

Living in View of Christ's Return

Study Guide for 1 & 2 Thessalonians

by Andy Sochor

Introduction

Author:

Paul with Silvanus and Timothy (1 Th. 1:1; 2 Th. 1:1)

Date:

First letter - Early 50's A.D.

Possibly the first of Paul's epistles (or Galatians)

Second letter - Probably about 6-12 months later

Historical Background of Thessalonica:

Thessalonica was a major seaport in Macedonia. It was founded in 315 BC and became the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia in 148 BC. In 42 BC it became a free city. (Nelson's Bible Dictionary)

History of the Thessalonian church:

Acts 17:1-10

Paul came to Thessalonica on his second preaching tour and began preaching in the synagogue for three Sabbaths (v. 2-3). Some Jews and many Gentiles believed (v. 4). Jewish opposition eventually caused Paul to leave town (v. 5-10). This account indicates Paul worked in Thessalonica at least three weeks (v. 2), but it is likely he stayed a while longer (Phil. 4:16). Two of Paul's later travel companions came from Thessalonica (Acts 20:4).

Message of the Letters:

Primary theme:

The Second Coming of Christ

Other major topics:

Persecution

Holiness

Resurrection

Apostasy

Discipline

Questions on the Introduction

1. Where did Paul first go preach when he came to Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-2)? Why?

2. How did Paul preach (Acts 17:2-3)?

3. Who opposed the teaching of the gospel (Acts 17:5)?

Who did they enlist to support them?

What did they say about Paul and Silas (Acts 17:6)?

Of what charge did they accuse them (Acts 17:7)?

4. Where did the brethren send Paul and Silas (Acts 17:10)?

What did they do when they arrived?

These were "more noble-minded" than whom (Acts 17:11)?

1 Thessalonians 1

I. Greeting (1:1)

- A. From Paul, Silvanus (or Silas), and Timothy
- B. To the church of the Thessalonians

II. Thanksgiving (1:2-5)

- A. Their work (1:3)
 - 1. Work of faith
 - 2. Labor of love
 - 3. Steadfastness of hope
- B. God's work (1:4-5)
 - 1. His choice of them
 - a. Predestination?
 - b. Compare Acts 16:6-10
 - 2. The message
 - a. The power of the gospel
 - b. The work of the Holy Spirit
 - c. Basis for conviction

III. Their Response to the Gospel (1:6-10)

- A. They became imitators of the Lord (1:6) - tribulation
- B. They became examples (1:7)
- C. They sounded forth the word (1:8)
 - 1. Macedonia, Achaia, and beyond
 - 2. Paul had no need to say anything
- D. Their lives had been changed (1:9-10)
 - 1. They turned to God from idols
 - 2. Now they wait for His Son

Questions on 1 Thessalonians 1

1. How did God choose them (1:4)?

Is Paul teaching the common denominational concept of predestination?

2. How did the gospel come to them "in power" (1:5)?

Does the gospel come "in power" today?

3. How far had the word of the Lord been sounded forth from them (1:8)?

How might we sound forth the word today?

4. How does Paul distinguish the God we serve from idols (1:9)?

What idols might men serve today?

1 Thessalonians 2

I. Paul's Work Among Them (2:1-12)

A. Not in vain (2:1-2)

1. Despite suffering and opposition (cf. Acts 17:5-8)
2. Because of their response (1:6-10)

B. How Paul presented the gospel to them (2:3-6)

1. Not pleasing men, but God (2:3-4)
2. Not with flattering speech (2:5) - cf. Rom. 16:18
3. Not with a pretext for greed (2:5) - cf. 1 Tim. 6:3-5

C. How Paul presented himself toward them (2:7-12)

1. Cared for them like a mother (2:7-8)
2. Exhorted them like a father (2:11-12)
3. Blameless behavior (2:9-10)

II. Their Response to His Preaching (2:13-16)

A. Received it as the word of God (2:13)

B. Became imitators of the churches of Judea (2:14-16)

1. Suffered at the hands of their countrymen
2. Reminder of the opposition by the Jews (2:15-16)

III. Paul's Desire to Come to Them (2:17-20)

A. He was forced to depart (2:17)

B. Unable to return to this point (2:17-18)

C. Paul's praise of them (2:19-20)

This is why he so much desires to see them

Questions on 1 Thessalonians 2

1. Where had Paul been before coming to Thessalonica (2:2)?

Where did he go when he left (Acts 17:10)?

2. Who did Paul seek to please (2:4)? Why?

3. In what ways was Paul's relationship with them similar to that of a parent and child (2:7-8,11-12)?

4. How did they know Paul spoke the word of God (2:13; cf. Acts 17:2-3)?

How will people today know that is what we speak?

5. What opposition did the Jews give to the cause of Christ (2:15-16)?

What were they hoping to accomplish (2:16)?

1 Thessalonians 3

I. Timothy Sent to Them (3:1-5)

A. The reason Paul sent Timothy

1. Paul wanted to come, but was unable (3:1,5; 2:18)
2. Timothy was a brother and fellow worker (3:2)
3. Sent to find out about their faith (3:5)

B. What Timothy would do

1. Strengthen and encourage them (3:2)
2. Prepare them for persecution (3:3-4)

C. Why Paul was concerned (3:5)

1. Possibility of them losing their faith
2. His labor being in vain

II. Timothy's Report Concerning Them (3:6-10)

A. Their love for Paul and the brethren (3:6)

B. Their faith

1. Provided comfort for Paul (3:7)
2. Paul wanted them to "stand firm" (3:8)
3. Paul wanted to come to perfect their faith (3:10)

C. Paul's prayer concerning them (3:9-10)

1. Thanksgiving and joy (3:9)
2. That he might see them (3:10)

III. Paul's Desire that They Grow and be Established (3:11-13)

A. That God would "direct our way to you" (3:11)

B. That God would cause their love to abound (3:12)

C. That God would establish their hearts in holiness (3:13)

Questions on 1 Thessalonians 3

1. What concern caused Paul to send Timothy to Thessalonica (3:1-5)?

Why did Paul choose Timothy (3:2; cf. 1 Cor. 4:17; 1 Tim. 1:2; Phil. 2:19-20)?

2. What is implied by the phrase "God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ" (3:2)?

3. What in Timothy's report gave Paul comfort?
 4. What is the condition of one's heart who is prepared for the coming of the Lord (3:13)?
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1 Thessalonians 4

- I. Walk in Such a Way to Please God (4:1-12)
 - A. Apostolic authority (4:1-2)
 1. The apostles delivered instructions
 2. Paul exhorted them "in the Lord"
 3. Commandments were by the authority of Christ
 - B. Abstain from sexual immorality (4:3-8)
 1. How to "possess" one's "vessel"
 - a. Sanctification and honor
 - b. Not in lustful passions
 2. Do not transgress a brother [remember context]
 3. This is God's will (4:3)
 - a. Sanctification, not impurity
 - b. To engage in sexual immorality is to reject God
 - C. Love one another (4:9-10)
 1. Contrast love and sexual immorality
 2. Love was learned from God (4:9)
 3. No need to write (4:9) - yet "excel still more" (4:10)
 - D. Conduct before others (4:11-12)
 1. Lead a quiet life
 2. Attend to your own business
 3. Work with your hands
 4. Why?
 - a. To behave properly toward outsiders
 - b. To not be in need

II. Fate of Those Who Have "Fallen Asleep in Jesus" (4:13-18)

- A. Not like those who have "no hope" (4:13)
- B. Their resurrection is as sure as Christ's (4:14)
- C. What will happen at the end (4:15-17)
 - 1. The Lord will return
 - 2. The dead in Christ will rise first
 - 3. The living faithful will be caught up
- D. "comfort one another with these words" (4:18)

Questions on 1 Thessalonians 4

1. Did Paul's instructions carry as much weight as the Lord's (4:2; cf. 1 Cor. 14:37)?
2. What does Paul have in mind when he writes of their sanctification (4:3)?
3. What specific transgression against a brother is indicated by the context (4:6)?
4. What does Paul say to do so as to behave properly toward those in the world (4:11-12)?
5. Who has / does not have hope (4:13-14)?
6. What will happen when the Lord returns (4:16-17)?

1 Thessalonians 5

I. The Day of the Lord (5:1-3)

- A. Paul writes a reminder to them (5:1)
- B. This is a reality - "the day of the Lord will come" (5:2)
- C. It will come like a thief (5:2-3)
 - unannounced, unexpected, inescapable

II. Be Alert (5:4-11)

- A. Contrast between those in darkness and those in light
 - 1. Those in darkness
 - a. Of the night, of darkness (5:5)
 - b. Sleep (5:6-7)
 - c. Get drunk (5:7)
 - 2. Those in light
 - a. Sons of day, sons of light (5:5)
 - b. Be alert, prepared (5:6,8)
 - c. Be sober (5:6,8)
- B. God's gift of salvation (5:9-11)
 - 1. Salvation, not wrath (5:9)
 - 2. Christ died for us (5:10)
 - 3. Our death will not keep Him from rewarding us
 - 4. Encourage one another (5:11)

III. How we are to conduct ourselves (5:12-22)

- A. Respect elders (5:12-13)
- B. How we are to treat others (5:14-15)
- C. Brief admonitions (5:16-22)

IV. Closing (5:23-28)

- A. What Paul wants God to do (5:23-24)
- B. What Paul wants them to do (5:25-27)
- C. Closing statement (5:28)

Questions on 1 Thessalonians 5

1. How is the day of the Lord going to come (5:2)?

What does this comparison suggest about the day of the Lord?

2. What pieces of armor does Paul mention (5:8)?

Where else does Paul talk about armor we are to put on?

3. How do we "pray without ceasing" (5:17)?

4. What would one do to "quench the Spirit" (5:19)?

5. Does the phrase "abstain from every form of evil" (5:22) mean we should avoid evil in all its forms, or avoid everything that could potentially be perceived as evil?

2 Thessalonians 1

I. Greetings (1:1-2)

- A. From Paul, Silvanus (or Silas), and Timothy
- B. To the church of the Thessalonians

II. Thanksgiving (1:3-4)

- A. Their faith is enlarged (1:3)
- B. Their love grows greater (1:3)
- C. They kept their faith in the midst of persecutions (1:4)

III. Coming Judgment (1:5-10)

- A. They were suffering for the kingdom (1:5)
- B. God's judgment is righteous (1:5) and just (1:6)
 - 1. He will punish the persecutors (1:6)
 - 2. And relieve the afflicted (1:7)

- C. The Lord will be revealed from heaven (1:7-10)
 - 1. Coming with mighty angels in flaming fire (1:7)
 - 2. Dealing out retribution to two groups (1:8):
 - a. Those who do not know God
 - b. Those who do not obey the gospel
 - 3. Penalty (1:9)
 - a. Eternal destruction
 - b. Separation from God
 - 4. He'll be glorified and marveled at by His own (1:10)

- IV. Paul's Prayer for Them (1:11-12)
 - A. They would be counted worthy (1:11)
 - B. They would fulfill goodness and the work of faith (1:11)
 - C. In them the name of the Lord will be glorified (1:12)

Questions on 2 Thessalonians 1

- 1. How had the church progressed (1:3-4)?
- 2. What characteristic of God is manifest in His punishment of certain ones (1:5-6)?

How can a loving God send anyone to Hell?

- 3. Why is it just for the Lord to punish "those who do not know God" (1:8)?
- 4. How do we prove to be worthy of our calling (1:11)?

2 Thessalonians 2

I. The Man of Lawlessness (2:1-12)

A. Do not be quickly shaken (2:1-2)

1. Regarding the coming of the Lord (2:1)
2. By spirit, message or alleged letter from Paul (2:2)
3. Dangerous message: the day of the Lord has come

B. Apostasy must come first (2:3-12)

1. Man of lawlessness revealed (2:3)
 - a. Son of destruction
 - b. Opposes every so-called god / idol
 - c. Puts himself in place of God
2. Paul's previous instruction to them (2:5-6)
 - a. Apostasy would come
 - b. That which restrains the man of lawlessness
3. Mystery of lawlessness at work (2:7-12)
 - a. Restraint removed - lawless one revealed
 - b. Ultimate fate of the lawless one - destruction
 - c. Work of Satan (2:9-10)
 1. Power, signs, false wonders
 2. Deception of wickedness
 3. Who is affected? Those who don't love truth
 - d. Work of God (2:11-12)
 1. Send a deluding influence
 2. Why? "That they will believe what is false"
 3. Why? "That they all may be judged"

II. Exhortation to Stand Firm (2:13-17)

A. They were chosen by God (2:13-14)

1. Chosen from the beginning (2:13)
2. Faith in the truth / those who do not love truth (2:13,10)
3. Called through the gospel (2:14)
4. For salvation and glory (2:13-14)

B. So then, stand firm (2:15-17)

1. Hold to the traditions (2:15)
2. Be strengthened in every good work and word (2:17)

Questions on 2 Thessalonians 2

1. Why was Paul concerned for them (2:2-3)?

Is it possible for a Christian to be lost?

2. Who/what is the man of lawlessness (2:3)?

What restrains him (2:6)?

3. What would prompt God to send a "deluding influence" upon anyone (2:11)?

4. How had they been called (2:14)?

Does God use any other method to call people today?

5. What traditions were to be held (2:15)?

2 Thessalonians 3

I. Request for and Offering of Prayers (3:1-5)

A. Paul requests prayers (3:1-2)

1. That the word would be spread (3:1)
2. That he and others would be rescued (3:2)

B. Paul's confidence in the Lord (3:3-5)

1. The Lord is faithful (3:3)
2. He would continue to strengthen and protect them
3. They would continue to obey (3:4)
4. He would direct their hearts in love & steadfastness

II. Discipline (3:6-15)

A. Discipline is commanded (3:6)

1. "In the name of the Lord"
2. Against those who do not live by the traditions
3. Specific case: those who lead an unruly life (3:6,11)

B. Paul's example (3:7-9)

1. Did not act in an undisciplined manner (3:7)
2. Worked to provide for himself (3:8)

C. Paul's instruction (3:10-13)

1. One who is unwilling to work should not eat (3:10)
2. Some were leading undisciplined lives (3:11)
3. Command and exhortation: take care of yourself

D. Exercising discipline (3:14-15)

1. Towards those who do not obey (3:14)
 - a. Note and avoid that person
 - b. Why? "So that he will be put to shame"
2. Be careful in your attitude (3:15)
 - a. Do not regard him as an enemy
 - b. Admonish him as a brother

III. Closing (3:16-18)

A. Prayer for peace (3:16)

B. Signature of Paul (3:17)

C. Closing statement (3:18)

Questions on 2 Thessalonians 3

1. Why did Paul request prayers (3:1-2)?

2. From whom did Paul command them to keep away (3:6)?

Is this command binding upon us today?

3. What principle did Paul teach through his example (3:8)?

Did Paul "have the right" to "be a burden" to them (3:8-9; cf. 1 Cor. 9:11-14)?

4. Are we obligated to help everyone in need (3:10)?

5. What should be our motive behind exercising discipline against a brother (3:15; cf. 1 Cor. 5:5)?

Review

The Second Coming is a recurrent theme in these letters.

It is discussed in both letters

1 Th. 4:13-5:11; 2 Th. 1:6-10

It is at least mentioned in every chapter but one

1 Th. 1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:1-11,23

2 Th. 1:6-10; 2:1,8

With this in mind, what should we do?

Spread the gospel

1 Th. 1:8

Also notice - 2 Cor. 5:10-11

Endure persecution

1 Th. 1:6; 2:14; 3:1-5; 2 Th. 1:4-8

Also notice - 2 Tim. 3:12; 1 Pet. 4:12-16; 2 Cor. 4:17

Stand firm

1 Th. 3:8; 5:8; 2 Th. 2:2,15

Also notice - 1 Cor. 16:13; Eph. 6:10-17; Phil. 4:1

Live holy lives

1 Th. 4:1-12; 5:12-22; 2 Th. 1:11

Also notice - Rom. 12:1; 1 Pet. 2:11-12; 2 Pet. 3:10-14

Eagerly wait for the Lord's return

1 Th. 1:10; 5:4-10

Also notice - Phil. 3:20-21; 2 Pet. 3:10-12; Rev. 22:20

Review Questions

1. What is the major theme in these two letters?
2. How should the Second Coming motivate us to spread the gospel?
3. What will be the fate of those who are persecuted for the cause of Christ?

What will be the fate of the ones who persecute those in Christ?

4. What is implied in the instruction to stand firm?
5. What does it mean to live holy lives?
6. How can one confidently look toward the Lord's return?