

these things. 9 And when they had received a pledge from Jason and the others, they released them. NASB And so Paul and Silas fled the city and went on their way to the next God ordained destination to preach the Gospel. After being forced to leave Thessalonica, they traveled to Berea where in just a short time the angry Jews from Thessalonica pursued them all the way to Berea to seek them out and cause them trouble.

Acts 17:10-15 - 10 And the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea; and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. 11 Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so. 12 Many of them therefore believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men. 13 But **when the Jews of Thessalonica found out that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Berea also, they came there likewise, agitating and stirring up the crowds.** 14 And then immediately the brethren sent Paul out to go as far as the sea; and Silas and Timothy remained there. 15 Now those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed. NASB

And so Paul was forced again to move on to yet another destination and wound up in Athens. It was there of course where he preached his famous sermon on Mars Hill.

Now as a result of this Jewish opposition to Paul, Silas and the new Christians at Thessalonica, the fledgling church found themselves as the object of much persecution in Thessalonica. Nevertheless, God's elect people were called out of the dark idolatry of this pagan city, and the very young and holy church was left to prosper in the face of no small opposition, upheld by keeping power of God and shepherded by the Lord Jesus Christ. It was because of Paul's separation from the young church that he left with such great concern for them. **Such is the occasion of Paul's letters to the Thessalonians.**

Purpose and Themes present in 1 Thessalonians: The content of things covered in 1 & 2 Thessalonians is really quite remarkable. Because Paul had spent such little time with them, he writes to give both instruction and encouragement to them. Therefore his writing is uniquely suited for their difficult situation being such a young church and facing the difficult task of growing and learning with few mature leaders and persecution from other hostile religious peoples. Therefore Paul's general purpose was one of encouragement and instruction, but he writes with several themes and topics in view in order to address important matters needed in their theological development. His topics include;

- **Joy, Thanksgiving and Encouragement for a healthy new church**
- **Responsibilities of a Healthy Church**
- **Instructions for Godly Living**
- **Eschatological Topics of grave importance**

Joy, Thanksgiving and Encouragement for a healthy new church

Paul spends the entire first chapter of the letter thanking God and commending the Thessalonians for their great faith.

1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 - 2 We **give thanks to God** always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; 3 constantly bearing in mind **your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ** in the presence of our God and Father, NASB

He was sure they were God's very elect and chosen people because of the fruits of their lives. Paul was greatly endeared and encouraged by the Thessalonians, especially the way in which they enthusiastically received the Gospel and the Word of God.

1 Thessalonians 1:4-5 - 4 knowing, brethren **beloved by God, His choice of you;** 5 for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but **also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction;** just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. NASB

1 Thessalonians 2:13 - 13 And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, **you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God,** which also **performs its work in you who believe.** NASB

2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 - 13 But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren **beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation** through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. 14 And **it was for this He called you through our gospel,** that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. NASB

He even goes so far as to say that they are his very glory and joy, the fruits of his own labor in the Lord.

1 Thessalonians 2:19-20 - 19 For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? 20 **For you are our glory and joy.** NASB

This was indeed a *model* church of faith, hope, love and holy lives who were both evangelical and steadfast even in the face of persecution.

Responsibilities of a Healthy Church

MacArthur writes, "*The Thessalonian epistles catalog the marks of a healthy growing church. They give the responsibilities of the leaders to the congregation (1 Thess 5:12, 14-15); the congregation to the leaders (1 Thess 5:13, 25-28, 2 Thess 3"1-2); of believers to grow spiritually (1 Thess 5:16-22); stand firm in the midst of persecution (1 Thess 2:14-16); an live orderly lives (2 Thess 3:6-13); and the church's responsibility to discipline sinning members(2 Thess 3:6-13). They also emphasize the church's responsibility to reach the lost world with the saving truth of the Gospel (1 Thess 1:8-10).*" This letter gives such clear and concise instructions on church life its message can hardly be mistaken.

Instructions for Godly Living

In 1 Thessalonians chapters 4 and 5, Paul gives very practical instructions about godly living, even as he is commending the Thessalonians as already doing so.

1 Thessalonians 4:1-5 - Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that, as **you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk),** that you may excel still more. 2 For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.

He commands them to avoid sexual immorality, which was so prevalent in their culture.

1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 - For this is the will of God, **your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality;** 4 that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, 5 **not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles** who do not know God; NASB

He also commends and exhorts them to love and to be growing in love and also to work hard, lead quiet lives and not to be in any need.

1 Thessalonians 4:9-12 - 9 Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; 10 for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But **we urge you, brethren, to excel still more,** 11 and to make it your ambition **to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands,** just as we commanded you; 12 so that you may behave properly toward outsiders **and not be in any need.** NASB

In 1 Thessalonians chapter 5:12-21 is some of the most concise instructions on godly living in all of Paul's letters. And then again in 2 Thessalonians chapter 3:6-14, Paul writes explaining the process of church discipline and commanding them to carry it out.

2 Thessalonians 3:6 - 6 Now **we command you,** brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, **that you keep aloof from every brother who leads an unruly life** and not according to the tradition which you received from us. NASB

Eschatological Topics of grave importance

Of all of the Pauline writings, 1 & 2 Thessalonians deal most profoundly with Eschatology. By Eschatology we mean the study of "*last things*" or, of the "*end times*" if you will. In fact, the

issues that Paul deals with here have absolutely massive implications for the whole world of mankind, whereas Paul actually speaks in great detail about the end of the world as we know it, the eagerly expected Second Coming of Christ Himself, to deliver His people and to bring judgment on a world full of rebellious sinners. The things which are here spoken of are some of the most profoundly important writings in all of the Word of God. Truly these warnings from God prove the very divine character of the Bible. What book in all of human history has spoken with such majesty and authoritative imperative as the Bible when it speaks to us about the end of the world at the powerful hand of God, and of the coming judgment of mankind. Here in Thessalonians we get a sneak peak at these most important and crucial issues of the Bible Prophecy. And it comes to us in the form of instruction and practical explanation for us to understand very clearly and concisely.

- **Deliverance of God’s people at the first resurrection** – Here in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4:13-18 is the famous passage on the rapture of the church which even deals with the death of Christians and their future hope. Here is pictured one very important event called the First Resurrection. We also learn in 1 Thessalonians that we are not destined for God’s wrath like the wicked, but more than twice are given promises of deliverance from God’s wrath.

1 Thessalonians 1:10 - 10 and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, **who delivers us from the wrath to come**. NASB

1 Thessalonians 5:9 - 9 For **God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation** through our Lord Jesus Christ, NASB

- **The Second Coming of Christ** – In the book of 1 Thessalonians there is a reference to the Second Coming in **every** chapter (1 Thessalonians 1:10, 2:19, 3:13, 4:16-17, 5:23). In 1 Thessalonians 5:2 and 2 Thessalonians 2:2 this coming is referred to as **“the day of the Lord.”** In 2 Thessalonians chapter 1:7-10 we have not only a reference to the Second Coming but also the destruction of the ungodly and judgment of those who have rejected the Gospel.

2 Thessalonians 1:7-10 - 7 and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well **when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire**, 8 dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 And **these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power**, 10 **when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day**, and to be marveled at among all who have believed — for our testimony to you was believed. NASB

Later in chapter 2:8 we have a reference to the Lord Jesus Himself personally destroying the Anti-Christ at His coming.

2 Thessalonians 2:8 - 8 And then that lawless one will be revealed **whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming**; NASB

- **Explanation of the coming day of wrath and judgment including instructions about the Antichrist and Great Tribulation** – Both 1 & 2 Thessalonians deal with God’s judgment and destruction of the wicked and rebellious world. Paul explains in 1 Thessalonians that **“the day of the Lord will come like a thief”** to the unbelieving world, and when it comes, it will bring **“sudden destruction”** down upon them who believe themselves to be safe from harm.

1 Thessalonians 5:2-3 - 2 For you yourselves know full well that **the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night**. 3 **While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly** like birth pangs upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.

However Paul instructs the Christians that this day will not **“overtake them like a thief”** because they walk in the **“light of day,”** enlightened by the knowledge of the signs of His coming.

1 Thessalonians 5:4-5 - 4 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day should overtake you like a thief; 5 for you are all sons of light and sons of day. NASB

After the passage in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10 (quoted above), where Paul describes the destruction of the Gospel rejecting sinners, he then goes into a lengthy discourse on the revelation of the Anti-Christ and the Great Tribulation period in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12. Although Paul does not expressly call this the **Great Tribulation** as Jesus does in Matthew 24:15-21, Mark 13:14-20, we know clearly from other texts in Scripture that the events of the Anti-Christ's rise to power and reign of terror are the very events that make up the **Great Tribulation** period, which are included in the **Seventieth Week of Daniel** (Daniel 9:24-27, 11:29-12:3). Paul does in fact give many very clear indications of the nature and character of this dreadful time in human history. These events are also cataloged in such passages as Revelation 13-14, Daniel 7, 8 and 9-12, as well as the Olivet Discourse of our Lord as described above. Understand that 1 & 2 Thessalonians are the only letters wherein Paul gives such extensive instruction about eschatological events surrounding the Second Coming of Christ, barring a few brief references in various other letters.

I might add that much of this Pauline Eschatology very closely parallels the teaching of our Lord in His Olivet Discourse which is recorded in Mathew 24-25, Mark 13 and Luke 21. The similarities are striking, but more than this, follow very distinct patterns and themes. Even though our Lord's discourse follows a *chronological* timeline more than Paul's, nevertheless they expose the same topics with much clarity and force, as we will see in the course of our study.

Now with all of this very wonderful instruction on the faith, hope and love of the commended Thessalonian Church, let us consider these letters and instruction from God as a very timely interlude in the life of our Church, ***Heritage Christian Fellowship***. As we peruse these very practical instructions for church life and existence, let us use these as a plumb line or measuring stick to examine our own Church and life as Christians.

FIRST THESSALONIANS: A Teaching Outline

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