

# Thessalonians I & II: A Chapter by Chapter Study

## Introduction

The letters to the Thessalonians are some of Paul's earliest works. It is typically believed that the letter to the Galatians and book of James were written prior to the Thessalonians, making these letters the third and fourth books of the New Testament chronologically. There is debate on the timing of the letter to the Galatians and the book of James so these may be the first and second letters Paul wrote and even of the New Testament. Paul was in Corinth when he wrote these letters. Paul and Silas were in Thessalonica in Acts 17 and were chased out. Timothy and Silas delivered the first letter in about 51 AD. These letters deal with eschatology, that is Paul talks about death, judgment and the eternity of the soul. It is generally believed that Paul penned the first letter on his own and then wrote the second letter six months to a year later in response to questions from the Thessalonians about the first letter.

## 1 Thessalonians

### Chapter 1

Paul founded this church on his second missionary journey. While in Corinth, Timothy and Silas come to Paul and tell him that the church is thriving. Paul excitedly writes this letter of encouragement to them. This letter is meant to not only bolster their faith, but to offer correction where needed, as later chapters will show.

This first chapter is a greeting of joy from Paul because of the reports of how their faith has grown and their lives have changed since their church started.

Verse 3 is the first time (chronologically) that Paul mentions faith, hope and love together, a theme found throughout Paul's writings.

*What does the phrase 'beloved by God' mean here?*

In verse 4, Paul calls the church 'beloved by God'. This was a phrase that was typically reserved for great men of God like Moses, David, Solomon or Daniel and sometimes it referred to the Jews as a nation. It would never be used to describe a gentile until Paul uses it here to define Christians since the blood of Jesus saves all, Jews and gentiles alike.

Verses 5 -7 talk about the strength of this church's belief. The gospel and the Holy Spirit are evident in this church as even in the face of adversity their faith perseveres.

Verses 8-10 describe how the Thessalonians have even ministered to other cities and been an example to other churches around them. They are performing the missionary work that Paul taught them by living it, not just talking it.

### Chapter 2

VV1-12

*What is Paul trying to accomplish in these verses?*

Paul begins this chapter with what may at first glance appear to be a defense of his character. It is, but not to the church in Thessalonica. This section is intended for the enemies that Paul and Silas made there. The religious leaders of Thessalonica, including Jews, chased Paul out of Thessalonica and then

pursued him to Berea and forced Paul to leave there. This mob did not stop discrediting Paul after he had left. This defense is aimed at the people that continue to slander his name.

Thessalonica was a major thoroughfare on a trade route. It was a melting pot of a city. It was famous for its' mixing of cultures and religions. There were Greek gods, Greek intellectuals, Egyptian gods and Roman gods, not to mention the Jews and the newly formed Christian church. Paul is listing what made the Christians stand out from the others. Most of those religions were there to exploit for gain. The Christian church was taking money out of other religions' pockets by setting them free from that lifestyle.

#### VV13-20

This is another praise for the church in Thessalonica as they not only received the message of Christ as truth but accepted having seen the harsh treatment of Paul and Silas. This church continues to be persecuted and yet they remain faithful.

Paul goes on to remind them that this suffering is not as great as what will happen to the persecutors at the hands of an angry God. This is a two-fold statement in that justice will be served, but to also not retaliate as God will deal out the justice.

Paul closes this chapter by reminding the Thessalonians that he loves them and cares for them and that his inability to visit them should not be misconstrued as anything other than a Satanical hindrance.

### **Chapter 3**

While Paul, Silas and Timothy were in Berea, Paul grew concerned for this church and sent Silas and Timothy back to find out how they were doing and help them if they could while Paul continued his journey to Athens and eventually Corinth. There they met Paul with a glowing report, and he is relieved and excited about it. Paul expresses his joy and comfort to the Thessalonians in this chapter.

### **Chapter 4**

#### VV1-12

There is some debate on why Paul brings up sexual impurity here. Some think it may have been that sexual immorality had crept into the church as a practice. The prevailing theory is that this was more of a cultural issue. Neither the Greeks nor the Romans had any concept of sexual purity. Abstinence was a foreign idea in this region at this day and age. Paul may have been simply reminding them to remain steadfast in their faith as this temptation would be strong both personally and culturally. This would be another way that Christians would stand out among worldly views.

#### VV13-18

Here Paul reminds the church that this world is temporary. That though we may mourn the passing of our fellow Christians, they are celebrating in Heaven! Remaining faithful and true to Christ as the previous section instructed would result in our eternal salvation.

### **Chapter 5**

#### VV1-11

This chapter is a continuation of the concepts in the previous chapter about remaining steadfast and true to Christ, and to demonstrate to others what their life could be like. The Thessalonian church is good at this and Paul is encouraging them to remain so.

Here, Paul produces a famous Christian image of God returning like a thief in the night. It is also the first images of the different aspects of Christianity as a uniform for a soldier in Christ, a precursor to Ephesians 6. The helmet is still represented as salvation, but the breastplate would be compared to righteousness instead of faith and love here.

## VV12-28

Paul closes this letter with a series of instructions, not as a rebuke, but as a confirmation that the Thessalonians were on the right path.

- Honor the workers and teachers in the church (v12- 13)
- Live peacefully (v13)
- Admonish the unruly (v14)
- Encourage the fainthearted (v14)
- Help the weak (v14)
- Be patient with everyone (v14)
- Do not repay evil with evil (v15)
- Seek to do good for others (v15)
- Rejoice always (v16)
- Pray constantly (v17)
- Give thanks in everything (v18); Not necessarily *for* everything but be thankful regardless.
- Do not quench the spirit (v19)
- Do not despise prophetic utterances (v20)
- Examine everything carefully (v21)
- Abstain from evil (v22)

*What does it mean to not quench the spirit?*

The word 'quench' here means to snuff out, as in a lamp or candle. The Holy Spirit is often referred to as a flame or fire, so Paul is expanding upon that metaphor. Here it means do not doubt, do not be indifferent to or even reject God and to not be distracted by the world around us or those in it. Basically, stay focused on Jesus.

## 2 Thessalonians

### Chapter 1

*Why are Paul and his companions 'bound to thank God...as it is fitting' (v3)?*

The consensus is that the Thessalonians replied to the first letter and said that they were not worthy of such praise. Paul, Silas and Timothy are offering their encouragement to this church and maintain that their faith, love and patience even amongst persecutions and tribulations has made them worthy of praise in this regard.

*In v5 Paul states that being persecuted is 'manifest evidence' of the righteous judgment of God. What does this mean?*

It is common for people to think that God is absent in our suffering. Paul contradicts that notion here by saying that our suffering is a tool to make us pure. God is with us *especially* during our suffering.

*How do you feel when you are being persecuted? What are your first thoughts?*

VV6-10 reference how God will deal with those who afflict the persecution amongst the believers and how the persecuted will find peace and rest. It is easy to look at these verses as a justification to wish our enemies ill. That is not what Paul is saying. For us to be faithful through our trials means to love everyone including those who cause us harm. There were probably many early believers who wished Paul death before his conversion but look what became of Paul. It is important to leave the judgement to God alone. Heaven is a reward for everyone that turns to God including those that were once the tormentors. This is yet another trait that would help the Christians stand out among the worldly culture.

Paul closes this chapter with a prayer that the Thessalonians would always be worthy of spreading the message of Christ and the eternal reward that follows.

## **Chapter 2**

### **VV1-2**

The opening of chapter 2 is one of the primary reasons for believing that this letter is in response to questions from the Thessalonians. These questions are apparently regarding teachings from Paul while he was with them as well as Paul's first letter. Paul changes gears here from chapter 1 to address concerns, apparently from communication after the first letter. The fact that we do not know what the questions are is one of the complications of understanding this letter.

These first two verses address some sort of confusion concerning both the gathering of the believers to Christ and the return of Christ. It is most commonly believed that this is addressing the passage in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18. Since the questions or conversations spurring this response are not present it is unknown what exactly Paul is addressing. What is clear is that Paul is distinguishing these as two separate events that have not yet happened. It is a common theory that the church in Thessalonica believed that they had missed the return of Christ.

### **VV3-12**

*What is meant by 'the falling away' in verse 3?*

This is a source of great debate among bible scholars. The literal translation includes the word 'the' and not 'a' so that there is a sense of importance or finality to it. Many believe that this is the first mention of the rapture.

*Who is the 'man of sin' or the 'man of lawlessness'?*

Yet another source of great debate in the same verse. Some believe that this would be a body of government or a highly regarded office. Some Protestant interpreters even believe this to be the office of the Pope. Others say that this is an individual and more than likely the Antichrist. Daniel 9:26, 8:23 and 11:36-45 are often associated with this verse, as is John 5:43 where Jesus Himself describes a person who comes in his own name.

*Who restrains the man of sin in verses 6 and 7?*

This is mostly agreed upon to be the Holy Spirit. God Himself restrains this man until the end of times when God will allow him to be free. This is usually associated with the prophecies in Revelation. The remainder of this section falls in line with the last book from John.

VV13-17

This is the closing of this chapter where Paul once again praises and expresses his gratitude to the Thessalonian church and offers a prayer of comfort for them.

## Chapter 3

VV1-5

This chapter is the closing of the letter. Paul opens the chapter asking for prayer for himself as he did in so many other letters to follow and he encourages the Thessalonians to keep their faith and trust in the Lord.

VV6-15

This passage concerns disorderly or unruly members of the church. It is possible that this was a question the Thessalonians had and asked for Paul's advice on. In 1 Thessalonian's 5:14, Paul mentions this same conduct so this could be addressing the same person or persons as the previous letter. Paul's response is plain and direct.

- This is a command in the name of Jesus.
- Withdraw from these people because they are not doing the will of God.
- These people continue to do this, this is not a one-time occurrence. The present tense of 'walks' or 'leads' in verse 6 is the confirmation of this.
- Withdrawing from them doesn't mean to stop loving them. They must repent and change their ways to be allowed back into the fold.
- Paul and his companions did their best to lead by example. He points to this as to how these unruly members should behave.
- The church is not there to be taken advantage of; it is there to help others. Weeding out the unruly allowed more help for those that needed it.
- Allowing the disorderly to maintain a presence in the church would also allow them to corrupt members or cause resentment. Such corruption should not be present among the followers of God.
- Do not let this command become an excuse to stop doing good.

VV16-18

Paul may not have actually written down every word, but had it scribed and then signed it himself as a sign of his approval of the words in the letter. This was common in his letters.

## References

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