

## 2—1 Thessalonians 1:1-10—Who We Are and What We Do

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### I. Introduction

- A. We've been talking about turning from idols to God but what are our American idols?
  - 1. I ask that because my guess is that when you hear idols you think of carved images or molded figures of gold and silver. That's not very common here on the hill so that means there's not much to think about, right?
  - 2. I would suggest that 4 of the main idols in America are these:
    - a) Identity
    - b) Freedom
    - c) Happiness
    - d) Power
  - 3. There's a lot to unpack in those but let me suggest this—you have a particular culture you live in and it has shaped how you think and live.
    - a) It's as though you do not even have to think about who you are and what you should be.
    - b) The culture tells you what to do. We pass it on to our kids without any hesitation.
    - c) When I was growing up, I did not think about the most important questions in life. I was a product of my own culture.
      - (1) Eventually, I started asking the right questions, by God's grace—Who created the world? Why am I here? What is the purpose of life? There are more questions but you get the idea.
      - (2) I then began to wrestle with them and what I found was that my culture was wrong about a lot of things—even their view of the church and God.
      - (3) When I turned from the idols of my culture to the living God, I realized that God created me for his glory. As Colossians 1 says, I was created by Christ and for Christ.
      - (4) So, when I understood who I was, then I knew what I was supposed to do.

### II. Main Point

- A. This is, again, the amazing story of how idol worshippers turned to Christ.
  - 1. They too discovered who they were when the gospel came to them and then they were taught what to do and taught others.

### III. Outline

- A. Why Your Identity in Christ Matters
- B. How Does One Get a New Identity
- C. What we now do

### IV. Exposition

- A. What we have become and what we then do. First the wrath to come. Why it matters not just for you but for the whole world.
  - 1. If this is true, how shall we live now?
    - a) We lived in Florida when hurricane Michael came through the panhandle. With a hurricane, you sort of know days in advance that it's coming, unlike tornados.
    - b) What did we do in light of the coming destruction?
      - (1) We prepared and helped others prepare.
      - (2) Our county sheriff's department organized pastors and churches to check on as many people as possible in our communities.
    - c) But something worse than a hurricane is coming. How do you prepare and help others prepare?
  - 2. Because we live in a broken world. Evil is everywhere and seemingly increasing. Last week was "Sanctity of Human Life Sunday" and the continued slaughter of babies in the womb is still normal in the United States. Many countries are offering assisted suicide. I've personally watched hospice carried out in ways that I am certain were not ethical.
    - a) There are untold injustices that happen all over the world everyday.
    - b) There are fires and hurricanes. Tornados and earthquakes.
    - c) There are wars—physical wars and political wars.

- d) There are untold amounts of cancer and diseases.
- e) Drugs are destroying lives and families.
- f) Kids are being trafficked and sold as sex slaves.
- g) The internet and TV are filled with massive amounts of cultural lies. They bring destructive ideas to our kids very easily.
- h) Marriages are falling apart. Kids are being used as bargaining pieces.
- i) We have every form of sexual identity. Kids are being mutilated by doctors with and without parental consent.
- j) I could go on and on but all of this is the result of the fall of humanity. The world lies under the curse. And death is our sentence because we are all in Adam.
  - (1) We are not merely born with a sin nature but we are in Adam. He is our father. His sin is our sin. We participated in his rebellion and we are all under the wrath and curse of humanity.
  - (2) God's eternal wrath awaits all humanity. All who are in Adam die eternally.
- 3. There in verse 10 the chapter ends with the reality that God's wrath is coming.
  - a) But what is coming? What is God's wrath?
    - (1) Jesus said in (Matthew 13:41-42 ESV) <sup>41</sup> "The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, <sup>42</sup> and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."
    - (2) Again he warning in (Matthew 25:41 ESV) <sup>43</sup> "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire'"
    - (3) Or in (John 3:36 ESV) <sup>44</sup> "whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him."
    - (4) How serious is the judgment of sin? How serious is this business of fighting sin? In (Mark 9:47-48 ESV) <sup>47</sup> "if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, <sup>48</sup> 'where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.'"
- 4. To answer the question: "Who are we?" We must answer this: all of humanity are sinners and we are enemies of God. Rebels. Transgressors. Law-breakers just like our father, Adam.
  - a) The wrath to come is God's wrath. God is the Judge and he will judge in perfect righteousness.
  - b) Are you a human being? Then you were or are in Adam. And if you are in Adam you have an eternal death sentence that is coming.
    - (1) The judgment now may already be upon you in the form of just letting you do and be who you want to be.
    - (2) You think that if you are doing bad that God will cause something bad to happen to you to get your attention.
      - (a) And if so, that is God's merciful reminder that his wrath is coming but to be rescued you must repent and believe in Christ.
  - c) This judgment is certain. You either believe it or not. Is this reality true? Or are you just not taking any chances?
- 5. One way we know it's real is the fact that God sent his only Son into the world to save his people.
  - a) The cross is proof that eternal condemnation is coming. The cross is proof that God's wrath is unimaginably horrific. The cross is proof that God is holy. The cross is proof that God loved the world.
  - b) When God the Son takes on human flesh, we must know this problem humanity has is beyond our ability to repair.
    - (1) The Son of God does not come if there's a possibility that mankind can get it together.
    - (2) The Son of God does not come if mankind could have just simply chosen to be good.
    - (3) The Son of God does not come just to be a good example though he is.
    - (4) He came to drink down the cup of God's wrath that is pending on us for us. And he came to gain the righteousness we need to merit salvation in him by faith.
    - (5) God's wrath must be satisfied or God cannot set us free from judgment.
    - (6) The righteous One dies for the unrighteous.

- (7) Yes it is God's justice that needs satisfying not Satan's. It is God who pours out his wrath on his Son that we might be rescued from the pending judgment.
- (8) Isaiah wrote in (Isaiah 53:3-10 ESV) <sup>3</sup>“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. <sup>4</sup> Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. <sup>6</sup> All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.... <sup>10</sup> Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief”
- (9) Yes our sin and judgment was so certain and so severe, it took the Son of God to swallow up that wrath and curse.
- (10) What Jesus received on the cross is what we deserve and we deserve it for eternity.
- (11) That wrath is coming. This is coming for you and me. For our kids and grandkids. Our neighbors and friends. Religious people and non-religious people. The seemingly good ole boy down the street. The nice, little old lady in the pew. The murder and the drunkard. The idol worshipper and the apple eating rebel. All die eternally in Adam.
- (12) However, if we will repent and believe, his death is our death. His righteousness is our righteousness.
- (13) We will be rescued from the wrath to come.
- (14) Indeed, anyone who turns to God from idols will be rescued. Anyone!

- B. That makes this all the more important—How do we and others get a new identity? Who do we become through the gospel? Because, by turning to God in repentance and faith takes us out of Adam and into Christ—the last Adam. Being in Christ is our new identity and that changes everything.
  - 1. How we understand the condition of those in Thessalonica before Paul and Silas arrive matters greatly.
    - a) They are not just people who need some help or a good head start or therapy.
    - b) They are sinners for whom the wrath of God rested upon.
    - c) They are enemies of God but God has sent the gospel to them that they might be rescued from the judgment to come.
    - d) That's what verse 1 was saying—their new reality was in God and in the Lord Jesus Christ.
      - (1) And if they are in him by faith they are safe from God's wrath because Christ took it for you.
      - (2) They are not afforded all the benefits of being in Christ.
  - 2. Well, the same was true of Paul and his companions. Notice there in the middle of verse 5 it says—just as you have known what kind of men we proved to be (lit. have become) among you for your sake.
    - a) The gospel came to them just as it did the people of Thessalonica.
      - (1) We have Paul's story when Jesus knocked him off his horse on the road to Damascus.
      - (2) We know that Timothy's grandmother and mother first shared with him and then later Paul when he came to faith.
    - b) They too had become new creations in Christ. They too are in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ.
    - c) They too had turned to God from idols. From darkness to light.
    - d) They too bear the marks of being in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ.
      - (1) Do we not see in Paul, Silas, and Timothy their work of faith, their labor of love and their steadfastness of hope?
      - (2) And their faith, love, and hope is not just for themselves but hear what Paul says there in verse 5—for your sake!
  - 3. How do we get a new identity? The gospel comes to us. We do not come to the gospel. God comes to us in the gospel and through repentance and faith in the gospel our nature is changed.
  - 4. That's important to know because they have the gospel. That gospel is to be shared. That gospel can save and transform anyone.

- a) Thus it greatly matters because God's wrath is coming but it also matters that we have the solution—the gospel.
- C. God through the gospel brings about new creations. The curse is reversed. This gospel transforms those who hear and respond to God. And God uses other means to transform our lives—who we are determines what we do.
  - 1. Notice there in verse 6—and you have become imitators of us and of the Lord.
    - a) The gospel had changed Paul and his friends.
      - (1) All three have their own stories of who they learned from.
      - (2) Paul wrote about how Timothy learned to follow Christ in—(2 Timothy 3:10-11 ESV) “<sup>10</sup> You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, <sup>11</sup> my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me.”
        - (a) Can you say that about your family? Other people? Do you have these kind of stories?
        - (b) Or has the culture told you what to believe and be?
      - (3) Also if you think that this is only for people like Paul or Timothy, hear this—(2 Timothy 2:2 ESV) “and what you [Timothy] have heard from me [Paul] in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.”
        - (a) This is meant to be a never-ending process until Christ returns.
        - (b) This is what it means to make disciples—going, baptizing and teaching them to observe all that Jesus commanded.
      - (4) Are you a someone that can be corrected because we have a lot that needs to change in us?
        - (a) If a fellow member observed or overheard you doing or saying things that were not glorifying to God and that member approached you and spoke the truth in love to you, would humbly receive it?
          - i) I must say, I changed more during my time in seminary not necessarily because of the classes but rather the men in my life who loved me enough to point out my sin and to help me change.
      - (5) How to do this—I'd caution against making blanket statements or stating something you saw or heard as fact. You cannot see someone's motives.
        - (a) I'd come at in humility by asking questions like—did I hear you say \_\_\_\_\_? Can you explain that to me? I heard that you did \_\_\_\_\_? Is that true? What's going on?
          - i) (Proverbs 9:9 ESV) “Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning.”
          - ii) What about the fool? (Proverbs 9:7-8 ESV) “<sup>7</sup> Whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse, and he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury. <sup>8</sup> Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you; reprove a wise man, and he will love you.”
            - (1) But doesn't Proverbs say—(Proverbs 26:4-5 ESV) “<sup>4</sup> Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself. <sup>5</sup> Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.”
            - (2) It depends on the situation. Something you do and sometimes you don't.
      - (6) Discipleship is supposed to be normal in the church.
        - (a) How can we make this normal here?
        - (b) How can we create spaces where we are helping each other grow that others might imitate the faith?
          - i) To do what Paul described with Timothy obviously requires them to be together.
          - ii) It requires buy in. You can be present in body but absent in mind.
          - iii) If I were to ask you, has anyone ever done this for you? Or have you just swallowed the cultural waters of who you are and what you are to be?
          - iv) Have you ever disciplined anyone? Do you know how?
          - v) If I were to ask you, why would you not want to do this—what would be your answer?

- vi) I would love for you to come and ask me—would you disciple me? Can you help connect me to someone who will disciple me? Or, I would love to disciple someone if you hear of anyone wanting to meet.
  - vii) What is the hang up? If it's time, then you may be too busy. If it's pride you need to humble yourself. If you are not making disciples then you are not obeying one of most basic commands of Christ. That job isn't over until Christ returns.
    - (1) Jesus's model on its most basic level was this—he was with them.
      - (a) He had a group of 3. A group of 12. A group of 70+. And he taught and preached to huge crowds.
      - (b) All of these are important.
2. Another way we learn to follow Christ is through suffering.
- a) Notice there in verse 6—you have become imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction.
    - (1) My two stories of affliction with my kids.
      - (a) My friend—Jacob—wrote a song about how I responded to that suffering. I didn't even remember responding that way. God was gracious.
3. Another way they become like Paul and his companions and the Lord is that they became examples to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.
- a) The transformation they had experienced through Paul and Silas and Timothy didn't remain hidden. In fact, they became a model by which they formed how other believers received the word in affliction with much joy!
  - b) This should be normal for a church. It's normal to expect other believers to be good examples of how to follow Jesus.
    - (1) That's what a church is supposed to do!
      - (a) I quoted this earlier—(2 Timothy 2:2 ESV) “what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men”—but what does that look like?
        - i) He also told Titus—(Titus 2:1-8 ESV) “<sup>1</sup> But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. <sup>2</sup> Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. <sup>3</sup> Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, <sup>4</sup> and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, <sup>5</sup> to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled. <sup>6</sup> Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. <sup>7</sup> Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, <sup>8</sup> and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us.”
        - ii) My friend is preaching—love your enemies this morning and forgive me for thinking that this is complicated and needs a lot of thought.
      - (b) Two things Paul pointed out for reasons why we should be a church like this—that the word of God many not be reviled and that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us.
        - i) What kind of church does Jesus want us to be? Most certainly a church that obeys his instructions about the church not the cultures ideas of church.
        - ii) Are you being who you are supposed to be? Are you helping others be who they are supposed to be in Christ?
        - iii) If you are in Christ why are you not being imitators God and examples to others?
4. Another mark of the church in Thessalonica being imitators of God shows up in verse 8 the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia.
- a) Macedonia was a province that covered much of northern Greece.
  - b) Achaia was a huge region of central and southern Greece.
  - c) The point is this—from Thessalonica the gospel had echoed throughout all of Greece.

- (1) God is the living God. He speaks. And he pours forth his revelation of himself and here God is doing that through his people.
- (2) So much so that Paul says there in verse 8—so that we need not say anything.
- (3) Why? Verse 9 says—because they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you.
  - (a) What had they heard? They had heard that some of the people in Thessalonica had turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven.
  - (b) This sort of seems unbelievable.
  - (c) Is this work of sounding forth the word of the Lord also imitating Paul and Silas?
    - i) Yes. They had brought the gospel to Thessalonica and many places.
- 5. Why is all of this important?
  - a) Because God's wrath is coming and people need the gospel to be saved from the wrath to come.
  - b) And Christ demands that we continue that process of making disciples who make disciples.
  - c) They need to hear how they can be changed from in Adam to in Christ. They need to know why they exist for God's glory and what they are to do while they wait.
  - d) May the Lord use this small little band of believers to echo forth from here the glorious gospel of saving grace in Christ.
  - e) May we be imitators of God and examples to others on what it looks like to follow Christ not our culture.
  - f) How about you?
    - (1) Are you in Adam or in Christ? You can know today. Come to Jesus. He will save you.