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Chapter Bible Study Series
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For the Teacher

An Introduction to 1 and 2 Thessalonians

Thessalonica was the largest, most important city of Macedonia. A pool of hot springs in the region gave the city its original name—Therma. However, in 315 B.C., its name was changed to Thessalonica after the half sister of Alexander the Great. Both a free city and a commercial center of the ancient world, the population reached 200,000 in Paul's day. Today, the city around which Paul walked is one of the few New Testament cities to survive, though its modern spelling is Thessalonki.

Paul founded the church at Thessalonica on his second missionary journey (Acts 17:1-10). According to Luke, after leaving Philippi, Paul made the 100-mile trek, stopping in Thessalonica for only a month or so. He had an amazingly fruitful ministry during those few weeks. However, some Jews incited a riot forcing the Apostle to abruptly leave Thessalonica and move on down to Berea.

The first letter Paul writes demonstrates the unfriendly environment the Thessalonians faced in living out their new found faith. Indeed this letter has served the persecuted church through the ages, both exhorting and encouraging them to stand strong in the Word they received "in much affliction," nevertheless "with joy of the Holy Ghost" (1:6). Paul expressed thanks for the church he was fortunate to establish (1:2-5). He also defended his character against slander (2:1-6). Additionally, Paul stood ready to deal with any issues pertaining to the body of Christ. One particular issue which the Apostle felt compelled to address was disrespect for church leaders (5:12-13).

Even so, the theme of Christ's second coming may overshadow all other concerns in this first letter to the Thessalonian believers. And, while Paul does not answer all the questions surrounding the Paraousia, he answers many questions, significant questions. In fact, each of the five chapters closes with an explicit reference to Christ's coming again.

1 Thessalonians Outline

The outline of 1 Thessalonians divides into two identifiable sections: **I. Personal** (chapters 1-3). Paul begins by focusing on the *ideal people*. Key words in this chapter include "love," "labor," "hope," and "power." The believers are described as receiving the word in "affliction" rather than agreeable circumstances (v. 6). Persecution is always a sharp blade which slices the genuine from the fake.

Chapter two presents the *ideal pastor*. The pastor will speak "boldly the Word of truth (v. 2). His life will be morally pure and focused on holiness to the Lord. The ideal pastor neither succumbs to flattery nor manipulates others with it (v. 5). Pastors are "gentle" among the flock and cherish them

as would a nurse her children (v. 8). A 24/7 attitude exudes from the ideal pastor (v. 9), always ready to minister to God's people. And, as a father would his child, so the ideal pastor both comforts and corrects (v. 11).

Finally, chapter three presents the *ideal program*. The church comes together as the body of Christ, functioning corporately and harmoniously as one.

II. Practical (chapters 4-5). As one notes in all of Paul's epistles, his concern never remains with theory alone. Or, perhaps a better way to say it is, correct belief without correct behavior is not Biblical Christianity. Hence, the Apostle sums up the personal section by stating the practical.



First, Paul's practical concerns deal with *development* (4:1-12). The core of Biblical faith is whether or how one "walks" in the Lord (v. 1). Hence, we are to obey the commandments of the Lord (v. 2). Second, Paul's practical concerns deal with the *dead* (4:13-18). Believers cannot afford to be ignorant of what happens to those who die in the Lord (v. 13). After all, if we are ignorant of what happens to a believer when he or she dies, what hope does the believer possess? Therefore, this is the hope we have in Jesus Christ. All believers who have passed on now remain with Him. Or, as Paul says, they "sleep" (i.e., rest) with Him (v. 15). Christ will first come for *His saints* to be forever with Him. This appearing will only be to *take* His saints. Popularly, this is called the "rapture" (vv. 16-17).

Third, Paul's practical concerns deal with the *Day of the Lord* (5:1-11). Now Christ comes back to earth *with His saints* to rule and reign a thousand years (5:1-2). While Christ's coming is a great encouragement to His people (4:18), it means grave destruction to unbelievers the world over (5:3). Fourth, Paul's practical concern deals with *duties* (5:12-22). Christians are to "know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake" (5:12-13). Leaders are to take their responsibilities seriously, and churches are to respect their God-given leaders. Joy (5:16), prayer (5:17), and thanksgiving (5:18) remain a vital part of Christian ministry until Jesus comes. Paul's closing remarks focus on the public reading of God's Word (5:27).

2 Thessalonians Outline

Second Thessalonians was written within a few months of Paul's first letter while he was still in Corinth. The first letter answered questions concerning the Second Coming of Christ. Interestingly, after his first letter was sent, Paul got news of the Lord's return. Someone was teaching the church that the "Day of Lord" had already come (2:2)! Paul corrects the faulty theology by pointing out two events that must happen before Jesus comes again: *Apostasy* at end of the age; *Antichrist* appearing at the beginning of the Great Tribulation.

The hard time the Thessalonians were experiencing in understanding end time events is no less true today. Our

world is progressively growing worse. The most difficult days to live a Christian life are yet future. Believers are still confused about the Lord's return.

To make matters even worse, the Thessalonian believers received a letter claiming to be from Paul (2:2). The Apostle had to clear the air concerning those pretending to be apostles. In addition, fellow believers had become lazy, free-loading rather than making an honest living. Consequently, reproach was imposed upon the Christian faith.

In summary, 2 Thessalonians was written to answer three problems they were experiencing: *persecution* (1:4-5), *false teachers* (1:1-2), and *idle Christians* (3:6-12).

Introduction (1: 1-2): Paul's standard greeting and thanksgiving for his recipients

I. A Word of Admiration (1:3-12): Paul encourages the church in their faith and exhorts them to remain strong during persecution

- A. *Praise* (1:3-4)
- B. *Promise* (1:5-10)
- C. *Prayer* (1:11-12)

II. A Word of Admonition (2:1-3:15): Paul follows his encouragement and exhortation with correction to the teachings of the false teachers who arose in Thessalonica

- A. *The coming lie* (2:1-12)
- B. *The Christian life* (2:13-3:15)

Conclusion (3:16-18)

Recommended Reading:

Journey Through the Bible (jerryvines.com)

Exploring 1 and 2 Thessalonians, John Phillips, Kregel.

1, 2 Thessalonians, The New American Commentary, D. Michael Martin, Broadman/Holman.

The Gospel and the End of Time, John Stott, IVP.

Be Ready, Warren Wiersbe, Victor Books.

