

1 Thessalonians

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Introduction to 1 Thessalonians

The Writer

We see from 1 Thessalonians 1:1 and 2:18 that the writer was Paul the Apostle. This epistle was probably written in A.D. 51 from Corinth during Paul's year and half ministry there (read Acts 17). We also see from the first verse that Silvanus (Silas) and Timotheus (Timothy) were with Paul when he wrote it. This coincides with the book of Acts because we see that Silas was with Paul on this missionary Journey (Acts 15:22, 40; 16:19, 25, 27; 17:4, 10) as well as was Timothy for a portion of it (Acts 17:14-15; 18:4).

The letter is addressed as from Paul, Silas and Timothy:

- **Paul** was once a persecutor of the church named Saul of Tarsus. Wrote 13 of the 27 books of the New Testament. 1 Thessalonians is one of the first epistles he wrote.
- **Silas** was a prophet himself and selected by the elders as one of the delegates of the Jerusalem church to Antioch. When Paul and Barnabas had their personal disagreement, the missionary troop was disbanded. Barnabas and John Mark went their way and Paul and Silas went their own way. (Acts 15:36-41)
- **Timothy** was a young convert who Paul desired to continue with him in his missionary journey. (Acts 16:1-3) Note: Timothy isn't mentioned again until Acts 17:14 when he appears in Berea, but that may only be because he was so young.

Paul visited Thessalonica for three weeks after he left Philippi. He preached in the synagogue and reasoned out of the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ. There was mixed success at Thessalonica for Paul but the opposition eventually made it wise to leave. Paul visited Berea, Athens and then Corinth at which he writes this epistle.

The City of Thessalonica

Not much has been uncovered in archaeological efforts at the location of Thessalonica because of the modern city that sits on top of it. In 1962, an old bus station was demolished and when the area was excavated a 1st or 2nd century A.D. forum was uncovered. Among other things, an inscription (30 B.C. to A.D. 143) was found on the Vardar gate bearing the word "politarches," the word Luke used in reference to the officials of the city before whom Jason was brought by the mob (Acts 17:6).

What kind of place was Thessalonica for the new converts? Thessalonica was a bustling seaport city at the head of the Thermaic Gulf. It was an important communication and trade center, located at the junction of the great Egnatian Way and the road leading north to the Danube. It was the largest city in Macedonia and was also the capital of its province.

The background of the Thessalonian church is found in Ac 17:1—9. Since Paul began his ministry there in the Jewish synagogue, it is reasonable to assume that the new church included some Jews. However, 1:9—10; Ac 17:4 seem to indicate that the church was largely Gentile in membership.

The Purpose of Writing

(READ Acts 17:1-10) Paul had to leave Thessalonica suddenly after being there only a short time. The new Christians had little to no support in Paul's departure. Paul's purpose in writing this letter was to exhort, remind, and encourage them.

- Exhort—2:3; 4:1; 5:14
- Remind—1:3; 2:9
- Encourage—1:2; 3:7; 4:9, 18; 5:2, 11, 27

Amidst the important exhortation and stirring of their memory, Paul's main theme seems to be to encourage the young Christians at Thessalonica. 1:2; 3:7; 4:9, 18; 5:2, 11, 27. Included in his message is the assurance that *what you received was real*.

1 Thessalonians 1:2—We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers;

About six months after sending out the epistle of 1 Thessalonians (a.d. 51/52) he sent 2 Thessalonians in response to confusion that had arisen concerning the second coming of Christ.

Paul had not to date had the privilege to spend as much time with them as he would have liked especially after his abrupt departure and then further difficulty in trying to return.

1 Thessalonians 2:18—Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us.

The Theme

The theme of 1 Thessalonians is second coming of Christ (1:3, 10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:1-11, 23).

The Outline

There are five chapters in the first epistle to the Thessalonians that are divided into two sections:

1. Personal Relations to the Thessalonians (chapters 1-3)
2. Practical Instructions in Doctrine and Life (chapters 4-5)

Personal Relations to the Thessalonians (1-3)

Grace and Peace from God to them (1:1)

Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ

Paul was writing by Divine inspiration. He received more wisdom and revelation because he was obedient to God to give what he had already received.

We see from Acts 17:1-3 that when Paul first visited Thessalonica that he "reasoned with them out of the scriptures, opening and alleging" that Jesus was the Christ.

Paul pioneered this church through much opposition and persecution and now he could write to them.

Thanksgiving for them (1:2-10)

Paul was thankful because of their Christian virtues

- They had a work of faith (1:3).

Faith is demonstrated by judging, preaching and living the (Gospel) truth itself and by assurance, belief, and fidelity shown in their everyday lives. To have a work of faith we need to Judge righteously with the Scripture, preach that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior, and live Holy according to the Scripture.

- They had a labor of love (1:3).

Love is manifested from God to them, and then to others.

- They had patience of hope (1:3).

Hope is proved by remaining anchored in God the Father and in Lord Jesus Christ through every storm.

Paul was thankful because of their divine election (1:4-7)

The assurance of their election (1:4,5)

The proof of assurance (1:5)

The proof of assurance is the power of the Holy Ghost.

The reason of assurance (1:6)

This was because they received the Word (1:6; 2:13) and they received the Holy Ghost (1:6).

The results of the assurance 1:7-9

Because of this assurance, they became examples (1:7) and they turned from idols to serve the living and the true God (1:9).

The revelation of Jesus (1:10)

We must wait for Him to reveal Himself. We must have a revelation that Jesus is the Father's Son from Heaven, we must have a revelation of His resurrection, and we must have a revelation that He is our Deliverer from the wrath to come.

Paul's ministry among them (2:1-20)

The circumstances of the ministry (2:1, 2)

The manner of the ministry (2:3-12)

Here we have a detailed description of Paul's ministry among the Thessalonians. It was "not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile" (2:3). He spoke the Gospel, believing that God would try their hearts (2:4). God is a witness that he neither used flattering words nor wore a cloak of covetousness (2:5). He was not boastful and did not seek glory (2:6). As an apostle, he could have used his authority to burden them, but he did not (2:6-12).

The memory of the ministry (2:13-17)

The workers conduct (2:13)

The converts received the word of God (2:13-17)

The workers' relationship to the converts

As a nurse (2:7)

As a father (2:11)

As the Apostle of Christ (2:6)

The converts following and fellowship in suffering (2:14)

The persecutors (2:14-16)

The relation since the separation (2:17-20)

Timothy sent to minister to them (3:1-13)

Paul was planning to send Timothy to them to establish and comfort them concerning their faith (3:2). They would need to be established because there would be many afflictions (3:3), tribulations (3:4), and temptations (3:5) that would come upon them.

Paul's motive (3:5)

To win souls for Christ for eternity, not just for a while Lest his labor be in vain

Timothy's report (3:6)

Paul's reaction to the report (3:7-10)

- It brought comfort (3:7)
- It evoked thanksgiving (3:9)
- It increased prayer (3:10)

The contents of his prayer (3:9-13)

- Thanks (3:9)
- That God would make a way to see them (3:10, 11)
- effect that which is lacking in their faith (3:10)
- That they may grow in love (3:12)
- Their hearts would be established (3:13)
- Unblameable in holiness (3:13)

Practical Instructions in Doctrine and Life (4-5)

Instructions Given in Chapters 4 & 5

Exhortations concerning the Christian walk (4:1-12)

Instructions concerning those that sleep in Jesus and the dead in Christ (4:14- 4:16)

The manner of Christ's coming (4:14-5:4)

Instructions concerning being prepared for him (5:1-10)

The differences between:

3:3, 4	5:09	5:09
appointed to afflictions	appointed to wrath	appointed salvation
Not a judgment of God for sin, but a fire of purging to purify our character and strengthen our faith	God's ultimate choice for the unrepentant who have chosen to reject Christ's provision	A great call given by Christ to "come unto Me" and answered by the individual through faith

Comforting and edifying (5:11)

Church discipline (5:12-28)

- Respect for Christian leaders (5:12-13)
- Care for each other (5:14-15)
- Always be thankful (5:16-18)
- Always be discerning (5:19-22)
- Commit yourself to God who is faithful (5:23-24)
- Commit yourself to prayer for the ministry (5:25)
- Commit yourself to each other to submit and respect (5:26)
- Commit yourself to the Word (5:27)
- Commit yourself to His grace (5:28)

1 Thessalonians Study Questions

1. Read Acts chapters 16-18 & 1 Thessalonians 1-5. Comment on what you observe.
2. Memorize Titus 2:11.
3. Where is the true Church in Thessalonica?
4. Describe in three ways the good works shown in them.
5. What phrase was used to show that they were living good and acceptable unto the Lord?
6. Do not stoop to be king or president as a Christian. Give an exhortation concerning your election of God.
7. What were the results of the Word coming in power and in the Holy Ghost?
8. What phrases were used to describe what the circumstances were that they received the Word in? 1:6 and 2:2
9. What was their attitude in those circumstances? 1:6 and 2:13,14
10. What was their example? 1:7-9
11. What was the Jews attitude in general? 2:14-16
12. In 2:6 what was Paul's title?

13. Give the two phrases from 2:7 and 2:11 that describe how Paul handled the people.

14. Give a word that shows what God does for man.

15. Give two words that show what man does to man.

16. Beginning at 5:14-23, list the 14 things we are to do

1 Thessalonians Quiz

1. Where is the true Church in Thessalonica? 1:1

2. Describe in three ways the good works shown in them 1:3.

3. What phrase was used to show that they were living good and acceptable unto Jesus?

4. What were the results of the Word coming in power and in the Holy Ghost?

5. What phrases were used to describe what the circumstances were that they received the Word in? 1:6 and 2:2

6. What was their attitude in those circumstances? 1:6 and 2:13,14

7. What was their example? 1:7-9

8. What was the Jews attitude in general? 2:14-16

9. In 2:6 what was Paul's title?

10. Give the two phrases from 2:7 and 2:11 that describe how Paul handled the people.

11. Give a word that shows what God does for man.

12. Give two words that show what man does to man.

13. BONUS 1: Beginning at 5:14-23 list 10 of the 14 things we are to do. (Partial answers do not count. i.e., if only 8 things listed bonus is NOT awarded.)

14. BONUS 2: List five of the titles of the Lord as found in 1 Thessalonians. (Partial answers do not count.)
