

1 Thessalonians 1:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God;

Analysis

For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols—epistrephō (ἐπιστρέφω, 'to turn/convert') describes 180-degree reversal, not religious refinement. The Thessalonians didn't add Jesus to their pantheon; they abandoned eidōla (εἰδωλα, 'idols') for the living God. This conversion was public, costly, and complete—forsaking idols meant economic loss (no trade-guild participation in idol feasts), social ostracism (breaking family religious practices), and physical danger (angering neighbors who profited from idolatry).

To serve the living and true God (douleuein Theō zōnti kai alēthinō, δουλεύειν Θεῷ ζῶντι καὶ ἀληθινῷ)—douleuein means 'to serve as a slave,' indicating total life reorientation. The living God contrasts with dead idols (Psalm 115:4-8); the true God contrasts with false pretenders. This is biblical conversion: not adding Jesus to existing religious practices but turning from darkness to light, from Satan's power to God (Acts 26:18). The Thessalonians' visible turning created the testimony that spread abroad (v. 8).

Historical Context

Thessalonica worshiped many gods: Zeus, Dionysus, the Egyptian deities Serapis and Isis, and prominently the imperial cult (emperor worship was strong in this loyal Roman city). Converts faced immediate pressure—refusing to attend civic

festivals honoring these gods marked them as antisocial, even treasonous. The mob's accusation 'These all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus' (Acts 17:7) reveals the political danger of monotheism in a polytheistic culture.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. What modern 'idols' (ultimate values, security sources, identity foundations) would biblical conversion require you to turn from?
2. How does understanding conversion as 'turning from' idols to serve God challenge contemporary emphasis on 'inviting Jesus into your heart'?
3. What social, economic, or relational costs have you paid (or avoided) for exclusive loyalty to Jesus as Lord?

Interlinear Text

αὐτοὶ	γὰρ	περὶ	ἡμῶν	ἀπαγγέλλουσιν	ὁποῖαν			
themselves	For	of	us	shew	what manner			
G846	G1063	G4012	G2257	G518	G3697			
εἴσοδον	ἔσχομεν	πρὸς	ὑμᾶς	καὶ	πῶς	ἐπεστρέψατε		
of entering in	we had	to	you	and	how	ye turned		
G1529	G2192	G4314	G5209	G2532	G4459	G1994		
πρὸς	τὸν	θεῶ	ἀπὸ	τῶν	εἰδώλων	δουλεύειν	θεῶ	ζῶντι
to	G3588	God	from	G3588	idols	to serve	God	the living
G4314		G2316	G575		G1497	G1398	G2316	G2198
καὶ	ἀληθινῶ							
and	true							
G2532	G228							

Additional Cross-References

1 Timothy 4:10 (References God): For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe.

1 Corinthians 12:2 (Parallel theme): Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led.

Acts 14:15 (References God): And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein:

1 Thessalonians 2:13 (Truth): For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

Psalms 42:2 (References God): My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?

1 Thessalonians 2:1 (Parallel theme): For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain:

Daniel 6:26 (References God): I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he is the living God, and stedfast for ever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end.

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