

The First Letter of St. Paul to the Thessalonians

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I. Introductory Notes -

- A. **The city of Thessalonica** - St. Paul arrived at Thessalonica accompanied by Silas in the course of his second apostolic journey (A.D. 49 – 52). More specifically he probably arrived in the summer of the year 50 (cf Acts 17:1). The city, situated on the Aegean Sea was a flourishing center of trade in St. Paul's time thanks to its port and the presence of a large trade route nearby. It was one of the most important cities in Macedonia during Paul's time. There were approximately 200,000 residents at the time of Paul's visit. As far as religion was concerned, it was a typical pagan city. Archaeology has unearthed the remains of many statues of gods. There were also quite a number of Jews living in Thessalonica in St. Paul's time. Paul, as was a general practice first went to the synagogue and preach Jesus as the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. We know that he preached in the synagogue there on three successive Sabbaths (acts 17: 2)and likely stayed in Thessalonica about two months lodging in the house of Jason (acts 17:6). As a result of his preaching many Jews and Gentiles came to believe. His success earned him the envy of certain Jews who organized demonstrations and attacked Jason's house. They were looking for Paul and Silas, and, not finding them, they arrested Jason. This led to St. Paul and his companions leaving the city and are the same night.
- B. **How the letters came to be written** - Paul's unexpected departure from Thessalonica meant that the instruction of the recent converts was cut short; also their situation became difficult due to persecution by the Jews. This led the apostle Paul to send Timothy to confirm them in the faith as he mentions in the third chapter of this letter. From Athens, St. Paul made his way to Corinth where he was joined by Timothy who gave them a good report: they were persevering in faith and charity, despite still being harassed. Timothy also reported that certain questions were troubling the Thessalonians, things to do with life after death, and the second coming. Paul wrote the first letter which he sent by way of Timothy to complete his interrupted preaching. It had the effect of reassuring the Thessalonians about the fate of those who had already died in the Lord. However, some did not understand Paul correctly; some so misunderstood him in fact that they began to give up working. Thus Paul wrote a second letter to them to clear up the misunderstanding.
- C. **Date and place of composition** - Timothy and Silas found Paul in Corinth according to Acts Chapter 18 and told him how things were in Thessalonica. Paul wrote the first letter in the winter of 50 to 51. It is the earliest letter of Paul in the canon of Scripture. The second letter was also written and some months later.

D. Themes -

1. **The preaching of the Gospel** – in evangelization the initiative lies with God and it is he who causes the preaching of the Gospel to bear fruit. God chooses us and saves us from the wrath that is to come. He sustains our hope. It is the Holy Spirit who renders the preachers word persuasive. The core of preaching is the gospel, that is the good news of salvation for told by the prophets and brought to fulfillment and Jesus.
2. **The foundations of faith and morality** – these letters, though written early, touch on all the main truths of faith and the foundations of Christian morality. God is our father, the source of our salvation. Jesus is his son who brings about our salvation by dying for us and rising again. He will come again in power and majesty to judge the living and the dead. We will be judged according to our works. God the Father sends the Holy Spirit to whom is attributed our sanctification and it moves us to accept with joy the preaching of the Word of God. All Christians are called to holiness. All relationships should be founded on love. We should give good example, and correct those who need correction, being patient with all we need to be watchful and exercise self-control and sobriety.
3. **Eschatology** – Christian teaching on the end of the world and the last things is a subject that received the most attention in these letters. The matter is dealt with on two levels, what happens to a person when he or she dies, and what will happen at the end of time when the ultimate victory of the Church will be revealed. Man's life does not end with death. Unlike unbelievers who have no hope Christians should not be saddened by the prospect of death for this leads to the vision of God. Though our soul lives our body lies in death but it too shall rise when Christ comes again in glory. The body that rises will be glorified. This letter caused some Christians to conclude that Christ's second coming was imminent. Due to this fact some began to cease working etc. Paul wrote a second letter to make it clear to the second coming was not imminent. He goes on to tell them of some of the events which will signal it: rebellion or apostasy in the appearing of the man of lawlessness.

II. Chapter one -

A. Greeting - *Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.*

1. A heading is affectionate but is not the kind of opening typical of a simple family letter. This is an official letter which is why two witnesses vouch for its content.
 - a. Silvanus is also known as Silas who Acts describes as a prophet and one of the leading men among the brethren.
 - b. Timothy was the son of a Gentile father and a Jewish mother, his mother was a Christian convert. Paul instructed Timothy in the faith when he passed through Lystra. Ever since this time Timothy had been a faithful helper of Paul. As we've seen previously in these notes it was Timothy who went to Thessalonica and had reported back to Paul.
2. Church – the Greek word is ekklesia - meaning those who have been called out.

B. Thanksgiving - *We give thanks to God always for you all, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, ³remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴For we know, brethren beloved by God, that he has chosen you; ⁵for our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. ⁶And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit; ⁷so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. ⁸For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. ⁹For they themselves report concerning us what a welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, ¹⁰and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.*

1. Give thanks...constantly mentioning
2. Remembering -
3. Chosen -
4. Word...also in power....in the Holy Spirit
5. In much affliction with joy
6. You became an example....
7. Turned to God from Idols or
8. Jesus...delivers us from the wrath to come.

III. Chapter 2

A. **The office of a preacher - *For you yourselves know, brethren, that our visit to you was not in vain; 2but though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the face of great opposition. 3For our appeal does not spring from error or uncleanness, nor is it made with guile; 4but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please men, but to please God who tests our hearts. 5For we never used either words of flattery, as you know, or a cloak for greed, as God is witness; 6nor did we seek glory from men, whether from you or from others, though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. 7But we were gentle among you, like a nurse taking care of her children. 8So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us. 9 For you remember our labor and toil, brethren; we worked night and day, that we might not burden any of you, while we preached to you the gospel of God. 10You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our behavior to you believers; 11for you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you 12to lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.***

1. Persecuted¹ - 1-2
2. Pure - 3
3. Pleasing God not man - 4-6
4. Patient - 7
5. Personal - 8
6. Profiting not - 9
7. Pure (2) - 10
8. Parenting - 11-12

1As we know from the Acts of the apostles, St. Paul and his companions arrived in Thessalonica after the persecution in Philippi (Acts 16)

B. *The Word of God - And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. ¹⁴For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus which are in Judea; for you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, ¹⁵who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all men ¹⁶by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they may be saved—so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But God’s wrath has come upon them at last!*

1. Author - 13
2. Authenticity - 14-15
3. Animosity - 16a
4. Aftermath - 16b

III. Chapter three

A. *Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, ²and we sent Timothy, our brother and God’s servant in the gospel of Christ, to establish you in your faith and to exhort you, ³that no one be moved by these afflictions. You yourselves know that this is to be our lot. ⁴For when we were with you, we told you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction; just as it has come to pass, and as you know. ⁵For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent that I might know your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and that our labor would be in vain.*

1. Concern 1-2, 5
2. Correction - 3-4

B. *6But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you—⁷for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith; ⁸for now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord. ⁹For what thanksgiving can we render to God for you, for all the joy which we feel for your sake before our God, ¹⁰praying earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith? 11 Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you; 12and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all men, as we do to you, ¹³so that he may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.*

1. The Relief of the Preacher 6-7
2. The Life of the Preacher - 8
3. The Joy of the Preacher - 9
4. The Prayer of the Preacher - 10-13
 - a. Completed faith
 - b. Loving faith
 - c. Holy Faith

IV. Chapter Four

- A. Chastity - *1Finally, brethren, we beseech and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you learned from us how you ought to live and to please God, just as you are doing, you do so more and more. 2For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. 3For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from unchastity; 4that each one of you know how to take a wife for himself in holiness and honor, 5not in the passion of lust like heathen who do not know God; 6that no man transgress, and wrong his brother in this matter because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we solemnly forewarned you. 7For God has not called us for uncleanness, but in holiness. 8Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.*
1. Progress - 1
 2. Prescription - 2
 3. Purity - 3-5
 4. Perspective - 6
 5. Power - 7-8
- B. Love - *9 But concerning love of the brethren you have no need to have any one write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another; 10and indeed you do love all the brethren throughout Macedonia. But we exhort you, brethren, to do so more and more,*
1. Miracle - 9-10a
 2. More - 10b
- C. Industry - *11to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we charged you; 12so that you may command the respect of outsiders, and be dependent on nobody.*

V. Chapter Five

A. *1But as to the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need to have anything written to you. 2For you yourselves know well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3When people say, ““There is peace and security,”” then sudden destruction will come upon them as travail comes upon a woman with child, and there will be no escape. 4But you are not in darkness, brethren, for that day to surprise you like a thief. 5For you are all sons of light and sons of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. 6So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. 7For those who sleep sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. 8But, since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. 9For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10who died for us so that whether we wake or sleep we might live with him. 11Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.*

1. Season - 1
2. Sudden - 2-3
3. Sons of Light 4-5
4. Sober - 6-8
5. Salvation - 9-10
6. Strengthen - 11

B. *12But we beseech you, brethren, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, ¹³and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. ¹⁴And we exhort you, brethren, admonish the disorderly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. ¹⁵See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. ¹⁶Rejoice always, ¹⁷pray constantly, ¹⁸give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. ¹⁹Do not quench the Spirit, ²⁰do not despise prophesying, ²¹but test everything; hold fast what is good, ²²abstain from every form of evil.*

1. Respect your leaders - 12-13a
2. Refrain from Conflict. 13b
3. Rebuke the disorderly - 14a
4. Reassure the unsure 14b
5. Restore the weak - 14c
6. Resolve to be patient - 14d
7. Revenge not - 15
8. Rejoice always - 16
9. Rest in prayer - 17
10. Render thanks - 18
11. Refuse not the Spirit - 19-22
 - a. Prophecy
 - b. Probe
 - c. Proper response

C. *²³May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it. Brethren, pray for us. ²⁶Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss. ²⁷I adjure you by the Lord that this letter be read to all the brethren. ²⁸The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.*

1. Preparation - 23
2. Power - 24a
3. Pray for us - 24b
4. Proclaim - 27
5. Prayer - 28