

I OVERVIEW OF I THESSALONIANS

PURPOSE: To strengthen the Thessalonian Christians in their faith and to give them the assurance of Christ's return.

AUTHOR: Apostle Paul.

TO WHOM WRITTEN: Young church at Thessalonica and all believers everywhere.

DATE WRITTEN: About 51 A.D. from Corinth. It was one of Paul's earliest epistles.

SETTING: The believers of the young Thessalonian church needed to mature in their faith and to have a misunderstanding remedied concern the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Some believers thought that the Second Coming was imminent. There were others who wondered whether those who had already died would experience a bodily resurrection at His Second Coming.

KEY PEOPLE: Paul, Timothy, Silas

BLUEPRINT:

- **Faithfulness to the Lord (1:1-3:13)**
- Watchfulness for the Lord (4:1-5:28)

MEGATHEMES:

Persecution	Paul and the new Christians at Thessalonica experienced persecution because of their faith in Jesus Christ. We can also expect to experience trials and troubles as well. We need to stand firm in our faith in the midst of trials, being strengthened by the Holy Spirit.
Paul's ministry	Paul expressed his concern for this church even while he was being slandered. Paul's commitment to share the gospel in spite of difficult circumstances is a model we should follow.
Hope	One day all believers, both those who are alive and those who have died, will be united with Christ Jesus. To those Christians who die before Christ's return, there is hope of the resurrection of the body.
Being prepared	No one knows the time of Christ's return. We are to live moral and holy lives, ever watchful for His Coming. Believers must not neglect daily responsibilities, but always work and live as if the Lord was to return today.

II BACKGROUND

Thessalonica was the capital and largest city of the Roman province of Macedonia. Going through Thessalonica was the Egnatian Way, the most important Roman Highway, extending from Rome through the Orient. This highway and a thriving seaport made Thessalonica a wealthy city. However, just like Corinth, this affluence brought pagan religions and cultural influences that challenged the faith of the young Christians there.

Paul and his companions during a missionary journey probably arrived in Thessalonica in the early summer of A.D. 50, about 21 years after the resurrection of Jesus Christ. They planted the Christian Church in that city, but had to live abruptly because their lives were threatened (**Acts 17:1-10**). At the first opportunity, probably when he stopped in Corinth, Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to see how the believers were doing, and Timothy returned with good news, as the church was remaining in the faith and were unified. However, some questions did surface about their new faith, which prompted Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to answer their questions and commend them on their faithfulness.

In **1 Thessalonians 1**, Paul recalled the faith, love, and hope of the young church as revealed through its work, labor and endurance. Those memories merged with Paul's remembrance of the Thessalonians' far-reaching testimony of turning to God to serve Him and await His Son.

In the next 2 chapters Paul focused on his relationship with the church. In **1 Thessalonians 2**, he recounted the foundation laid for that relationship during his ministry there. His ministry there was marked with boldness in speech, purity in motive, gentleness in ministry, and independence in financial support.

In **1 Thessalonians 3**, he assured the church of his continuing concern for them, his unabated desire to see them, and his burden for them which led him to send Timothy to minister to them.

In the final two chapters, Paul exhorted the believers to live lives of sexual purity and to practice brotherly love.

In the last 6 verses of **1 Thessalonians 4**, Paul then addressed their misconceptions of Christ's Second Coming and recorded the only passage that directly mentions the Rapture.

In **1 Thessalonians 5**, Paul reminded the Thessalonians that the coming day of the Lord will mean judgment for the world and salvation for the church. This day will overtake everyone as a thief in the night. If the believers are watchful and prepared, they will not be surprised by that day. Paul concluded the epistle with a series of exhortations dealing with proper attitudes on the part of church members for their leaders as well as the need for constant rejoicing, ceaseless praying, and comprehensive thanksgiving.

III SCRIPTURE

GREETING AND VIRTUES OF THESSALONIAN BELIEVERS (1:1-1:3)

Paul himself founded the church in Thessalonica on his second missionary journey (**Acts 17:1-9**). He was only in the city a short time because he was forced out by enemies of the gospel. Yet the church of the Thessalonians continued alive and active. Paul's deep concern for this young church he was forced to suddenly leave prompted this letter.

This letter presupposes a basic truth: Paul found it important, even essential, to organize these young converts into a group of mutual interest, care, and fellowship. Paul "knew better than to leave his young societies with nothing more than the vague memory of pious preaching. The local organization was, as yet, primitive, but evidently it was sufficient to maintain itself and carry on the business of the church, when the guiding hand of the missionary was removed." (Moffatt).

(1): **Greeting to Thessalonian Believers:** Paul opened the letter to the church at Thessalonica with a salutation that emphasized the two key attributes of those who know Jesus: Grace (**God's Riches At Christ's Expense**) and peace (i.e., wholeness and well-being). Satan's world system can offer up no substitutes for these.

His companions on the Second Missionary Journey Team, Silas (**Acts 15:22**) and Timothy (**Acts 16:1-3**) were recognized.

(2-3): Believers' Christian Virtues: Paul then expressed his thanksgiving to God for the Thessalonian believers. His gratitude was both continual and comprehensive. His prayer for them was unceasing (*1 Thessalonians 5:17*).

Paul gave thanks to the Thessalonian believers because they stood firm during their deep persecution. Accordingly, they were commended by him for their Christian virtues that included: (1) loving deeds (i.e., unselfish service); (2) strong faith (i.e., believing that when all is said and done, God was telling the truth); and, (3) deep commitment to Christ (i.e., including being transformed with His attributes). These characteristics are the mark of an **effective** Christian.

BELIEVERS' GENUINE FAITH (1:4-7)

(4): Believers Election: Paul referred to each Thessalonian believer as divinely elected. Divine election (*Ephesians 1:4*) and human responsibility are inextricably tied. The two truths exist together and neither diminishes the other. These two truths must be appropriately balanced to understand what it is that Scripture is teaching:

- Emphasis on divine election to the neglect of human responsibility misrepresents God as arbitrary and tyrannical (lack of fairness); and,
- Emphasis on human responsibility to the neglect of divine election removes God's prior love as the first cause of a person's salvation by attributing salvation solely to human whim or initiative (e.g., works).

Salvation from beginning to end is God's work (*Romans 3:21*). However, God does not do that work apart from **human choices to receive it** (*John 1:12; Romans 10:9*).

(5): The Gospel Caused the Changes in the Thessalonian Christians: The Holy Spirit teaches us what is true and brings all things to our understanding (*John 14:26*). Paul reminded the believers that the Good News he, Silas, and Timothy preached was powerful because it was not from them, but from the Holy Spirit. In addition, their belief was further reinforced since Paul, Silas, and Timothy lived (i.e., "walked the talk") what they revealed under the power of the Holy Spirit. As bondservant (*Romans 1:1*) ambassadors for Jesus Christ, they did not want to let human weaknesses dilute the truth of their message.

The message of Jesus Christ has power. It has power for miracles; power for wonderful signs from God; and best of all, it has the power to change minds, hearts, and lives. It is a message by the Holy Spirit, a living Person, who works within the hearts of the hearers, to convict, to comfort and to instruct. If the preacher only speaks, then it is a matter of word only, but when the Holy Spirit works through the word, a great spiritual work is accomplished.

(6-7): Thessalonian Response: Become Followers and Examples: Paul's message included an element of personal discipleship as he personally led these Thessalonian Christians in their spiritual life. They could see his life and were invited to **learn from his example**.

As Paul was an example to the Thessalonian Christians, they became examples to others. **This is exactly how the work of God should happen.** The Christians in Macedonia and Achaia needed examples, and the Thessalonians supplied that need. As Christians, we always need others who will show us how to follow Jesus Christ.

The believers were willing to execute their faith in spite of deep persecution. They became "living epistles" to other Christians. We are to be committed to Him, regardless of the cost (Luke 9:62).

BELIEVERS' CHRISTIAN EXAMPLE (1:8-10)

(8-9): Commitment of Joy: The Thessalonian believers had come a long way, turning from their idols and now so on fire that their faith was so contagious and they evangelized everywhere. Paul mentioned that no matter where he visited, he heard about their great faith (even without the blogosphere). They were truly a model church that Jesus planted in this world.

Today, almost two millennia later, we should emulate the commitment and joy of the Thessalonian church.

(10): Commitment to Second Coming: Throughout this epistle, Paul emphasizes Christ's Second Coming, as an encouragement to the persecuted Thessalonian church. They were to look forward to the deliverance Christ would bring (*Titus 2:13*). Our perspective in life is incomplete without an understanding of what God's final plan is for His chosen (*Revelation 21-22*). Today's church generally de-emphasizes the Second Coming. God wants us to be so prepared as if the Rapture will occur before this Sunday school class ends. **Wouldn't that be great!!**

Later in this letter, Paul used the expression God did not appoint us to wrath (*1 Thessalonians 5:9*) to refer to God's deliverance of His people in the context of the wrath to come upon the world in the last days. He may have the same idea in mind here. "Used technically, as it so frequently is in the NT, 'wrath' (orges) is a title for the period just before Messiah's kingdom on earth, when God will afflict earth's inhabitants with an unparalleled series of physical torments because of their rejection of His will." (Thomas)

MARKS OF PAUL'S MINISTRY (2:1-12)

This Chapter begins a section where Paul defended his own character and ministry before the Thessalonians. This wasn't because Paul was insecure about his ministry, but because he had many enemies in Thessalonica (*Acts 17:5-6; Acts 17:13*) who discredited him in his absence, especially because of his hurried departure from Thessalonica. Paul's enemies said he left town quickly because he was a self-serving coward.

(1-2): Paul's Integrity: Paul referred to his first visit to Thessalonica (*Acts 17:1-9*) and they were familiar with Paul's trials and difficulties in Philippi prior to reaching Thessalonica (*Acts 16:16-40*). His life showed that there was always courage and no fear when the gospel was to be preached. His example is an encouragement for believers to be persistent in witnessing for Christ, even though when doing so may be difficult. **Faithful witnessing under adverse conditions is evidence of pure motives.**

(3): Sincerity of Paul's Motives: Paul made a pointed statement about the sincerity of his motives as a response to the accusations from the Jewish leaders who had stirred up the crowds (*Acts 17:5*). Paul never sought money, fame, or popularity when sharing the Good News. He was already infinitely paid by the eternal life he received from accepting Jesus as his Lord (*John 3:16; Romans 6:23b*). He was driven by his love of Jesus as his Lord and his desire for servanthood. The willingness to be an empty vessel unleashed the power of the Holy Spirit in his life. **Are you ready to empty yourself for service to Jesus? Once you do, the course He will take you on will be out of this world!!**

(4): The Truth and Nothing but the Truth: Paul did not alter his message one iota to please the crowd. God has no use for the politically correct, spin-doctors or polltakers. He wants the unadulterated truth (*Matthew 18:37*) to reach everyone. On its own merit, very few people can resist the truth. He knew that outward appearances did not fool God, for God knows our heart's deepest thoughts. Any attempt at straying from the truth would set off the Holy Spirit alarm clock.

(5): **The Truth will Set You Free:** Paul never resorted to flattery or sought praise. He never wore a mask to cover up greed because there was no greed in his heart to cover up. He had **total freedom** since he was fully calibrated to God's perfect will. Everything that he thought of and did was unimpeded. He needed no mask or filter, and never had to ask anyone if he did a good job. Witnessing done to meet quotas and goals, solicit flattery, or gain a reputation in the church, springs from the wrong motives and is not of the Kingdom of God.

(6): **Paul was Selfless and had Pure Motives:** Paul and his co-laborers did not want to be a burden to the Thessalonians (*II Corinthians 11:9; II Corinthians 12:16*). Even though as an apostle Paul was entitled to financial support, he chose to work full-time as a tentmaker to offset his living expenses. He truly was a selfless man!

Paul didn't seek glory from men because his needs for security and acceptance were met primarily in Jesus. This meant that he didn't spend his life trying to seek and earn the acceptance of man (*Matthew 6:1*). He ministered from an understanding of his identity in Jesus.

(7): **Paul was Gentle and Humble:** Gentleness, a fruit of the spirit (*Galatians 5:22-23*), is love in action. It involves being considerate, meeting the needs of others, allowing time for the other person to share their feelings, and being willing to learn (*I Corinthians 13:4-7*). However, in this world it is not often a respected quality. Since Satan adversely affects this world, power, control and assertiveness gain more respect in our society. Of course, such power and respect are temporal (*Psalms 73*) while gentleness is eternal.

Gentleness is an essential trait for both men and women, as we need to maintain this trait with every person we meet. Our goal is to be a **Zero Negative Impact Christian**.

(8-9): **Paul Supported Himself and Worked Hard:** The depth of Paul's love and concern is reflected in his desire to not only share the gospel, but to share his entire life. He was willing to impart his innermost being to those that he preached, making himself totally vulnerable. We expose our vulnerabilities to only people we love.

Paul recognized his right to be supported by those he ministered to (*I Corinthians 9:14*), but voluntarily gave up that right to set himself apart from missionaries of false religions. Paul denied his rights and took a higher standard upon himself.

(10): **Paul's Behavior and Integrity of His Mission:** Paul went on to elaborate on his character and the aim of his mission. He and his co-laborers were holy, righteous, and blameless:

- **Holy:** Set apart for God's service;
- **Righteous:** Conforming to God's moral laws and standards; and,
- **Blameless:** Being without reproach in light of God's standards and people's expectations.

Paul himself lived justly and blamelessly, but he also told the Thessalonians they should live the same way. He could tell them that they should walk worthy of God because his life and message were consistent.

(11-12): **Living Righteously:** By his words and example, Paul encouraged the Thessalonians to live in ways that would bring joy to God. Paul encouraged (i.e., exhorted) them to proper conduct as a father and mother encourages their children to behave righteously.

God's goal for Christians is for active participation in His Kingdom and glory. You have received salvation by His grace, not by works. The works come **after** you have inherited eternal life, as a tiny repayment to a God with infinite love for you. No matter how hard you work, He has already done more for you.