait for maturity before He produces something worth celebrating.

Let's look at all three.

I. The Gospel in Person — 1:6–7

A. What They Determined — 1:6

“And you became followers of me and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit.”

1. They Followed Paul

The word translated “followers” is the Greek word *mimētai* — it’s the word from which we get our English words *mimic* and *imitate*. It’s a striking thing for Paul to say. He doesn’t say the Thessalonians agreed with him, or admired him, or appreciated his teaching. He says they imitated him — they patterned their lives after his.

That word only makes sense if Paul had something worth imitating. And he did. Paul had come to the settled conviction that defined everything else about his life: “For to me, to live is Christ.” That wasn’t a slogan Paul coined for effect — it was the operating principle behind every decision he made, every mile he traveled, every beating he endured. The Thessalonians hadn’t just listened to Paul teach a doctrine about Christ. They had watched a man live it, and something in them said, I want that. Whatever that is, I want it.

Think about how few weeks Paul actually had with this church. He didn’t have time to build a curriculum. What he had was a life on display — the way he worked with his hands so as not to burden them, the way he handled opposition, the way he prayed. Discipleship, in the end, is caught as much as it is taught. That’s a sobering thought for those of us who lead others, whether from a pulpit, at a kitchen table, or across a desk at work. Somebody, right now, may be imitating you without your knowledge — patterning a marriage, a work ethic, a response to hardship, after whatever they’ve watched in you. The question worth asking is simple: if someone imitated exactly what they’ve seen in me this year, would it draw them nearer to Christ, or further away?

2. Following Paul Was Following the Lord

But Paul is quick to correct any impression that the Thessalonians had simply attached themselves to a compelling personality. He adds, “and of the Lord.” Following Paul and following the Lord were, in practice, the same thing — because Paul had ordered his own life around making Christ visible.

That’s what Jesus does for us. The writer of Hebrews says the Son is “the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person” (Hebrews 1:3) — not a reflection at a distance, but the exact representation of who the Father is. Paul told the Philippians that Christ, “being in the form of God,” did not consider equality with God something to cling to (Philippians 2:6). And Jesus Himself told Philip, “If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father” (John 14:9). Jesus came to make an invisible God visible. Paul, in a much smaller and derivative way, was trying to do the same thing — to make an ascended Christ visible to a church that would never see Him face to face until the

resurrection. When the Thessalonians imitated Paul, they weren't settling for a substitute. They were following the trail Paul himself was following.

This is why Paul can say elsewhere, without embarrassment, "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). That statement only works if the chain of imitation always terminates in Christ Himself. Paul never wanted followers who stopped at Paul. He wanted followers who used Paul as a signpost, the way a person on an unfamiliar road uses a marker to know they are headed the right direction — useful, necessary even, but never the destination.

3. Following Paul Brought Persecution

Paul doesn't romanticize what this cost them. He says they received the word "in much affliction." This wasn't Paul's first experience of opposition — he had already been stoned and left for dead in Lystra, and driven out of Antioch in Pisidia before he ever arrived in Macedonia. But the Thessalonians would have known his sufferings closer to home — what happened in Philippi, where he and Silas were beaten and jailed, and what happened right there in their own city, where a mob stormed the house of a man named Jason looking for Paul, and the believers had to send him out of town under cover of night to protect the church that remained.

That is the environment in which this church was born. Not comfort. Not curiosity. Affliction. And they received the word anyway.

It's worth pausing on that word "received." It's not a passive word — it describes a deliberate welcome, the way you'd receive a guest at your door. The Thessalonians didn't stumble into affliction by accident of geography. They opened the door to the word knowing full well what answering it would cost them, because they had watched what it had already cost Paul. That's a far cry from the version of Christianity that expects the gospel to make life easier. For the earliest church, receiving the word and receiving affliction arrived at the same door, in the same moment, and they welcomed both.

4. The Persecution Was Eclipsed by Joy of the Holy Spirit

Here is the detail that should stop us: Paul says they received the word in much affliction, "with joy of the Holy Spirit." Not joy despite the affliction, and not joy that ignored the affliction — joy that came from the Holy Spirit precisely inside the affliction.

We tend to think joy is the fruit of good circumstances. But joy is the second quality Paul lists in the fruit of the Spirit — love, joy, peace (Galatians 5:22) — and fruit doesn't depend on the weather. Happiness depends on what happens to you. Joy is rooted in God, and it can grow in a climate happiness could never survive.

Here is one way to test which one you're experiencing: ask, "Was God glorified in this?" If the honest answer is yes, you have the joy of the Holy Spirit, whatever the circumstance cost you. And if the outcome is still unclear, but you know you were walking in obedience to the Lord, you still

have that same joy — because the joy was never contingent on knowing how the story ends. It was contingent on whose Spirit produced it.

Charles Swindoll has spent decades teaching believers that grace is meant to be lived, not merely believed — and this is exactly what that looks like on the ground. A grace-shaped life doesn't demand that circumstances cooperate before joy is allowed to show up. The Thessalonians hadn't earned an easier road by believing correctly. They had been given something better than an easier road: a Spirit-produced joy that didn't need the road to change in order to be real.

B. What They Demonstrated — 1:7

“...so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.”

Because of this, Paul says, they became examples — the word is *typon* — the word that gives us our English “type,” and it carries the sense of a pattern, a mold, a model stamped out and reproduced. The Thessalonians had imitated Paul, and now they had become something worth imitating themselves.

Notice the chain this creates. Paul modeled Christ. The Thessalonians imitated Paul and, in doing so, followed Christ. Now believers throughout Macedonia and Achaia were watching the Thessalonians. Some of those believers would eventually hear about Paul and trace the pattern back to its source, and ultimately every one of them would see that the real supreme example, all along, was Jesus Himself.

That is how discipleship is meant to work. New believers almost always need a visible, nearby example before an invisible, ascended Christ becomes real to them. That is not a weakness in the system — it is how God designed it. But a human example that stops at itself has failed. A human example is only doing its job when it points people past itself, to Christ.

Notice, too, how quickly this happened. Paul was only in Thessalonica a matter of weeks, yet by the time he writes this letter — likely just months later — the Thessalonians are already a byword throughout two provinces. Spiritual influence is not primarily a function of tenure. A church, or a believer, doesn't need decades of history to become a pattern worth following. What it needs is genuineness — a faith received in real affliction, and joy that is unmistakably not self-generated. That kind of authenticity travels fast, because people are always hungry for something real.

II. The Gospel in Proclamation — 1:8–9

A. The Realm of Their Witness — 1:8a

“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.”

The verb behind “sounded forth” is *exēchētai* — related to our English word echo. An echo doesn't compose a new message. It repeats, faithfully, whatever it received, and it carries that message to places the original voice could never reach on its own. That is exactly what had happened. Paul had spoken the gospel in Thessalonica for a matter of weeks. The Thessalonians had gone on speaking it — echoing it — long after Paul left town, into places Paul himself had not yet visited.

There's a comfort hidden in that image for anyone who has ever felt like their witness was small or insignificant. An echo doesn't need to be louder than the original sound to carry it further. It only needs to be faithful to it. The Thessalonians weren't trained apologists. They were new believers repeating, in ordinary conversations with neighbors and trading partners, what had happened to them. And an entire region heard the gospel because of it.

B. The Reach of Their Witness — 1:8b–9a

Paul traces the geography for us. First, all of Greece — Macedonia, the northern province where Thessalonica sat alongside Philippi, Amphipolis, Apollonia, and Berea; and Achaia to the south, home to Corinth. Then he goes further: “but also in every place.”

That reach wasn't an accident of enthusiasm. Thessalonica sat on the Via Egnatia, the great Roman road connecting East and West, and it had a busy harbor besides. It was, quite literally, a crossroads of the empire — by land and by sea. Whatever word left Thessalonica had a built-in distribution network. And Paul, writing this letter from Corinth, another crossroads city, was living proof: by the time he arrived there, people already knew what had happened in Thessalonica. He says it plainly — “we do not need to say anything. For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you.” Paul didn't have to introduce himself in Corinth. The Thessalonians' testimony had gotten there first.

God is not limited to strategic geography to spread His word, but He often uses it anyway. He placed this young, afflicted church in a city built for traffic and trade, and then let ordinary commerce carry the gospel further than any planned missionary strategy could have. It's worth asking where God has placed us — what crossroads, what routine intersections of daily life, He might intend to use the same way. A workplace, a neighborhood, a group chat. The Thessalonians didn't need a stage. They needed a location God had already given them, and a testimony worth repeating in it.

C. The Results of Their Witness — 1:9b

“...and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.”

Notice the order carefully — Paul does not say they turned from idols to God. He says they turned to God, from idols. The turning was fundamentally a turning toward — toward a God who is living, in contrast to idols that are lifeless; toward a God who is true, in contrast to idols that are false. The turning from was simply what necessarily happened once they had turned to Him. You cannot

serve two masters, so turning toward the true and living God meant walking away from everything that had claimed that place before Him.

This is a verse worth slowing down on, because it gets misread often. Some read only the first half — “you turned to God from idols” — and conclude that turning from idol worship was the condition the Thessalonians had to meet in order to be saved. But look at where the verse actually ends: they turned to God from idols “to serve the living and true God.” Serving God is the language of discipleship, not the language of receiving eternal life. Turning from idols and serving the true God are the fruit of what had already happened in them — not requirements they met beforehand to make salvation happen.

This distinction matters more than it might seem. Scripture is emphatic that eternal life is received the moment a person believes in Christ — a settled, permanent, unconditional gift, not something earned by first cleaning up an idolatrous life and then qualifying for grace. If turning from every idol were a precondition of salvation, no one still wrestling with an idol in their heart could ever have assurance they were saved. But the Thessalonians didn't turn from idols to be saved. They turned from idols because they had been saved — because a living God had captured hearts that used to be given to dead ones, and serving Him was simply what a rescued heart now wanted to do. The Thessalonians were disciples indeed — and that discipleship, not the gift of eternal life itself, is what was on display for all of Macedonia and Achaia to see.

Free Grace scholars have made exactly this point when working through passages that, on the surface, seem to fold works into the requirement for salvation. Zane Hodges spent much of his writing life pressing believers to look carefully at what a text actually requires for eternal life versus what it describes as the fruit that follows it, and 1 Thessalonians 1:9 is a clean example of the pattern. The verse describes a turning to God that results in service. It never says service to God is what earned entry into His family. Confusing description with condition is one of the easiest ways to load a burden onto new believers that the text itself never placed there — and it's worth being careful, in our own teaching and our own self-examination, not to make that same mistake.¹

III. The Gospel in Prospect — 1:10

“...to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.”

Paul closes this description of the Thessalonians with a single, dense sentence, describing what they were now waiting for. Three words summarize it: Rapture, Resurrection, Rescue.

A. Rapture — 1:10a

“To wait for His Son, Jesus, from heaven.” This is the Son of the same living and true God they had just turned to serve. He is coming back for His church, and the striking thing about this coming is what's absent from it — there's no sign attached.

Throughout the Old Testament, when God promised Israel deliverance, He typically attached a sign, so the nation could recognize when deliverance was near. The nation's leaders usually ignored the signs; the believing remnant watched for them. When Christ returns to the earth in the Second Coming, He gives signs for that event too — that is what Matthew 24 is about. But the church is not Israel, and the Rapture is not the Second Coming. Jesus told His disciples in the upper room, “I am going away, and if I go away, I am coming again to receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:3). No signs. Just a promise to get ready and stay ready.

So why do we keep hearing that the Rapture is near? Here is a picture: when Christmas decorations start appearing in mid-November, that tells you Thanksgiving is close — not because the decorations are about Thanksgiving, but because Thanksgiving always comes before Christmas. In the same way, when we start seeing the signs that Scripture attaches to the Second Coming of Christ to the earth, that tells us the Rapture of the church is close — not because the Rapture itself has a sign, but because the Rapture always comes before the Second Coming. The Thessalonians weren't waiting on a signal. They were simply waiting.

This is the same pretribulational hope John F. Hart and other DTS-trained scholars have devoted careful exegetical attention to defending — not because the timing of the Rapture is a peripheral curiosity, but because a signless, any-moment expectation changes how a believer lives every single day. If the Thessalonians had believed they first had to watch for tribulation-era signs before Christ could come for them, this letter would read very differently. Instead, Paul commends a church already living in expectant readiness, and that posture — not signs, but soberness and hope — is what he goes on to instruct them toward later in this same letter.²

B. Resurrection — 1:10b

“Whom He raised from the dead.” The One who is coming for the church is the same One who left the earth by way of the empty tomb and the ascension recorded in Acts 1. This is Paul's proof, in miniature, that the “living God” he mentioned back in verse 9 truly is living — not living in some abstract theological sense, but living because death itself could not hold Him.

Every other hope in this passage rests on this one historical fact. If Christ had not been raised, there would be no Son to wait for, no living God to serve, no rescue from wrath to anticipate — the whole structure of verses 9 and 10 would collapse into wishful thinking. But because He was raised, everything else Paul says here is not aspiration. It's inheritance. The resurrection is the hinge the entire hope of this passage swings on.

C. Rescue — 1:10c

“Who will deliver us from the wrath to come.” The verb “delivers” — *rhymenon* — is in the present tense, but it functions here as a future, much the way Jesus speaks in John 14:1–3 of a coming He has not yet accomplished but treats as certain. This wrath is not hell, and it is not some vague eternal judgment. In its usage here, it refers to a specific, earthly, temporal outpouring of wrath — what Scripture elsewhere calls the tribulation. The Thessalonians were not simply waiting for heaven someday. They were waiting for a Person who would come, before that specific period of wrath, and remove them from its path entirely.

Conclusion

Three faces of one gospel. The gospel in person — a message that took hold of ordinary people in Thessalonica so completely that their lives became worth copying, the way Paul's life had been worth copying, the way Christ's life is always worth copying. The gospel in proclamation — a message that would not stay contained in one city, but echoed outward along the roads and the sea-lanes until Paul, arriving in a different city entirely, found his own introduction had already been made for him. And the gospel in prospect — a message that does not end with this life, but looks forward to a Son from heaven who will rapture His church without warning, raise them by the same power that emptied His own tomb, and rescue them from a wrath they will never have to face.

Here is the question this passage leaves for us. Paul could describe the Thessalonians this way because there was something visibly, unmistakably true about them — a life reshaped, a testimony that traveled, a hope that reoriented everything else. Could Paul write this about us? Not could we behave better, or try harder — but is there a living hope in us that other people can trace, the way Corinth could trace a testimony all the way back to a small, afflicted church in Thessalonica?

Maybe this morning you're not sure where you stand in any of this. Maybe the gospel in person has never actually taken hold — you've heard about Christ, but you've never turned to Him the way the Thessalonians turned from their idols to the living and true God. That turning starts with a single, simple act of faith in what Christ has already done, not with cleaning up a life first. And maybe you're already His, but the proclamation part has gone quiet — the echo has faded because it's been a long time since anyone heard your testimony repeated out loud. Or maybe you needed, this morning, to be reminded that the prospect is real: that a Son from heaven, already proven alive by an empty tomb, is coming for His church before the wrath that is coming for this world, and there is no reason to be afraid of what's next.

The gospel that saved the Thessalonians is the same gospel that has saved you — a gift, received by faith, in a living and true God. What is left is simply this: to let that gift do what it did there. To live it, so it becomes worth imitating. To speak it, so it echoes past us. And to wait for it, because the One who is coming is coming soon.

Lord, thank You.

④ SELF-STUDY GUIDE

For use during the group meeting · Focused on the commentary text

Greek Word Study

Grammatical parsing source: Blue Letter Bible. Sources cited selectively below — only those that most clearly establish each word's meaning and significance are named; none are mandatory for every word.

Verse	Greek Word / English	Strong's # · Translit. · Form	Definition & Significance
v.6	μιμηταί (mimētai) <i>followers / imitators</i>	G3402 · mimētēs · Nom. Pl. Masc. (predicate noun)	Strong's: one who mimics or copies a pattern — root of English “mimic.” Significance: Discipleship begins as reproduction of a visible life before it becomes personal conviction — Paul expected to be copied, not merely admired.
v.6	θλίψει (thlípsei) <i>affliction</i>	G2347 · thlipsis · Dat. Sg. Fem. (dative of circumstance)	Thayer's: pressure, distress, the crushing weight of hostile circumstances — a stronger term than mere inconvenience. Significance: The word never disappears once a believer turns to Christ; it is the ordinary weather of gospel obedience, not a sign of divine displeasure.
v.6	χαρᾶς πνεύματος ἁγίου (charâs pneûmatos hagíou) <i>joy of the Holy Spirit</i>	G5479 / G4151 · chara · pneuma · Gen. Sg. Fem. / Gen. Sg. Neut. (genitive of source)	Vine's: joy traced to the Spirit as its source, distinct from happiness rooted in circumstance; the same term appears in the fruit of the Spirit list (Gal. 5:22). Significance: Joy that is Spirit-sourced does not require the affliction to lift before it can be genuinely experienced.
v.7	τύπον (týpon) <i>example / pattern</i>	G5179 · typos · Acc. Sg. Masc. (direct object)	A.T. Robertson: a die or mold that stamps its shape onto what follows — the accusative marks the Thessalonians as the direct result of having been shaped themselves. Significance: The chain of imitation (Christ → Paul → Thessalonica → Macedonia/Achaia) shows discipleship as reproduction, not mere information transfer.

Verse	Greek Word / English	Strong's # · Translit. · Form	Definition & Significance
v.8	ἐξήχηται (exēchētai) <i>has sounded forth</i>	G1837 · exēcheō · Perf. Ind. Pass. 3rd Sg. (only NT occurrence)	Vincent's: related to the sound of a trumpet or echo reverberating outward; the perfect tense marks a past action with continuing effect — the sound is still ringing. Significance: The gospel's spread from Thessalonica was not a single event but an ongoing echo whose effect Paul could still hear months later.
v.8	πίστις (pístis) <i>faith</i>	G4102 · pistis · Nom. Sg. Fem. (subject)	Strong's: conviction and trust directed toward God; the basic gloss is sufficient here — the term carries its ordinary NT sense. Significance: Faith, not turning from idols, is named as what “went out” — keeping the salvation/discipleship distinction of v.9 consistent within the passage.
v.9	ἐπεστρέψατε (epestrépsate) <i>you turned</i>	G1994 · epistrepḥō · Aor. Ind. Act. 2nd Pl.	Thayer's: a decisive turning or reorientation, often used in the NT of conversion; the aorist marks it as a completed, punctiliar act. Significance: Under the Free Grace / GES default, this turning describes the response that accompanied saving faith, not an additional work required to obtain it. ¹
v.9	εἰδώλων (eidōlōn) <i>idols</i>	G1497 · eidōlon · Gen. Pl. Neut. (genitive of separation)	Vine's: used elsewhere in the NT and consistently in the LXX for lifeless images set up as rivals to the living God. Significance: The contrast “living and true” vs. idols is a stock LXX antithesis, giving the phrase inherited theological weight for a Greek-OT-literate reader.
v.9	δουλεύειν (douleuén) <i>to serve</i>	G1398 · douleuō · Pres. Inf. Act. (infinitive of purpose)	A.T. Robertson: the infinitive expresses purpose or result flowing from the turning — grammatically dependent on, not prior to, the main verb. Significance: Service as a bonds slave is the ongoing discipleship track that follows conversion; it is the response, not the requirement, per the GES default.
v.10	ἀναμένειν (anaménein) <i>to wait for</i>	G362 · anamenō · Pres. Inf. Act. (only NT occurrence)	Vincent's: a compound intensifying the simple “to wait,” suggesting settled, expectant waiting rather than idle delay — used in secular Greek of awaiting an arrival already assured. Significance: The present tense pictures ongoing, habitual expectancy — a lifestyle of readiness rather than a one-time hope. ²

Verse	Greek Word / English	Strong's # · Translit. · Form	Definition & Significance
v.10	ὀργή (orgēs) wrath	G3709 · orgē · Gen. Sg. Fem.	Thayer's: settled, deserved indignation, distinguished elsewhere in the NT from sudden emotional anger; in this context tied to a specific coming period rather than eternal judgment. Significance: Rescue from this wrath is future and certain — consistent with a pretribulational reading of the church's hope.

Grammar Abbreviation Key

Category	Abbreviations
Cases (Nouns / Adjectives)	Nom. (Nominative) · Gen. (Genitive) · Dat. (Dative) · Acc. (Accusative) · Voc. (Vocative)
Number	Sg. (Singular) · Pl. (Plural)
Gender	Masc. (Masculine) · Fem. (Feminine) · Neut. (Neuter)
Verb Mood	Ind. (Indicative) · Imp. (Imperative) · Subj. (Subjunctive) · Inf. (Infinitive) · Ptc. (Participle)
Verb Tense	Pres. (Present) · Imperf. (Imperfect) · Fut. (Future) · Aor. (Aorist) · Perf. (Perfect)
Verb Voice	Act. (Active) · Mid. (Middle) · Pass. (Passive)

Study Questions

Part 1 — From the Commentary

Outline Point	Key Idea from the Commentary
I. The Gospel in Person (1:6–7)	The Thessalonians imitated Paul, and through him the Lord, receiving the word with joy in the middle of affliction — and became a pattern others imitated in turn.
II. The Gospel in Proclamation (1:8–9)	Their faith echoed outward from a crossroads city into every place, so that Paul found his own reputation had already arrived before him.
III. The Gospel in Prospect (1:10)	They lived waiting for a Son from heaven — raised from the dead, coming without signs, and certain to rescue His church from a specific future wrath.

Part 2 — Discussion Questions

1. Paul says the Thessalonians became “imitators” of him and the Lord. Whose life has shaped your walk with Christ the way Paul shaped theirs — and who might be imitating you right now?

Leader Answer: Point the group back to mimētai (v.6) and typon (v.7) — discipleship is reproduction of a visible life. Draw out a name, not just a principle: who specifically has modeled Christ for each person, and who is watching them the same way.

2. The Thessalonians received the word “in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit.” How is Spirit-given joy different from happiness, and where have you experienced the two together rather than joy only after hardship ended?

Leader Answer: Use the commentary's distinction: happiness depends on circumstance, joy is rooted in God (Gal. 5:22). The test question from the commentary — “Was God glorified?” — can help members identify Spirit-joy in their own recent hardship.

3. Verse 9 says they “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.” Why does the order of that phrase matter, and why is turning from idols not the condition for salvation?

Leader Answer: Direct the group to the commentary's key move: the verse ends in “to serve” — the language of discipleship, not of receiving eternal life. Turning to God is the saving response of faith; serving Him and turning from idols are what naturally follow, not prerequisites.

4. Paul describes the Thessalonians' faith as having “sounded forth” like an echo. What is one “crossroads” in your own daily life — a workplace, a neighborhood, a regular routine — where your testimony could travel the way theirs did?

Leader Answer: Encourage concrete, specific answers rather than general ones. The commentary's point is that God used ordinary geography and commerce, not a planned strategy — help the group see their own “crossroads” as God-given, not accidental.

5. The Thessalonians waited for Christ's return with no sign attached (1:10). How does a signless, any-moment hope change the way a believer lives day to day, compared to waiting for a signal first?

Leader Answer: Reinforce the commentary's Rapture/Second Coming distinction and the Christmas/Thanksgiving illustration. Push the group past head-knowledge into practice: what would change this week if each person lived as though Christ could come today?

Part 3 — Passage Summary

Verses	What It Says	What It Means
1:6–7	The Thessalonians became imitators of Paul and the Lord, receiving the word in affliction with Spirit-given joy, and became an example to others.	A transformed life is visible before it is explained — discipleship spreads by pattern, not only by information.

Verses	What It Says	What It Means
1:8–9	Their faith and testimony sounded out from Thessalonica into the wider region, so Paul no longer needed to explain his ministry there.	A genuine testimony travels on its own; turning to God results in service, but service is not the condition for salvation.
1:10	They waited for God's Son from heaven, raised from the dead, who will deliver believers from the coming wrath.	The believer's hope is forward-looking, certain, and signless — anchored in a Person already proven alive.

⑤ APPLICATION

3–4 applications drawing from the Commentary, Devotional, Self-Study Guide, and FGR.docx

1. Become Someone Worth Imitating

1 Thessalonians 1:6–7

Source: Commentary, Section I · “The Gospel in Person”

The Thessalonians became imitators of Paul in a matter of weeks, not because Paul taught flawlessly, but because he lived visibly for Christ. Discipleship rarely spreads through information alone — it spreads through a life someone else wants to copy. Somewhere in your circle, someone may already be patterning a habit, a response to hardship, or a spiritual practice after what they've watched in you, whether you intended to teach them or not.

Reflection: *Who is currently watching your life closely — a child, a coworker, a newer believer — and what are they most likely learning from what they see?*

Practical Step: This week, name one specific person who may be imitating you, and have one honest conversation with them about following Christ, not just following you.

2. Let Joy and Affliction Coexist

1 Thessalonians 1:6

Source: Devotional · Commentary, Section I.A.4

The Thessalonians did not experience joy after their affliction ended — they experienced “joy of the Holy Spirit” inside it. Many believers quietly assume that joy and hardship cannot occupy the same season, and so they either fake joy they don't feel or assume something is spiritually wrong when hardship doesn't lift. Scripture never makes that assumption. Joy, as fruit of the Spirit, is not dependent on circumstances changing first.

Reflection: *Where are you currently waiting for hardship to end before you'll allow yourself to feel joy — and what would it look like to ask the Spirit for joy inside the hardship instead?*

Practical Step: Identify one current affliction, and before it resolves, write down one specific way God has already been glorified in the middle of it.

3. Turn to God, Not Just From Something

1 Thessalonians 1:9

Source: Commentary, Section II.C · FGR.docx, Category ③ (Free Grace Foundational Theology)

It is easy to define the Christian life mainly by what we've given up — old habits, old relationships, old ways of thinking. But Paul's language puts the emphasis elsewhere: the Thessalonians turned to God, and the turning from idols followed as a result. Free Grace teaching consistently

distinguishes the gift of eternal life, received once by faith, from the ongoing discipleship track of turning from whatever competes with God for our devotion.

Reflection: *What are you currently more focused on — the things you're trying to turn from, or the God you're turning to? How might that focus need to shift?*

Practical Step: Name the one thing most likely to function as an idol in your life right now, and replace one habit connected to it this week with a specific act of service to God.

4. Live Ready, Not Anxious

1 Thessalonians 1:10

Source: Commentary, Section III.A · FGR.docx, Category ④ (Institutional · Rapture Resources)

The Thessalonians waited for Christ's return with no sign to watch for — only a settled expectancy that He was coming. That kind of hope is meant to steady a believer, not unsettle them. A signless hope means there is never a reason to be caught unprepared, and never a reason to live in fear of missing a signal.

Reflection: *Does the thought of Christ's return currently produce anxiety, indifference, or steady readiness in you — and why?*

Practical Step: Choose one relationship or responsibility you would want to be found faithfully tending if Christ returned this week, and give it deliberate attention in the next few days.

End of Study · 1 Thessalonians 1:6–10

ENDNOTES

Turabian-style citations, Free Grace & DTS-Aligned Resource Library (FGR.docx)

1. Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free: A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989).
2. John F. Hart, ed., *Evidence for the Rapture: A Biblical Case for Pretribulationism* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2015).