

THE CHURCH IN THESSALONICA

1 Thessalonians 1:1

Introduction: Several years ago a book was written titled *The Purpose Driven Church*. Rick Warren, who was pastor of the Saddleback Community Church in California decided the church did not understand its purpose and the believers in the church did not understand their purpose. I agree with the importance of a church knowing its purpose but I disagree with the thesis of the book. He gives a purpose for the church that is more akin to the business model of structure than the biblical method of purpose. If we are to understand the purpose of the church then it should be founded on the word of God and not what the business world thinks the structure of an organization needs to be. We seldom consider the purpose or mission of the church. It is my understanding that **the purpose of the believer** is to glorify God in their life. Consider these passages of scripture: **Romans 15:6** [That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.](#) **Romans 15:9** [And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name.](#) **1 Corinthians 6:20** [For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.](#) [Emphasis added.] That is the purpose of the believer and I understand the church as well. The importance of the church cannot be underestimated. If we were to talk about the *mission* of the church we would be closer to the biblical model. Paul understood this very well. He launched his “missionary endeavors” as he left the church in Antioch and the first order of business was to establish churches. He did this everywhere he went. In each city he saw the importance of getting people saved and establishing churches. This is part of the mission of the church. That is applicable to our work here at home and our work in the fields of the world. The goal of the church and its mission is to establish churches. This was Paul’s burden as he traveled from city to city telling the story of the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. As people were saved they began to organize into churches. We should understand that is a vital part of the work we are to do.

The books of **1 & 2 Thessalonians** came about because Paul had traveled to a city in Europe of the area of Macedonia called Thessalonica. Here he found people who heard the message, believed it and trusted Christ as saviour. This story is told clearly in **Acts 17**. Paul had received the “Macedonian Call” in **Acts 16:9**. He then made his way across the Aegean Sea into Macedonia. **Acts 17:1** tells us that he and his team passed through

Amphipolis and Apollonia and came to Thessalonica. We are told in **Acts 17:4** *And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.* The response to the message of Christ was very well received. Then when you come to Acts 17:5 the mood changes. It says, *“But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.”* The Jews were not happy that Paul had invaded their city and preached a message they did not agree with. They proceeded to bring harm to some of the believers, namely a man named Jason and “certain brethren.” **Acts 17:8** tells us, *And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things.* It evidently became so dangerous that the brethren sent Paul and Silas away to Berea (**Acts 17:10**). This is the way the church in Thessalonica began. It was born in the midst of a great deal of persecution and trouble. I want us to examine this church and the message of Paul to them. It is my conviction that it is as instructive today as it was when it was sent to the church in Thessalonica. Hopefully we can learn and grow from the instruction of the Holy Spirit and the apostle Paul.

There is one other matter to consider in the way of introduction. Paul mentions two men that traveled with him and the church at Thessalonica would be familiar with, Silvanus and Timotheus. This would be Silas and Timothy. Silas was the man who replaced Barnabas when he and Paul had their dispute over John Mark (see **Acts 15:36-41**). Paul and Silas travel to Derbe and Listra where they come into contact with a “*certain disciple...named Timotheus*” (**Acts 16:1**). He joined Paul and Silas and was witness of the trouble they encountered in Thessalonica. These two men had a special relationship with Paul. He called them his “workfellow,” “fellowhelper,” “companion in labour,” and several other descriptions of their work together. These were two men that shared the trials and joys of the ministry and were first hand witnesses of the establishment of the church in Thessalonica.

- 1. The Place of the Church, 1 Thessalonians 1:1.** The church founded by Paul was in the city that was considered the capital of Macedonia. Rome evidently determined this and built a major highway through the city. The city was called “Therme” originally and was evidently founded near some “hot springs” thus the meaning of the word “Thessalonica” means “the hot springs.” It was a city of great importance considered to be second only to Constantinople. The city exists even today under a different name, Thessaloniki. It is one of the main cities of Greece today with a population of about 400,000. During World War II, Adolf Hitler

and the German Army captured Thessaoloniki and deported about 60,000 Jews from the city and eventually murdered them in the concentration camps of Germany and Poland.

- 2. The People of the Church, 1 Thessalonians 1:1.** The church was founded in the midst of great persecution and trouble. If you read **2 Thessalonians 1:4** *So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure.* You learn that they were still in the midst of strong persecution. There is a growing resistance to Christianity in our world and in the U.S. I'm not sure most of us are aware of the pending harsh treatment of believers in our country. There is no persecution in the U.S. yet but the growing opposition is well documented. *The Sword of the Lord* (April 16, 2010 issue, page 15) tells of a California college teacher was in trouble with the administration for assigning readings from the Bible. Another article (page 20) tells of a public housing apartment complex for the elderly that stopped a Dallas church from holding services there. They had been doing so for 14 years. There are many incidents that document the growing opposition to Christianity. In other countries there is outright persecution by opposing religious groups. This is the same as found in Thessalonica when the Jews opposed and persecuted those who believed the message of Paul and became followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Note what Paul says in **1 Thessalonians 1:6** *And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost.* This is a church that believed the message, received the word of God with affliction but not they had joy as well. We can allow troubles to rob us of our joy if we are not careful. There is a difference between persecution and opposition for your beliefs and having a car that won't start. We sometimes think that our poor management and inability to pay our bills is persecution. Not!
- 3. The Position of the Church, 1 Thessalonians 1:1.** Note that Paul tells them they were "*in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ.*" They understood their position as believers. This is something foreign to many Christians today. They do not understand that their standing in Christ is part of their salvation. The phrase "in Christ" occurs 77 times in the New Testament, 2 times in **1 Thessalonians** and 11 times in the book of **Ephesians**. This phrase is an indication of our relationship with

the Lord Jesus Christ and God as our position, our standing. He is in us and we are in Him. This is stated several times in the New Testament and verifies the place we have as believers in Christ. Let's explore this concept. Look at **Romans 8:1-2** ¹ *There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.* ² *For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.* [Emphasis added.] Here we clearly see that a believer who has trusted Christ as Saviour is "in Christ." This is something that God does and not something we do. **1 Corinthians 15:22** ²² *For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.* We are dead spiritually "in Adam" and we are made alive "in Christ." This is talking about our position, our placement by God into Christ. Go to **Ephesians 1:3** ³ *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.* [Emphasis added.] How can we be in "heavenly places" when we are firmly planted on the earth? By being "in Christ." One more section. Look at **1 John 4:15-16** ¹⁵ *Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.* ¹⁶ *And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.* [Emphasis added.] Again the Bible is talking about our position in Christ. We need to grasp this truth and rest in the position that God has given us when we trusted in Christ and God placed us "in Him."

- 4. The Provision of the church, 1Thessalonians 1:1.** Paul uses two terms to describe the benefits we have by being "in Christ. They are "grace" and "peace." We all know these two terms and have no difficulty understanding both. Paul uses this formula to begin each of his epistles (see: **Rom. 1:7; 1Cor. 1:3; 2Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:2; Col. 1:2; 1Thess. 1:1; 2Thess 1:2; 1Tim. 1:2; 2Tim. 1:2; Titus 1:4; Philemon 1:3**). There is an important principle here. Grace is always listed first before peace. There will never be peace until one has the grace of God in their life. This is a simple principle of the word of God. Our world is in turmoil and it is indicative of the absence of peace. The world is frantically searching for peace and they cannot find it. Peace is not the absence of conflict but the presence of God. Our world is described in **Psalms 28:3** *Draw me not away with the wicked, and with the workers of iniquity, **which speak peace to their neighbours, but***

mischief is in their hearts. [Emphasis added.] The principle is emphasized in **Colossians 1:20** And, **having made peace through the blood of his cross**, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether *they be* things in earth, or things in heaven. [Emphasis added.] Couple this with **Ephesians 2:8-9** For by **grace are ye saved through faith**; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: ⁹ Not of works, lest any man should boast. [Emphasis added.] Salvation comes through the “blood of his cross.” Peace comes when the transaction is completed and we are saved by grace. You and I will never have peace until we are “in Christ” and recipients of the grace of God given in salvation. Paul is addressing the **believers** in Thessalonica. They have experienced the grace of God and they know the peace that is found by being in Christ. Do you know that grace and peace? You see the greatest provision that God could ever make for us is to deliver us from the bondage we have “in Adam” and set us free from this bondage. Look at **Romans 5:15** But not as the offence, so also *is* the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. [Emphasis added.] One of the cornerstone beliefs of the church is this matter of the grace of God which brings the peace of God. **Philippians 4:7** And the **peace of God**, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. [Emphasis added.] Do you have that peace? If not why not trust Christ today?

Conclusion: Do you know these principles we have laid out in this verse? We need more than anything to understand our position in Christ which magnifies the provision God has made for us when we are in Christ. That provision is the grace of God that brings peace. Why live in turmoil? Why not turn your life over to Christ and experience the grace and peace that comes only by trusting Christ? You can do that today.