

OUTLINE OF 1 THESSALONIANS

- I. Salutation (1:1).
- II. Section One: Comfort and Encouragement to Persevere in Adversity (Chapters 1-3):
 - A. Remembrance: The Thessalonians' conversion was worth remembering, and they should be encouraged by it, as was Paul (1:2-10).
 - i. Paul remembered them and the proof of their conversion in his prayers (1:2-4).
 - ii. Their conversion amidst persecution provided a remarkable example that was broadcast along with their support of the gospel (1:5-10).
 - iii. Paul's persecution and humble, selfless preaching testified to his integrity (2:1-12).
 - iv. Despite persecution, they accepted Paul's message as the word of God, not men (2:13-16).
 - B. Comfort: The Thessalonians' spiritual well-being and persistence was once a cause of great concern to Paul, but it is now a source of great strength and comfort (2:17-3:13).
 - i. The Thessalonians were Paul's concern and joy, despite his absence (2:17-20).
 - ii. Timothy was sent to instruct and encourage the Thessalonians (3:1-5).
 - iii. Timothy brought an encouraging report of the Thessalonians (3:6-8).
 - iv. Paul personally drew strength from their success and prayed for their further spiritual growth and maturity (3:9-13).
- III. Section Two: Doctrinal Explanations and Moral Admonitions (Chapters 4-5):
 - A. General encouragement, "*abound more and more*" (4:1-2).
 - B. Maintain sexual purity and holiness (4:3-8).
 - C. Abound in love toward brethren and quiet, diligent labor (4:9-12).
 - D. Take comfort in knowing the certainty of Jesus' audible return and the saints' resurrection (4:13-18).
 - E. Be always working, comforted, and prepared for the Lord's return, which will occur at an unknowable time (5:1-11).
 - F. Distinguish and treat others based on their works and their needed good (5:12-15).
 - G. Cling to God's revelation and reject that which is not (5:16-22).
- IV. Closing and Benediction (5:23-28).

LESSON 1 – REMEMBRANCE AND REINFORCEMENT

1 Thessalonians 1:1-2:20

Brief History and Background

On Paul's second missionary journey, in about 51-52 AD, Paul travelled to Macedonia, after receiving a vision (**Acts 16:1-11**). There in Philippi, Lydia, her household, the Philippian jailer, and his household were converted (**Acts 16:12-34**). After being wrongfully punished and imprisoned, Paul and Silas were released and eventually travelled from Philippi to Thessalonica (**Acts 16:35-17:1**). After a short time preaching there with some success, the Jews stirred up a mob and began a persecution against the infant Thessalonian Christians, which resulted in Paul and Silas having to leave Thessalonica immediately (**Acts 17:1-10**). These persecuting Jews were so intent on stopping Paul's preaching that they journeyed to Berea to stir up a crowd there also (**Acts 17:10-14**). From Berea, Paul travelled to Athens (**Acts 17:15-34**), and from Athens, Paul travelled to Corinth, where Silas and Timothy rejoined him (**Acts 18:1-5**). While in Corinth, in about 51-52 AD, Paul wrote this first epistle to the Thessalonians.

Themes

Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians can be divided into two sections. The first section of the epistle (chapters 1-3) is understandably encouraging, reinforcing, and personal, given the short time that Paul was able to spend with the newly converted Thessalonians. They are admonished to cling to their faith in the face of adversity and persecution, which had undoubtedly continued given the city's religious and political climate. The second section (chapters 4-5) deals with questions and issues on various topics, including holiness, sexual purity, dead saints, the end of the world, and various other applications. Concern for the dead in Christ receives the most attention in this second section of the epistle, and it is a subtle theme throughout.

Bible Reading with Questions – Also Read Acts 16-17 for background:

Greeting and Remembrance – 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5

1. What benefit and purpose would have been accomplished by Paul recounting how the gospel came to them? How can we benefit from this same technique?

A City Set on a Hill – 1 Thessalonians 1:6-10

2. What 2 messages or statements were broadcasted by the Thessalonians? Applications to us?

3. What was the religious background of the Thessalonians? Were these Thessalonians most likely Gentiles or Jews?

Summary (2:1-16)

Paul continues to reinforce the Thessalonian's conviction by reminding them of the blameless way he and his fellow workers came to them with the gospel. They spoke boldly, even though they had been persecuted and were facing more persecution. They did not seek glory or compensation from the Thessalonians, even though that was their right. Instead, they demonstrated selfless concern and love for the Thessalonians. Consequently, in part, the Thessalonians realized and accepted Paul's message as being from God, and it provided great strength to them as they endured persecution from their own countrymen, much like the Judean Christians who suffered persecution from their Jewish brethren. However, the wickedness of the Jews has not gone unnoticed or forgotten, while Paul expresses the Thessalonians' persistence and ultimate salvation as his "*crown of rejoicing*".

Bible Reading with Questions

Blameless Exhortation – 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

4. How could Paul's preaching to the Thessalonians have been "*in vain*" (see **3:5; Gal. 4:11**)?

5. What evidence does Paul call to their remembrance to demonstrate his concern primarily for God's approval and not just man's?

6. How did Paul and his companions show their personal love and concern for the Thessalonians?

7. What important exhortation did Paul deliver to the Thessalonians, which was worthy of their recollection?

Blessed Imitation and Avenged Persecution – 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16

8. How is it that the Word of God "*effectively works*" in us? What is required from us?

9. In what way did the Thessalonians become "*imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus*"? Does this mean we should today imitate the Judean churches?

LESSON 2 – ENCOURAGEMENT AND GROWTH

1 Thessalonians 2:17-4:18

Summary (2:17-3:13)

Paul's, Timothy's, and Silas' great spiritual affection for the Thessalonians is most evident in this third and final chapter of the epistle's first half. Although Paul's company's love for the Thessalonians can be seen in the preceding chapters, their intertwined relationship is clearly visible here. Paul's concern for their spiritual well-being prompts Timothy's encouraging visit to the Thessalonians, which results in a good report to Paul, which increases his joy, thanksgiving, and prayers for them, which only serves to strengthen the Thessalonians. This example demonstrates brethren's great opportunity to mutually encourage and uplift each other.

Bible Reading with Questions

Timothy's Message from Paul – 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:5

1. Why was Paul unable to personally visit the Thessalonians according to his desire? Explain.
2. How were the Thessalonians Paul's hope, joy, glory, and crown of rejoicing? How does this reflect upon our own priorities?
3. How could the Thessalonians avoid being "shaken"?

Timothy's Report to Paul – 1 Thessalonians 3:6-8

4. How would Paul's life be dependent upon the Thessalonians' steadfastness? (Explain verse 8.)

Paul's Prayer for the Thessalonians – 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

5. What three things did Paul wish or pray for the Thessalonians, and how are they related?

Summary (4:1-18)

This fourth chapter begins the second half of the book, which explains more about the resurrection and the Lord's return provides gentle encouragement to continue growing in obedience to God's commands. The first admonition is for sexual purity and holiness. The second command is to work diligently and to continue abounding in love toward each other, saints beyond Thessalonica, and even outsiders. The third topic explains what will happen to the dead in Christ. They will rise and ascend first at the Lord's visible return, and then the living will ascend to be together with Jesus forever. This hope – eternal life with Jesus beyond death – would have brought great comfort and peace to the Christians of the first century, as it continues to comfort saints even today.

Bible Reading with Questions

Abstain from Sexual Immorality – 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

6. What is the first basic command that Paul brings to their remembrance? How would they “*abound more and more*” in keeping this command?
7. What virtue should characterize the Christian's purpose, manner of life, or mission, as identified by Paul here (verse 7)?

Diligent Work and Generous Love – 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

8. How were the Thessalonians “*taught by God*”? Can we receive the same today? If so, how?
9. How might the Thessalonians have demonstrated love “*toward all the brethren who are in Macedonia*”?

Resurrection of the Dead in Christ – 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

10. Before Paul's writing, what hope did the Thessalonians have for their brethren, who had died in Christ?
11. Why would they need to “*comfort one another*” if they all received the same words? Lessons?

LESSON 3 – WATCH AND BE SOBER

1 Thessalonians 5:1-28

Summary

In chapter 5, Paul continues his explanation of the Lord's return from the close of chapter 4; however, he focuses on the unexpected timing and suddenness of His coming, which will bring destruction to those who are unprepared. Naturally, Paul's exhortation for the Thessalonians and us is to be always prepared and spiritually vigilant. We should be comforted by the certainty of the Lord's return and reunion of His saints – both dead and alive, but we are to be edified unto sobriety and vigilance, because of the unknown timing of these events. Closing admonitions to appropriately recognize both the strong and the weak are provided. Loosely grouped exhortations to take advantage of God's revelation, cling to it, and discard what is not good are also given. The letter closes with a prayerful blessing and benediction for the Thessalonians' complete preservation and some related instructions.

Bible Reading with Questions

Watching for the Lord's Return – 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

1. How is the Lord's return like a thief and a pregnant woman?
2. What does it mean to be a "son of light" or "son of day"? Contrast this with being a "son of night" or "son of darkness".
3. When does the Christian take off his spiritual armor?
4. How do we "live together with Him" with those who "sleep" (verse 10)?

Recognize and Pursue the Appropriate Good for All – 1 Thessalonians 5:12-15

5. Who are "those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you"? Could this refer to evangelists?
6. How do we distinguish among the "unruly, ... fainthearted, ... weak"? How do we know who fits in what category?

7. What should be the overarching principle for all our interactions with others? Why does revenge not comply with this principle?

Clinging to God's Word – 1 Thessalonians 5:16-22

8. If joy is an emotion, something we feel, how could the Holy Spirit command them and us through Paul to “rejoice always”?
9. How would the Thessalonians have “*quenched the Spirit*” or “*despised prophecies*”? How would this apply to us today?
10. Are Christians to be simple, naïve, gullible people, who believe everyone who claims to speak for God? Explain. Providing supporting Scriptures. Is this limited to testing false prophets?

Closing Commands and Benediction – 1 Thessalonians 5:23-28

11. How is God “*faithful*”? Is not faith a requirement for us to believe in Him, not the other way around?
12. How would this practice affect the Bible's compilation? How can it provide confidence in the textual integrity of the Bible?