

Thessalonians

An Expository Commentary

Thessalonians

An Expository Commentary

Donald Grey
Barnhouse

Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, Inc.
1716 Spruce St,
Philadelphia, PA 19103
800-956-2644
AllianceNet.org

© Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals 2009

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form, or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the author.

Biographical Information

Donald Grey Barnhouse was, for half a century, one of the most widely acclaimed American preachers. Scholarly exposition and a popular approach marked his teaching. An unyielding faith, devotion to Christ, innovation, and great energy marked his ministry.

Although some found him overly abrupt and sometimes controversial, his zeal for the kingdom of God made him an exciting and captivating speaker. His elocutionary ability sprung from his careful speech, friendly manner, vivid analogies and most of all from his faithful exposition of the Scriptures. He was able to make the Bible relevant to the modern man. In fact his sermons have grown no less relevant to those who hear or read them today.

Dr. Barnhouse was one of the pioneers of radio preaching in the 1920s. Eventually he launched his own network program, The Bible Study Hour. In 1949 he began his famous study of Romans which continued each week for nearly 12 years until his death. This broadcast continues to air as Dr. Barnhouse & the Bible.

The written word was also part of Barnhouse's ministry. He wrote many articles and authored more than a dozen books. He was founder and editor-in-chief of Eternity Magazine. He displayed remarkable insight in his evaluation of the meaning of events for church and nation.

For over 30 years Dr. Barnhouse conducted a weekly Bible study class in New York City. More than 500 people attended.

The demand for his services as a speaker and a conference leader was international.

His ministry was a varied one. For 33 years until his death he served as the pastor of Philadelphia's Tenth Presbyterian Church. There his influence was realized in many young lives that were directed into the ministry and the foreign mission field.

CONTENTS

Foreword	9
Introduction	11
Background to the Thessalonian Epistles	19
I THESSALONIANS 1	19
I THESSALONIANS 2	35
I THESSALONIANS 3	49
I THESSALONIANS 4	59
I THESSALONIANS 5	75
II THESSALONIANS 1	95
II THESSALONIANS 2	103
II THESSALONIANS 3	115

Foreword

For generations the faithful preaching and teaching of Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse has been impacting the lives of thousands around the world. With the discipline of expository preaching fading in many mainstream churches, resources like Barnhouse's commentary on Thessalonians are becoming more and more valuable. While current day scholars might lean away from his end times view, we see it as a product of that generation that we can still learn from. Carefully examining the verses and the doctrines throughout Paul's letters to the church at Thessalonica allows Barnhouse to continue faithful exegesis and application of the Word.

Grounding the reader in the historical context of Paul's letters allows Barnhouse the opportunity to properly guide through its many timeless truths. Addressing difficult themes such as suffering, obedience, justification, sanctification, and our witness to the world in a practical manor gives the reader not only a proper understanding, but encouragement to apply these teachings on a day to day basis. "Now, justification is that planting of the new life of God in us; sanctification is the rise and development of the new life. I suppose that if we charted the progress of our new life in Christ, the chart would now show a steady growth, but rather it would be like those charts on the stock market-up and down" (p.57).

There is much that can be gained from the expositional teaching of Dr. Barnhouse. With his classic style of anticipation and explanation, those interested in his teaching can rest

assured knowing that his careful examination of Thessalonians in this commentary will cover much of what the reader is after. Barnhouse's Thessalonians commentary continues with his consistent ability of making God's word plain for over 60 years.

Praise God for His Word!

Robert Brady
Executive Vice President
Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals

Introduction

These expositions of the First and Second Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians were first presented by Donald Grey Barnhouse to the congregation of Tenth Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, which he served for thirty-three years. The messages were refined as he traveled about the United States and Canada conducting Bible conferences.

Dr. Barnhouse, regarded by many as the outstanding popular Bible expositor of his generation, was both a product of the evangelical culture of his day and latterly one of its most forceful leaders.

He was a tall, handsome man with a shock of curly hair that turned from chestnut to white in the long years of his ministry. Always a commanding figure in the pulpit, his teaching often came across as authoritarian. Yet to brand him only as an authoritarian fundamentalist preacher would do him despite.

True, he was dogmatic and often anything but politic in his public utterances, but beyond all this, he was an unparalleled communicator of Bible truth. His real authority as a teacher stemmed from his passionate commitment to the Word of God. Beneath his brusque exterior was a childlike faith in the living God and the Holy Scriptures. He always blew the trumpet of the Lord with a certain sound.

What were the forces in his life that developed his great gifts?

The youngest child and only boy in a devout Watsonville, California, family, young Donald was beloved and per-

haps “spoiled” by his loving parents and four doting sisters. The eldest sister was Mabel Jean became a student at the Bible Institute of Los Angeles. It was her example that influenced Donald to enter the same school when he was eighteen. Only three years before, he had confessed his faith in Jesus Christ at a Christian Endeavor convention in San Jose.

It was at Biola, however, that young Barnhouse met the man who shaped his theological thinking more than any other individual—Reuben Archer Torrey, one of the giants of early fundamentalism. Torrey, a graduate of Yale College and Divinity School and schooled in German universities, was ordained to the Congregational ministry. He was attracted to the dispensationalist teaching that was centered at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago and ultimately became superintendent, later dean, of that school. Torrey liked Donald and, in an unprecedented move, lent his teaching notes to his alert young disciple.

Later Barnhouse studied at the University of Chicago, Princeton University, and Princeton Theological Seminary, but his grounding in the Word of God under Torrey never departed from him. Thus he became a Bible teacher, not a theologian.

While still a student at Biola, he had heard most of the great fundamentalists of his day lecture—A. C. Gaebelain, James M. Gray, C. I. Scofield, W. B. Riley, and F. W. Farr, to mention a few. These were valiant men who passionately and brilliantly defended the historic Christian faith against the onslaught of humanistic liberalism then known as modernism. These men, and particularly Torrey, molded the thinking of the bright and often cocky young man who one day would sway audiences with his own God-given charisma.

At Princeton Seminary, young Barnhouse came under the tutelage of four giants of the “Princeton school” who confirmed his faith in the infallible Word of God. These proponents of the Reformed faith were Benjamin B. Warfield, regarded by many as the greatest American theologian of all time; Robert Dick

Wilson, the eminent Hebrew scholar; John D. Davis, Old Testament expert and editor of the Bible dictionary bearing his name; and William B. Green, apologist. His ministry was forever enhanced by the impact of these conservative scholars.

Later Dr. Barnhouse eschewed the term “dispensationalist,” the prevailing school of theology at Moody and Biola, yet the mark of this school of interpretation of Scripture never left him. It is evident in these messages on both Thessalonian Epistles, which deal with the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Although he spurned the separatism of many fundamentalists and was thereby misunderstood for his views on the church, Dr. Barnhouse never departed from what is known as “the pretribulation, premillennial position.” Thus, he taught that Christ could return at any moment to take out His redeemed people from the world—that event known as the rapture. He also believed that following the rapture, there would be a period of time called the great tribulation, which would precede the millennium, the time when Christ would return to earth “with his saints” to establish His thousand-year kingdom.

Dr. Barnhouse argued that this position most satisfactorily harmonized with the biblical passages relating to a revived nation of Israel. Yet this prince of expositors in his later years did not emphasize Bible prophecy in his ministry, because he felt many Bible conference adherents were more interested in future events surrounding the return of Christ than they were in Christ himself.

In his teaching of the Thessalonian Epistles, Dr. Barnhouse warns against abstract doctrine that does not have an effect on a believer’s life. His comments on 1 Thessalonians 5 illustrate this: “My chief interest in the doctrine of the Second Coming of Christ is what it does for you now,” he declared. “And if you don’t know 1 John 3:3, I am not interested in your theory of prophecy, for 1 John 3:3 says, ‘Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.’” Thus, he stressed

the need for personal holiness as well as doctrinal orthodoxy.

There are many theories as to why Barnhouse influenced so many pastors, missionaries, and Christian workers both in North America and around the world. Some will stress Dr. Barnhouse's great gift of employing apt illustrations to drive biblical truth home to his listeners. This is certainly a valid observation, for, like our Lord, Barnhouse used illustrations from the common life of his culture to make spiritual truths glow in one's memory. But was not the greatest reason for his influence his application of God-given truth in such a way that those who heard recognized that God's truth must change their lives? The Word had to become flesh in their experience.

There is nothing in Barnhouse's messages that cannot easily be understood by a willing heart. May God grant that this colorful teacher of the Word will continue to be used in the lives of many Christians.

RUSSELL T. HITT

Background to the Thessalonian Epistles

ACTS 17

1. *Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica where was a synagogue of the Jews.*
2. *And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures,*
3. *Opening and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.*
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.*
5. *But the Jews who 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.*
6. *And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also,*
7. *Whom Jason hath received; and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus.*
8. *And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things.*
9. *And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go.*
10. *And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by*

night unto Berea, who, coming thither, went into the synagogue of the Jews.

- 11. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.*

I THESSALONIANS 1

I THESSALONIANS 1

The First Epistle to the Thessalonians, a letter to a missionary church only one year old, was the first book of the New Testament to be written. All scholars agree that 1 Thessalonians is older than Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, and all other parts of the New Testament.

For background, let us look at Acts 17. Acts 17:4 says that some who heard Paul preach in the synagogue at Thessalonica believed, plus a great many of the devout Greeks, not a few of the leading women, and Jason. This gives us a cross section of a missionary effort and a missionary church. There were first of all some who believed; this means “some Jews.” Acts 17:2 shows that when Paul arrived in a town, he didn’t form his own little separatist group. He always took his message first of all to the synagogue—the *Jewish* synagogue—and in this case he stirred up such a fuss that he was almost killed (Acts 17:5). But even this didn’t deter him. In the next town we find him again in the synagogue (Acts 17:10), preaching without compromise. Paul was not a separatist, except from sin. He would go anywhere, preach anywhere. He never worried about the auspices under which he worked, or with whom he was involved, as long as he could preach the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We see, then, that in Thessalonica the church was formed first of all of some converted Jews; second, a great many devout Greeks became members of the church. These were Greeks who had been devout in the worship of demons, Greeks who had

spent their lives in the temples of Aphrodite and Astarte, the temples of Zeus and Apollo. Were Aphrodite and Zeus *demons*? Yes, demons. Read 1 Corinthians 10:20 and then turn to Deuteronomy 32:17 and Psalm 106:37 if you don't believe me.

Paul went into the house of Jason. Now, anyone who knows mythology knows the Jason who was captain of the Argonauts who sailed out looking for the golden fleece. This man Jason, namesake of the mythological hero, very probably was taken up to the temple of Aphrodite when he was a baby and had oil and wine put on his little body in the devil's temple. Or his parents may even have taken him into the temple where the "holy" flame was, and, his father taking the baby's feet and his mother his hands, swung the baby through the holy flame, much as the Old Testament worshipers of Moloch did. The Old Testament totally condemns this sort of thing.

Jason. This is what they named that little baby from one of the families of the devil-worshippers. But now Jason has grown up. He listened to the gospel and is saved and he takes Paul into his house. Jason is the man the unbelieving Jews pick on; they drag him out and take him before the authorities. Jason has to put up a bail bond, guaranteeing that there won't be any disturbing of the peace. Wonderful, isn't it—the transforming power of the gospel of Jesus Christ—and remember this was within three weeks! Wonderful! It doesn't take long to establish a church. Paul arrived in town and within three weeks a church had been born. There was a body of believers. Why? Because it was not Paul doing it, it was the work of the Holy Spirit.

Thessalonica is the city that is known today as Salonica. If you glance at a map, you will see Greece on one side and Asia Minor on the other, with the Aegean Sea separating them. Thessalonica is right at the top of the Macedonian-Achaian peninsula, not very far west of Constantinople—Istanbul. The first time I ever went there, I sailed on a ship that was on its way to Constantinople. First, we saw the distant line on the

horizon. Then, as we began to get closer, we saw the hills back of it, and finally we could see the town with its gray brown walls and red-tile roofs. A large bombed-out church still stood among the houses of the town though it had been bombed in the First World War. Thus we saw it: Salonica, Thessalonica, Salonica of Thessaly.

After Paul and Silas arrived, it was said, “These men that have turned the world upside down have come hither” (Acts 17:6). This is the town where two or three often-quoted expressions developed from Paul’s first arrival. Two of these are “these men who have turned the world upside down” and “lewd fellows of the baser sort.” The Revised Standard Version calls the latter “men of the rabble.” Phillips puts it this way: “The hoodlums were gotten together to raise this uproar against Paul.”

Now, Paul was sent away quietly to avoid trouble. I don’t know where he had been hidden during the time they were searching the house for him. I don’t know whether he had to slip away into someone else’s house or go into a chicken house or hide in a cellar inside a bale of hay. We don’t know. But they combed the place for him and didn’t find him. So, as soon as the judges had freed Jason and the rest, the Christians got together and sent Paul away in the middle of the night to Berea, a town fifteen miles away. Now the Revised Standard Version says that “these Jews [in Berea] were more noble than those in Thessalonica.” Our version says just “these,” leaving out the word “Jews.” But the idea is that the Jews who listened in Berea were not narrow-minded, evil, and envious as were the unbelieving Jews in Thessalonica. They heard the word of God with all readiness of mind. But then the Thessalonian Jews came there also and stirred up trouble. Paul, forced to leave Berea, went down to Athens, spoke on Mars’ Hill, and continued on to Corinth where he heard about the situation in the church of Thessalonica. While he was in Corinth, he wrote the first Epistle to the Thessalonians—the Epistle we are now studying.

Let's look at this first chapter of 1 Thessalonians and see what had happened in one year from the time the missionary first arrived in Europe. For, remember, Thessalonica was one of the first places to which Paul had come after the Holy Spirit would not let him preach in Asia and he saw in his vision the man who said, "Come over into Macedonia and help us!" (Acts 16:9). That's where Thessalonica was. Paul crossed into Europe. His going to Europe was one of the most fateful things in the history of the world. A man gets into a little boat, goes across the Dardanelles, sets foot on Europe, and the course of history is turned upside down! Suppose Paul had not listened to the Holy Spirit and had gone to Asia. Would Asia, instead of Europe, have become "Christian"? Well, this is one of those "iffy-suppose" questions that are fruitless to pursue. The point is, the Holy Spirit intended that Christianity would come and dominate the West. And it did, largely through the initial influence of the apostle Paul.

Now, let's read what Paul wrote to that little church. "Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians" (1 Thess. 1:1). I would have you note again that this is written to *the church*. Romans was written *to* the church; Corinthians, *to* the church; Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, *to* the church. Let no one say, "The church teaches." The church does *not* teach; the church is *taught*. The Holy Spirit does the teaching. Any time any group of people say, "We have deep-frozen creeds and formulas, and the church teaches thus and so," then right away, you're subject to error. The church is taught, and the more we (who constitute the church) are yielded to the Lord, the more the Holy Spirit will teach us.

Now, where was this church? "The church of the Thessalonians which is *in* God the Father, and *in* the Lord Jesus Christ." Notice the emphasis. Isn't that a wonderful place for any church to be? Paul addressed the Philippians as those who

were “*in* Christ” and “*at* Philippi.” *In* and *at*, like a man who prints on his letterhead: “Home address, 1615 Broad Street; office address, Fidelity Trust Company Building.” So, with us. Home address: in Christ. Office address: at Philadelphia, or New York, or Podunk Center—or wherever else. This is where we are at work for the Lord. This is our business place here in the world; our home is *in Christ*. We are in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ, and don’t let anybody say a Christian can be lost once he is “in Christ.” Let there be no teaching that a man can lose his salvation. How can I get out of the Christ I’m “in”? Only when Christ gets out of God. Who put us in Christ? Now, if you put yourself in, you could take yourself out. But if you read your Bible correctly, you know that you didn’t put yourself in Christ.

He saw me ruined in the fall
And loved me, notwithstanding all.
He saved me from my lost estate.
His loving-kindness, O how great!

He took me out of a horrible pit, set me upon the rock, and established my going. And He put a new song in my mouth (Ps. 40:2,3). He identified me with Jesus Christ and I’m “in Christ.”

So are you, if you’ve been born again. “Grace be unto you, and peace, from God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

These are the first words of the New Testament—the beginning of Paul’s message to the Thessalonians. “We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; remembering...” Ah, Paul! You had quite a time there, didn’t you? Three weeks of boat-rocking. It may have been only two weeks between three Sabbaths because three Sabbaths are the fence around two weeks, as we call it. We don’t know. But at the maximum, it was twenty-two days, and at the minimum,

fifteen. But Paul says, “I remember without ceasing (1) your work of faith, (2) and labor of love, and (3) patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father.” Isn’t that wonderful! They were, as we shall see, a group of believers who were really well-grounded. “Knowing, brethren, beloved, your election of God. For our gospel came not unto you in word only...” Isn’t it terrible when somebody just gets up and babbles? Preaching, preaching, preaching. What can that do for anybody?

Some years ago, when I had a leave of absence of sixteen months from my pulpit, I spent it crossing Asia. One night in northern China, in Shantung Province, I was at a conference in a missionary household. When the meeting was over, about forty missionaries and I went down a sidewalk past two or three mission buildings in the total darkness. Somebody had a flashlight and illumined our feet as we went along so that we could see our path. But there was a rosebush beside one of the houses, and as I was walking along in the dark, a thorn caught me and tore my cheek. There’s still a little scar there now. When I came back to the United States, one of my church members said to me, “Doctor, you’ve adopted a new mannerism since you’ve come back.” I said, “Oh, what is it?” He told me, “You sometimes preach for three or four minutes with your finger on your cheek.” When I became aware of this, I soon broke the habit. Until that moment, I had not known that I had a mannerism and wondered what might have caused me to do this. Of course, it was that little wound in my cheek. For it had developed within three or four days into a fountain of pus. It’s not pleasant to talk about, but it’s an illustration I hope you won’t forget: it poured out as much as a teaspoonful of pus in an hour. I tried to keep bandages on it. But nothing was of any avail. If I went into a mission to preach, I had to dress it one minute before I began to speak and had to cut my sermon down to less than a half-hour in order to treat it again.

One night, just before I was going to preach, I looked into a mirror to dress the wound and as definitely as any voice, the Holy Spirit spoke to me and said, "Anything that comes from you, Donald Barnhouse, could kill. It's poison!" And I remember saying, "Oh, God, I need, moment-by-moment, the force and power of Thy life, that the Word may go forth in the power of the Holy Spirit and in much assurance." After a few weeks, just before I was going in to preach, I glanced at the scar, which at that time was livid, and I put my finger on it and said, "Oh, Lord, I don't want to ever be a fountain of pus to preach unbelief or false things of the spirit or legalism, that which gets a man looking at some experience instead of looking to Christ."

In fact, I remembered it so often that at one time in the middle of my sermon I thought of what a human word could do when a divine word was really needed. I was in India at that time and I remember putting my finger up to my cheek and saying, "Oh, Lord, I remember that episode, and I settled it there before that mirror that not the poison of Donald Barnhouse but the life of the Lord Jesus Christ that comes from the Holy Spirit might go through me." Thus, quite without knowing it, I developed the concept so vividly that when I came back to the States, they told me I was preaching sometimes half my sermon with my finger to my cheek. Well, spiritually, that finger is still there. Spiritually, I still recognize that anything that's cooked up from my mind and life would be poison to you. But if God the Holy Spirit can fill me and speak through me to you, then it will be His wisdom, His knowledge, His truth. That's why mere preaching, as such, is never sufficient, unless it is a vehicle through which the Holy Spirit can speak. "Our gospel came not unto you in word only [which is pus] but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance."

The president of Northeast Bible Institute was once introducing me to several hundred people for their graduation exercises, as I was to bring the address. He said to the people:

“Dr. Barnhouse doesn’t know this, but one Sunday afternoon shortly after I was saved, as I turned on the radio, I heard a voice preaching and the voice said, ‘the Lord Jesus Christ.’ I had come to know that name and to love it. The speaker kept on talking about the Lord Jesus Christ with such positiveness that he so spoke to my heart. I said, “I want to hear this to the end.” Now, at that time, I had never heard the name ‘Barnhouse.’ It didn’t mean a thing to me. But I began to listen to the program week after week. After six weeks, I went to his church to hear him preach and to see what this was all about. I subsequently joined the church and for three years I just sat there and absorbed everything.”

Well, when I got up after that introduction, I said, “He didn’t tell you that five or ten years later a man heard him preach one day and said, ‘You’re all right except for one thing. Too many of your phrases, gestures, tones of voice, and your positive preaching are too much like Dr. Barnhouse. Well, listen, friends, it isn’t that embarrassing. They told me when I was a younger preacher that I had too many of the mannerisms of Dr. R. A. Torrey under whom I had sat for two years. And they probably told Torrey when he was young that it was Moody, and they told Moody that it was somebody else. And if you go back far enough, you come to the apostle Paul and this is where it all started—this positiveness, this definiteness, this assurance of what you preach because it comes from the Word of God.” This is the way our preaching and teaching must be—in power and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance.

Now, Paul says, “As you know what manner of men we were among you for your sake” (v. 5). For your sake! Three weeks among you and you’ve had a riot, the police, a trial, and putting up money for bail bond. But one year later there was a church, and we see from this passage that one year after that the gospel had taken root and the life of God was becoming manifest in this community. Now, verse 6: “And ye became fol-

lowers of us, and of the Lord.” Well, does anyone dare to stand up and say, “Be followers of me”? Only insofar as he’s following the Lord. Don’t you dare go out and try to be a Barnhouse—ite and say, “Thus saith Dr. Barnhouse!” No, no! Don’t be a follower of any other human teacher, either. Check everything by the Word of God. These Jews in Berea were more noble than the Jews that stirred up trouble because “they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily to see if these things were true” (Acts 17:10,11). Now this is what *you* must do. Go to the Word and where you find that what I say is what the Holy Spirit is teaching, then you follow it. But do *not* follow it because *I* said it, but because you’ve checked and found it in God’s Word.

Because, you know, if you go to your preacher or someone else and say, “I believe this because I heard Dr. Barnhouse say so,” all you’ll do is succeed in having the preacher say, “Well, I’ll make a note never to have *him* around. I’ll never tell anybody to listen to his radio program.” But, if you go and say to your preacher, “Well, I believe this, because—well, look, preacher—it’s here in the Word of God; that’s where I’ve found it,” maybe you’ll get the preacher to go and read his Bible a little more. You see, that’s the way it has to be. But you should so live in your school or office or shop or home that you can say to others, “If you want to know what the Christian life is, do what I do.”

Paul says, “You became followers of us, and of the Lord” (v. 6). It would be wonderful if you could have a couple of stenographers around the office who are saying, “I want to live the way *she* does!” or a couple of nurses at the hospital who say, “Lord, I’d like to have my life count as *hers* does.” God wants us to live like that.

“Having received the word in much affliction...” (v. 6). Of course, this doesn’t apply to you. You didn’t receive the word in much affliction. Probably there are not more than a hand-

ful of those who read these words who received the word in affliction. Oh, sure, I know, once in awhile when the gospel is preached, somebody gets hurt. Just the other day, I talked to someone who said, "If you mail a book to me, don't mail it to my home; mail it to my post office box. Because, you see, if it comes to my home, my mother will see it and she'll burn it. She so hates my having anything to do with Christ." Very few of us know anything about this sort of thing. In fact, when most of you said, "Well, I'm becoming a Christian and following Christ!" people probably responded, "Well, isn't that nice! God bless you!" Oh, in some cases, you're looked upon with a haughty sneer and folks will quickly change the conversation. Very possibly you'll no longer be invited to Mrs. X's bridge parties. Praise God! Praise God! But that's the most affliction that most Americans know and it's good for you when that happens because as our text says, "Having received the word...with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that ye were examples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord." Now, you see, this was written before they had been Christians even one year. It proves that you don't have to go to a college, a Bible institute, or a theological seminary before you can be a witness for Jesus Christ. These people were witnesses, they were born talking. The life of God was in them, and the result was a living, vital church.

"But also, in every place your faith toward God is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak anything. For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you..." (v. 9). Now, in studying the Book of Acts together with this first chapter of Thessalonians, we can discover that here is one of the greatest missionary manuals in the world. It shows us (1) the message of the preacher, (2) the manner in which the message was given, and (3) the manner in which the message was received, as well as (4) the result in the hearts of those who believed. Turn back to Acts 17:3 for a moment. There

we read that Paul arrived and began to preach, “opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead.” Now, there are liberals who say that Paul began this doctrine, that Paul falsified what Jesus preached, that Jesus was preaching love and brotherhood, and that Paul turned it into this doctrine of blood atonement, salvation by the death of Jesus Christ. This is not true. Read Luke 24:26,27 and you will see that the message of Jesus and that of Paul dovetail exactly. All right now, back to 1 Thessalonians 1:9, where Paul said, “You turned to God from idols.” If you’re going to be a Christian, the idols of your life must go. If you are going to begin Christianity, you begin by turning. You cannot have the two—Jesus and idols. Jesus sits on a solitary throne. He will never share His position or His being with any other. In the Old Testament it is written, “I am the Lord, I will not give my glory to another, nor my praise to graven images” (Isa. 42:8). Jesus is not one of many equally good ways or a phase of truth or an aspect of life. In John 14:6 He tells us that He is *the* way, *the* truth, and *the* life, and your religion is idol worship if it does not approach God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

However, not only did they do an about-face, they “turned” to serve the living and true God. Theirs was a life of service. Now, there are some who seek to serve when they have not turned from idols and this is American religion in large measure. How many churches are there where people are actively active in the activities, and where they have everything, with the kitchen being the most important part of the church? Now, there’s nothing wrong with a church kitchen. But it must not be the center of the teaching. It is true that to those who serve there they may be truly serving the Lord, but it is possible for churches to be working and working and yet not working for the Lord Jesus Christ. It’s possible for people to pray and have beads slipping through their fingers while their hearts are far from the Lord.

Two men went up to the temple to pray, the one a Pharisee

and the other a publican (Luke 18:9–14). One had not turned from idols; the other one had. Two men may write checks and give them to charity or to Christian work and God may say, “This one is blessed, for this man turned from idols to serve the living and true God; the other one is not blessed, for he has not so turned.” People went up to the treasury and Jesus stood by as one man tossed in his generous tip to God and another man threw in his conscience money. Then came the poor widow who put in her two mites. Jesus said, “This is the one who has done more than all the others” (Luke 21:1–4).

So, it can be that two men can be preaching and one can be simply saying what is expected of him, what is of the world, human opinions going forth. The other may be a channel for the use of the Lord that the Word may go forth in power and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance. You see, these Thessalonians had turned from idols to serve the living and true God. You can serve Him anywhere, wherever you are.

Personally, I despise the term “full-time Christian service.” You know, sometimes people say, “We ought to pray for so-and-so. She’s going into ‘full-time Christian service.’” Let’s change the term and call such a person a “career Christian.” In a sense, everyone who is in “full-time” service is a career Christian. Some of them are nothing more, and it’s a terrible thing to be a career Christian if you’re not yielded to the Lord, if you have not turned from idols to serve the Lord. Here are two Christian girls. One says, “God has called me; I’m going to Africa.” The other one says, “I’m going to be a secretary at O’Shaughnessy, O’Reilly, and O’Toole.” They’re both “in full-time Christian work,” believe me. One is making a career of it in Africa; the other one is paying the bills for the girl out in Africa. But both belong to the Lord and are where they’re convinced the Lord wants them. I do not believe a missionary is any greater in the sight of God than the Christian doctor, or office worker, or policeman, or farmer, or whatever. If God puts

you in a place, then this is where you belong. If God puts you somewhere else, that is where you belong. I'll never forget what one of my elders said to me years ago when he became church treasurer. After he had served awhile, handling church benevolent money, he said, with a glow in his face: "You have no idea what a joy it is to be keeping track of the Lord's money." Well, of course! But whatever money he handled in any job, it was "the Lord's money." You see, our whole idea of service needs revision.

These Thessalonians, saved just about a year, had turned from idols to serve the living and true God" and "to wait for his Son from heaven" (v. 10). Jesus is coming! O, what glory and joy! Every day when they got up in the morning to do their day's work, they said, "Jesus may come today!" And when they went to lie down to sleep at night, they said, "O Lord, perhaps in the middle of the night, we'll hear the trumpet sound and be caught up to meet You in the air." And thus they lived. Working and looking; working and looking; waiting and looking. You serve and you wait—and this is the whole of the Christian life, the about-face of conversion, the day-by-day living, the anticipation of being joined to the Bridegroom. What more could we ask?