

1 Thessalonians chapter 1, beginning at verse right and reading through verse 10. Last time, if you'll remember, we were looking at the Christian testimony. Remember, Paul, in this first Thanksgiving section, which basically goes through all of chapter 1, Paul is expressing what he thanks God for in the Church of the Thessalonians. He starts by talking about his conduct among the Thessalonians. We learn from that how we should relate to the Church. We saw last time, we began to look at what Paul thanked God for among the Thessalonians. What was it about the Thessalonians that Paul was thanking God for over and over again?

We look particularly at their testimony. What kind of testimony do they have? What was their testimony like? And how does God build testimonies? Well, tonight, we're going to be looking at not what kind of testimony they had, but what is the Christian testimony? What is the content of the Christian testimony?

I'll confess that when I was originally outlining the previous sermon, this was point four on my sermon outline. But as I started to expand it out, I was like, okay, this needs its own sermon. I don't want to exhaust everyone's patience, and I want to make sure we have time to really work this out. So as we read this text, be thinking about what is the content of the Christian testimony? What does it mean to be a Christian? So let's look at this text together.

Before we do, let's ask God's help in prayer. Our Father in heaven, as we open up your word, we pray that we know not you teach us, what we have not give us, what we are not make us, for the sake of your son, Jesus Christ. Amen. 1 Thessalonians 1, beginning at verse 9. For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath that is to come. This is the word of the Lord. May he add his blessing to it.

There's an important difference in theology between what we call the first doctrines and the second doctrines. Or we might call them the primary doctrines and the secondary doctrines. Now when we say secondary, we don't mean by that that they're not important. All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, training, and righteousness. And we as God's people are commanded to believe, to teach, and to confess the whole counsel of God.

And yet, And yet, there is a difference between the secondary doctrines and the primary doctrines. Secondary doctrines separate Christians from other Christians. Primary doctrines separate whether or not you believe the primary doctrines. Determines whether you are a Christian or a non-Christian.

These are the fundamental things. These are the first principles of the Christian life. These are the things that make Christians, Christians. And that is really what Paul is getting at in this text. And that's what we're gonna be looking at tonight. What is the Christian testimony? What is uniquely Christian? What does it mean to be a Christian?

And you may ask, well, if these things are so fundamental, these things are so primary, what's the point of looking at them? I mean, don't we already all believe these things? I mean, if we're Christians, we should already believe these things, right? What's the point of going back over them? Well, there's a few reasons.

One, we have a tendency to forget. And not forget in the sense where if someone asked you what these doctrines were or asked you about these doctrines, you wouldn't be able to tell them. But forget in the sense you don't think about them. They become so basic, so a part of their rhythm of life that you don't even think about them anymore. And we need to think about them. We need to be reminded of them. Lest we start to make secondary doctrines the primary ones. So that's important.

It's also important for those in the room who may not actually be believers. Now, looking around in this room, I am as confident as a person can be that most all of you do truly trust in Jesus Christ, and I hope I'm right, but I could be wrong. I don't know your heart. And you may be able to speak the Christian lingo. You might know some of kind of what it means to be a Christian, but you've never had the primary doctrine spelled out for you, at least you haven't listened.

And that's important. It's also important to go over these for those of us who are believers, because we need to be able to give an account of the hope that is in us, don't we? If someone asks you, what does it mean that you're a Christian? You call yourself a Christian, what does that mean? Can you answer that question? Or would you find yourself stumbling over it and wondering, where do I even start? Well, this sermon's for you. So what does it mean to be a Christian? What is the Christian testimony? That's the question I want to focus on this evening. What is the Christian testimony? And there are two major points we're looking at this evening that answer this question. First, who we are in Christ. And second, who is this Christ? Who we are in Christ And who is this Christ? So first, the first major point here is who we are in Christ.

Paul begins with that right here in verse nine. He says, for they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you and how you turn to God from idols to serve the living and true God. This is one of the first and most basic aspects of being a Christian is to turn to God from idols. To turn to God means to turn away from idols.

The Thessalonians were very much aware of this. Idolatry was a basic part of their existence. Remember we talked about at the very beginning, at the beginning of this series, that Thessalonica was a religious melting pot. There were all kinds of deities that were being worshipped, and all kinds of religions being offered, all kinds of systems being offered. And yet, in addition to all these systems, they had what was called the public religion, where if you can believe privately whatever you want, but you better offer the sacrifices, you better take part within the festivals to the city's gods. Because if you don't, the city's gods might get mad at the whole city, and we're all in trouble. And so there was a tolerance in Thessalonica so long as you conformed to the public worship, to the public religion.

Thus, for the people of Thessalonica, for the church of the Thessalonians, to turn away from idols had very real public consequences. It could mean a loss of property, loss of reputation, certainly a loss of friends and possibly a loss of family members. Loss of business. This was a major decision on their part. Pagan religion was a part of everything they did. To turn away from idols had major public consequences, but it also had major private consequences for the Thessalonians.

It meant no more covering their bases. It meant they couldn't go in the market square and get the blue eye to ward off the evil eye. They couldn't offer their sacrifices to the Egyptian gods, to the Thessalonian gods, to the Greek gods, and then go to church on Sunday. It meant turning away from those idols and trusting the God of Israel, the God of the New Testament, Jesus Christ alone, exclusively. That had private consequences. And the same goes for us today. to turn to God from idols is to turn away from idols, and that has public consequences. I don't know about you, but the description of Thessalonians and their religious context sounds eerily familiar to today.

Wouldn't you say that we have a general religious tolerance in the water? So long as you do the public things, If you're a company, if you're a business, yeah, you can believe whatever you want privately, but don't you dare not change your logo to a rainbow during Pride Month. Or you have professional baseball players forced to wear rainbow paraphernalia.

The reason it's on the mind is June was just here. We all saw it. That's public religion. It didn't matter if you really believed it. The idea is you have to conform. That's idolatry, as much as it was for the public worship of the Thessalonians. And turning to God from idols also has other public consequences. You might be seen as an extremist. You might be seen as crazy. It might mean alienating, being alienated from family members, friends, losing business. It has real public consequences, and that's part and parcel with what it means to be a Christian.

But turning to God from idols doesn't just have public consequences, it's got private consequences. It means turning away from your own idols. And I'm not talking about idols made of wood and stone, though in some parts of the world that's very much still the case, even in America. But for most of us, it means turning away from the idols of greed, Selfishness, covetousness. The idol of me, the unholy trinity of me, myself, and I. Let's take one example, the idol of money.

Jesus talks a lot about this. He says, you cannot serve two masters. You either love the one or despise the other or be devoted to one and alienated to the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. Mammon meaning the pursuit of monetary gain. Now that doesn't mean, as Christians, you're not allowed to make money. But it means that is not your God. That your money, your financial resources, your physical possessions are not an end in themselves. You lay them at the feet of your master. You serve one king. And all of your resources are at his disposal. They're not ultimately yours. They're his. That's what it means to be a Christian.

You can apply that to your other idols and to the idol you may have formed of God. We all have a tendency to make God in our own image, don't we? To say, well, the God I worship wouldn't have any problem with what I'm doing. The God I worship would certainly not ask me to do that. Well, is the God you worship the God of scripture? Or is he a God you've made in your own image? the head of your own private pantheon. God has no pantheon. He is God alone. You shall have no other gods before me. So what does it mean to be a Christian? Who are you in Christ? You're one who turns away from idols.

And it also means turning to serve the living God. We serve God. You can see that in verse 9, how you turn to God from idols to serve the living and true God. We not simply turn away from idols, we turn to the living and true God to serve him. Now the word to serve here means to serve as a slave, to be the slave of the living God.

Now this is a metaphor that Paul often used. He often calls himself a slave of Jesus Christ. He calls believers in Romans chapter six slaves of righteousness. And he means that to do a couple of things. First, it shows a dichotomy. You're either a slave of sin, a slave of idols, or you are a slave of righteousness, a slave of God. There is no in between. Freedom is not found in autonomy, autonomy is an illusion. Freedom is found in service to God, in being God's slave. That's what it means. Slavery is also a great image for service to God because it implies ownership. You are not your own. Your money is not your own. Your time is not your own. Your relationships are not your own.

Everything you own, you own, belongs to God. That's a cruel injustice in human interactions, but it is as it should be with God, because he gave you everything. Slavery also has the image of protection, though. It's also good news. You as a Christian are God's property. And God will protect his property. He will not lose his property. He is a good master. He protects his slaves. If you are a slave of righteousness, you are under God's protection. You are his property. And an assault against you is an assault against him.

So we are those. We are those who turn away from idols, We are those who serve the living and true God. The third thing that Paul says about who we are in Christ is we await his coming. We await his coming. Look again at verse nine, or verse 10 rather. And to wait for his son from heaven. And to wait for his son from heaven. This is something that defines the Christian.

Very often when we think about what it means to be a Christian, we'll think in terms of the first two cardinal virtues that he's laid out here. You'll notice that Paul seems to, over and over again this Thanksgiving session, go back to the three cardinal virtues of the Christian life.

Faith, love, and hope. And we've seen that so far. Faith, turning away from idols to God. Love, serving God. We serve God by loving God with our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and loving our neighbor as ourselves. And now we come to the third one, hope. And very often we get focused on the first two, but we can't forget the third. A Christian is one who is defined by his forward looking. We look for the coming of Christ. We are those who await his coming. We expect his coming. Christians do not live for this life. Christians do not live for this world. Christians do not live for this age. Christians do not even live for a disembodied existence forever in heaven.

That's better than here, but it's not the end. What we hope for, what we wait for, is Christ's second coming. when the souls that are in heaven are reunited with their bodies, when all of us are changed in the blink of an eye, and we enter the new heavens and the new earth. That is our hope. That is what we look forward to. And that hope is what defines Christians. How do we express that hope? How do we live in light of that hope? Well, Jesus tells us.

In parable after parable, he talks about a master that goes away on a long journey. And he has these servants. He's given them tasks to do. And how do the servants await the coming of their master? Do they sit on their hands, looking down the road, wait, trying to catch a glimpse of him? No. They work. They do the things their master would have them do. They serve him.

This awaiting for Christ is meant to motivate your Christian life. So very practically, when you get home tonight, when you're at work this week, think to yourself every so often, if Christ were to come back right now, would he find

me at work at his business? Would he find me doing the business, the work he sent me to do? That can apply to minister work. It also applies to your jobs. Your jobs are a vocation from God.

When you do your jobs to the best of your ability and to the honor of Christ, you are serving him. But think about that. So that's who we are in Christ. What it means to be a Christian is to be in Christ. It is all these things, to turn away from idols, to serve the living God, and to await Christ's coming.

But as I mentioned before during our prayer, the Christian life is not ultimately about us. It's not ultimately a kingdom. God's kingdom is not ultimately about the subjects. A kingdom is about the king. And so what does it mean to be a Christian? What is the Christian testimony? Certainly it's all these things. It is about who we are in Christ, but even more so, it is about the Christ we serve. It is about Jesus Christ and who he is and what he's done. And what does Paul say about Christ in this passage? What are the main things about Jesus that we must believe?

First and foremost, we must believe that he is the son of God. We must believe that he is the son of God. Look what he says in verse 10. And to wait for his son from heaven. Whose son? God's son. Jesus is the Son of God. This is the most basic Christian confession. Jesus is the Son of God.

Now, what does that mean? It's no accident that this, the most basic Christian confession, is so often the focus of Satan's attacks when it comes to false teaching. You'll get all kinds of answers from false teachers on what this means. What does it mean that Jesus Christ is the Son of God? A false answer, one false answer you might get is that it means that Jesus is just a wise teacher.

He's aligned with the will of God, he's a great guy, you can model your life after him, you can listen to what he says, but he's not divine. You'll hear that from the false religion of Islam and the false religion of liberalism. You might hear that he's a second lesser God, that you have God the Father, the true God, creator of all things, and his first creation is to create the Son of God, a lesser God that he uses to do certain things. You'll hear that from the false religion of Mormonism and the false religion of the Jehovah's Witnesses. You might hear that, oh, the Son of God is just another name for God. God's like a play actor. He wears different masks. He has different names. Sometimes he's called the Father. Sometimes he's called the Son.

You'll hear that from the false religion, from the false teaching of Oneness Pentecostals. But what is the true confession? What does it mean that Jesus Christ is the Son of God? Well, it means that Jesus Christ is the second person of the Trinity. One with God the Father in essence, but distinct in person.

He's begotten from the Father, not made, as we say in the Nicene Creed. All of his Godness, in a mysterious way, is from the Father. And yet he was not made by the father. There was no time in all of existence in which the son was not. And yet we say he is begotten from the father. There is a mystery there, but that is what scripture teaches. He is equal in power, honor, authority with the father. And the same, he has the same glory, the same essence, the same godness. He is one with the father in essence. but distinct in person.

He has always existed with God from eternity past. We read this in John 1, in the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God and the Word was God. It explains, and this one God, this one, this person, the Son of God, the eternal Son of God, the Logos, the Word of God, for us and for our salvation.

In time, took upon himself a human nature, a true human nature with all the weaknesses and limitations of a human, but without sin. And he did this without leaving any of the divinity he had. He became man without ceasing to be God. That is the Christian confession. Born of the Virgin Mary. True man. That is the Christian confession. That is what it means that Jesus is the Son of God. It is the confession of scripture. John 1. Or other places, I and the Father are one. Or how Jesus says, I came from the Father. I proceeded from the Father. It is the confession of scripture.

This is what it means that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And this is why he is the perfect mediator between God and man. Because he is true God, he has unmediated access to the divine, because he is God. And yet, because he is true man, he knows our weaknesses. He knows your struggles. He knows what it's like to have flesh and bones and blood and guts, because he does. Even now, he has a true human body. God is a man. The wonder of that statement. So who is this Christ that we serve? He is the Son of God. And he is the one who rose from the dead.

This is the second most important declaration about Jesus, that he rose from the dead. that he truly died, that he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and that when he was crucified, he truly breathed his last. His soul was truly separated from his body, and his body was buried in a tomb for three days. And then on that third day, on that morning, he truly did rise from the dead. His soul was truly reunited with his body, and he was raised from the tomb. Not a spiritual resurrection, not a metaphorical resurrection, a bodily resurrection.

That is the confession of the New Testament, that is the confession of a Christian. Jesus is raised from the dead, and this is important, this is vital to the Christian faith, because it confirms the claims of Christ. Those who said, you say you're one with God, that's blasphemy, you must die. The fact that God raised him from the dead means that that accusation is false. Jesus is exactly who he claimed to be. It's important because it establishes the hope for our resurrection, that just as Christ was raised from the dead, those who have died, those loved ones whom we have buried, who are in Christ, will one day, when the trumpet blows, will be raised from the dead, just as surely as Christ was. And Jesus' resurrection is the confirmation of our justification. That because Jesus was raised from the dead, God says, I accept Christ's sacrifice. I accept Christ's people. These most basic claims about Jesus.

He is the son of God. He rose from the dead. Third and finally, he delivers from the coming wrath. He delivers from the coming wrath. Look at that in verse 10. Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath that is to come. This is perhaps the most scandalous doctrine of the Christian faith, the most scandalous first thing in the Christian faith. That Jesus came to deliver you from God's wrath.

The news that you are a sinner. That in and of yourself, you are dead in Adam. That though God made Adam and Eve perfect, they chose to sin. And that sin carried on to all their descendants. Adam, the head of all of humanity, when he sinned, all of us sinned with him, casting all of mankind into the fall so that we are a fallen race. And not only are we guilty in Adam, but we ourselves establish our own guilt, evidence our own guilt by continuing to sin, by continuing to break God's law, and we cannot break free from it.

And that because of that sin, because we are bent in ourselves, bent inward, because we do not glorify God as he deserves, because we've broken his law, because us, the one thing in all of creation that does not praise God for the glory that he is due, we deserve to die, to die an eternal death, and that's what that coming wrath is for. Don't think that because the wrath is delayed that it's not coming. Notice this is in the present tense. The wrath is on its way. God will surely come and avenge himself on his enemies. And what shelter can we possibly have for this wrath? Our own good works? The house of cards we build for ourselves? The fig leaves we try to sew together to cover our nakedness? No. Even if we were to do one good deed, one truly good deed, one not soiled with any sinful intent, even that would not make up for all the bad we did do.

We'd be nothing more than unprofitable servants who did only what we were supposed to do in one area, one time. we are helplessly lost, and that's why we need Jesus. That is why the Son of God became man, why he took upon himself a human nature, because only true God could bear the sins of the world, but only true man could die in the place of a man. Only true man could be the head of a human people. so that if you trust in Jesus, if you are a Christian, all of your sins have been imputed to Jesus Christ, all of your wickedness, all of the guilt of your sin has been laid on his back, and all of his righteousness has been given to you, so that in God's sight you are as righteous as Jesus Christ himself.

That is how you are delivered from the coming wrath. That is the most basic message of the gospel, that Jesus came He lived, he died to pay for our sins and deliver us from that coming wrath. And see, this is why we love Jesus. This is why we worship him. This is why we've turned, this is why we turn to him. Yes, in and of himself, he's worthy of it all. But on top of that, he's done all this.

So what is the Christian testimony? The Christian testimony is that you as a Christian are one who turns from idols continually, imperfectly, but steadily to serve the living and true God, to serve as his slave, a slave of righteousness. and you do so awaiting the coming of Jesus Christ from heaven. This Jesus Christ, truly the son of God, true God, and true man, who came, died, died, and was raised from the dead, all to deliver you from God's coming wrath. That's what it means to be a Christian.

Let's pray. Our Father and our God, we stand amazed at all that you have done. Who we are in Christ is only as a result of who you are, how you brought us from darkness into light. And Lord, we have no other hope. Help us, Lord, as we go out into the world that we might live that confession, that we might live ever in expectation if you're coming.

We might be able to articulate the gospel, to articulate these cardinal truths to anyone who might ask us to give us an account of the hope that is in us. Lord, I pray for any here who have understood these cardinal truths for the first time. Any who might be listening. Lord, I ask that this word would not be like the word on the path that met a hard heart and was gobbled up by Satan, but this word would be sown deeply, and they would believe that they'd be met by true saving faith. I ask all this in Jesus' name, amen.