

Introduction to First and Second Thessalonians

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Introduction:

- I. *“After some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.” (Acts 15:36)*
 - A. But when Barnabas wanted to take John Mark along, Paul strongly disagreed
 1. As a result, Barnabas took Mark and went one direction.
 2. Paul took Silas and went another.
 - B. Paul and Silas came to Derbe and Lystra.
 1. They met a young man named Timothy who was of good reputation.
 2. Paul encouraged him to join the traveling group as they continued on teaching and preaching the message of the cross.
 - C. The group passed through the regions of Phrygia and Galatia. Then being prevented to travel into Asia by the Holy Spirit (Acts 16), they went on to Mysia, then on to Troas.
 - D. It was while they were in Troas that Paul received a vision, the Macedonian Call, and he promptly responded. The group set out for Samothrace, then to Neapolis, coming to a stop in Philippi.
 1. While here in Philippi they brought many to the Lord including a woman named Lydia.
 2. They were also imprisoned there, which only led to more opportunities to teach as the Jailer and his family were converted to the Lord.
 - E. Departing Philippi, they *“traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews.” (Acts 17:1)*
 1. Leaving Philippi, Paul and his companions traveled southwest along the Roman highway known as the Egnatian Way, through Amphipolis and Apollonia, and finally to Thessalonica.
 2. Amphipolis was about thirty miles from Philippi, Apollonia about thirty miles from Amphipolis, and Thessalonica just under forty miles from Apollonia.
 - a. The text implies that they made the journey from Philippi to Thessalonica in three days, stopping for the night at Amphipolis and again at Apollonia.
 - b. If so, they covered about thirty miles a day, leading some commentators to speculate that they traveled on horses (perhaps supplied through the generosity of the Philippian church).
 - c. It is difficult to imagine that Paul and Silas, weakened by their beating at Philippi, could have walked nearly one hundred miles in three days.
 3. There is no indication that Paul and his companions preached the gospel in either Amphipolis or Apollonia, although Amphipolis was a larger and more important city than Philippi.
 - a. The reason seems to be that neither city had a synagogue.

- b. Luke's note that there was a synagogue of the Jews at Thessalonica implies an absence of one in the other cities.
- c. There has been no evidence of a synagogue identified in either Amphipolis or Apollonia.
- d. Luke goes on to tell us that "*for three Sabbaths [they] reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ.'*" (Acts 17:2-3)

Body:

I. The City of Thessalonica...

- A. Thessalonica (modern Salonika) was located on the Thermaic Gulf.
 - 1. It was on the *Via Egnatia*.
 - 2. It linked the agricultural plains of the Macedonian interior with the land and sea routes to the east.
 - 3. Cicero described it as "situated in the bosom of our domain" (*Pro Plancio* 41).
 - 4. It was probably founded by Cassander in 315 B.C. and named for his wife, the daughter of Philip II.
 - a. Although other traditions trace its foundation to Philip and say it was named either for his daughter or in honor of his victory over the Thessalonians.
 - 5. When Rome conquered Macedonia in 167 B.C., Thessalonica became the capital of the second of the four administrative districts of the province.
 - 6. Then with the reorganization of Macedonia into one province in 142 B.C., Thessalonica became its capital.
 - 7. In the second civil war it sided with Mark Antony and Octavian (later Augustus) against Cassius and Brutus, and because of its loyalty it was declared a free city in 42 B.C.
- B. As a large city of perhaps two hundred thousand, and one that dominated Macedonian government and commerce, Thessalonica naturally attracted diverse groups of people including a substantial Jewish contingent (1 Thess. 2:14-16).
 - 1. Paul seems to have looked on it as the strategic center for the spread of the gospel throughout the region (1 Thess. 1:7-8).
 - 2. Therefore Paul and Silas—though doubtless in some pain from their recent beating and time in the stocks—pushed on resolutely the hundred miles from Philippi to Thessalonica. (Gaebelein, 468)
- C. As a free city, Thessalonica had its governing assembly of citizens.
 - 1. The magistrates of Thessalonica were called "politarchs," a title found in inscriptions ranging from the second century B.C. through the third century A.D. and applied almost exclusively to Macedonian cities.
 - 2. "From five inscriptions referring to Thessalonica, it appears that a body of five politarchs ruled the city during the first century A.D.—a number expanded to a board of six in the second century (cf. E.D. Burton, "The Politarchs," *AJT*, 2 [1898], 598ff.)." (Gaebelein, 469)

3. William Barclay writes” “It is impossible to over-stress the importance of the arrival of Christianity in Thessalonica. If Christianity was settled there, it was bound to spread East along the Egnatian Road until all Asia [Minor] was conquered and West until it stormed even the city of Rome. The coming of Christianity to Thessalonica was crucial in the making of it into a world religion. (The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians. Rev. ed. [Louisville, Ky.: Westminster, 1975], 181)” (MacArthur, 3)
- D. Seeing the opportunities in this area, Paul began preaching the gospel in his typical manner: in the synagogue.

II. Success and Persecution in Thessalonica...

- A. Paul’s work with the people in Thessalonica proved successful.
 1. Luke states, “*And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large number of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women.*” (Acts 17:4)
 2. Two of the members of the church (Aristarchus and Secundus) even joined Paul in his work. (Acts 20:4)
- B. As a result of his success, the Jewish leaders became jealous and led a city-wide revolt against him.
 1. “*But the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar.*” (Acts 17:5)
 2. Luke continues, “*When they did not find them, they began dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, ‘These men who have upset the world have come here also; and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.’*” (Acts 17:6-7)

III. How long did Paul stay in Thessalonica?

- A. One of the arguments against authenticity is that the Acts account doesn’t allow enough time for Paul to be among the brethren and develop as close of a relationship as the letters seem to reveal (esp. 1 Thess.)
- B. Luke states that he reasoned with the people in the synagogue for three Sabbaths.
- C. However, other internal evidence suggests that he was among the brethren for a more extended period of time, perhaps months.
 1. His love and concern for the brethren as demonstrated throughout the two letters he writes suggest a knowledge and closeness with the brethren that would have grown over a period of months instead of weeks.
 2. The fact that he labored with his own hands shows that he was there long enough to establish some sort of steady income.
 3. The church at Philippi sent him financial support on at least two occasions (Phil 4:16)
- D. Understanding these things, reading his own words, and seeing his joy in these brethren shows us that he was with them long enough to develop a close relationship with them.
- E. Therefore, Luke records the time he spent specifically among the Jews rather than the total amount of time he remained in the city with the brethren.

IV. The Date and Location of the Thessalonian Correspondence

A. First Thessalonians...

1. Paul wrote this epistle from Corinth where he went after he left Athens.
 - a. Timothy, having been sent back to check on the situation at Thessalonica, met Paul in Corinth and delivered his report (Acts 18:5; 1 Thess. 3:6).
 - b. Paul's inclusion of Silas in the greeting of the letter indicates it was written on his second missionary journey, since Silas did not accompany him on his third journey (Silas is not mentioned in Acts after 18:5).
2. Paul's stay in Corinth can be correlated with Gallio's term as proconsul (Acts 18:12).
 - a. An inscription found at Delphi, not far from Corinth, refers to Gallio as proconsul at Corinth in early A.D. 52.
 - b. Since proconsuls took office during the summer, Gallio would have begun his term in the summer of A.D. 51.
 - c. Paul's trial before Gallio (Acts 18:12-17) probably took place shortly after he assumed office.
 - d. Since Paul had apparently been in Corinth for some time before Gallio arrived, he would have written 1 Thessalonians shortly after his arrival in Corinth. (MacArthur, 8)
3. Therefore, the epistle was probably written late in A.D. 50 or early in A.D. 51.

B. Second Thessalonians...

1. Many scholars agree that this letter was composed shortly (1 to 3 months) after the first letter.
2. Although, some will argue that 2 Thessalonians was written first...
 - a. Argument 1: In 2 Thess. 3:17 a mark is given by which the genuineness of the Epistles of Paul may be recognized, but such a mark belongs properly to the first Epistle, not to a second.
 - 1) Answer: The mark of authenticity in 2 Thess. 3:17 was not required until, as we learn from 2 Thess. 2:2, attempts had occurred to forge epistles in the name of the apostle.
 - b. Argument 2: 2 Thess. 2:1-12 refers to the Emperor Caius Caligula.
 - 1) Answer: Caligula was dead approximately 10 years before Paul even traveled to Thessalonica. Why would he refer back to him and still speak in terms of a still future revelation of the man of lawlessness?
 - c. Argument 3: The second letter was placed after the first simply because of its brevity but was really written before 1 Thessalonians.
 - 1) Ewald thinks that "it is manifestly a first Epistle written to a church which Paul had shortly before founded."
 - 2) Answer: "Ewald's assertion, that our Second Epistle manifestly declares itself to be a first Epistle written by Paul to a church recently founded, is thoroughly erroneous." (Lunemann, 169)
 - d. Argument 4: In 2 Thessalonians trials are said to be at their height, but in 1 Thessalonians they are past.

- 1) Answer: 1 Thessalonians 3:4 is easily understood to indicate trials as present in that Epistle too.
- e. Argument 5: In 2 Thessalonians internal difficulties (3:6-15) are a new development, but in 1 Thessalonians they are already well known (4:11-12; 5:14).
 - 1) Answer: The situation had become more aggravated in 2 Thessalonians, necessitating extended discussion.
 - 2) In 1 Thessalonians only a passing mention was required for a problem that had not yet become serious.
- f. Argument 6: Three didactic sections of 1 Thessalonians, each introduced by *peride* (“now about”) correspond to questions raised by 2 Thessalonians (1 Thess. 4:9-12 with 2 Thess. 3:12; 1 Thess. 4:13-18 with 2 Thess. 2:1-12; 1 Thess. 5:1-11 with 2 Thess. 2:1-12).
 - 1) Answer: “While interesting, these correspondences may be just as easily explained by postulating the traditional order for the Epistles.” (Gaebelein, 303)
3. On the basis of the evidence, a date shortly after 1 Thessalonians is most probable for the writing of 2 Thessalonians, perhaps late in the summer of A.D. 50 or 51.

V. Authorship...

A. First Thessalonians...

1. The majority of students and scholars believe that Paul was the author.
2. The main serious objection to Pauline authorship is that of the Tubingen School of Germany. However, their objections have not gained any strong following.
 - a. Questions have been raised on grounds that what is said in the letter does not always agree with what is recorded in Acts.
 - 1) Luke says Paul worked in the synagogue for three Sabbaths (Acts 17:2), when Paul says that he worked his trade in the city (which implies a longer stay, 1 Thess. 2:7-9).
 - a) This is supported by the fact that Philippi sent him financial assistance on more than one occasion while there (Phil. 4:16).
 - b) However, the argument can be made that by using the term “both,” he could be saying that “both (when I was at Thessalonica) and more than once (when I was elsewhere) you sent...”
 - 2) Neither Luke nor Paul actually gives a specific amount of time that he stayed in the area.
 - 3) Acts may simply show how much time he spent exclusively with the Jews, after which he began to preach to the Gentiles along with the Jewish converts.
 - 4) Even though that may be the case, it seems his stay in Thessalonica was relatively short.
3. The letter twice claims to have been written by Paul. (1:1; 2:18)
4. It harmonizes with the Acts account of his travels (1 Th. 2:1-2; 3:1-2; Acts 16-18), and contains many intimate details about him.

5. The letter shows clear evidence of having been written early in church history, during Paul's lifetime.
6. There is no reference to church organization or a specialized ministry; only the general reference in 5:12 to "*those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction.*"
7. Also, a forger, writing long after Paul's death, would not have allowed for the possibility that Christ could return during the apostle's lifetime (4:15, 17).
8. The vocabulary is consistent with Paul's other letters.
9. The testimony of the early church also strongly supports the Pauline authorship of 1 Thessalonians.
 - a. The Muratorian Canon (c. A.D. 170) and the church fathers Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria all affirmed Paul's authorship.
 - b. Even the heretic Marcion, who denied that Paul wrote several of his other letters, acknowledged the genuineness of 1 Thessalonians.
 - c. The church historian Eusebius, writing early in the fourth century, also included 1 Thessalonians among Paul's epistles.

B. Second Thessalonians...

1. The Pauline authorship of Second Thessalonians has been harshly challenged.
2. Arguments Against Pauline Authorship...
 - a. Argument 1: The eschatology of the letter...
 - 1) Some believe that 2 Thessalonians is not Pauline because of the teaching concerning the *parousia*.
 - a) 1 Thessalonians teaches that it will be sudden
 - b) 2 Thessalonians teaches that there will be signs to signal its coming
 - 2) Answer: Other teaching concerning the *parousia* often combines the suddenness with preparatory signs.
 - b. Argument 2: Some argue that 2 Thessalonians isn't Pauline because there is no other corresponding teaching on the Man of Lawlessness.
 - 1) Answer: Just because Paul doesn't mention this elsewhere does not mean he didn't write it. After all, Paul doesn't face the contention that "*the day of the Lord*" has already come (2:2) anywhere else.
 - c. Argument 3: Some critics find stylistic difference between the two letters and therefore argue Paul couldn't have written 2 Thessalonians.
 - 1) They say the first letter is extremely heart felt and warm while the second letter is more formal and cold.
 - 2) Answer: Does Paul always write with the same tone? Must he do that to prove that the letter is genuinely from him? Obviously not.
 - d. Argument 4: The main reason urged for seeing 2 Thessalonians as inauthentic is the combination of likeness and unlikeness to the first letter.

- 1) In some places, ideas and even words used are very similar. Why would he repeat himself in such ways to the same group of people?
 - 2) On the other hand, Paul signs the second letter and not the first. Why not end both in the same way?
 - 3) Answer: The passages with similar words are used in different ways.
 - a) In 1 Thessalonians speaks of Paul working with his own hands.
 - 1] This comes early in the letter and shows his love for the converts and his determination not to be a burden to them 2:9.
 - b) In 2 Thessalonians this same idea is expressed late in the letter and is “*in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow*” 3:7-9.
 - c) Also considering the signature in 3:17
 - 1] Paul specifically says, “*I wrote this with my own hand.*”
 - 2] Knowing Paul’s use of an amanuensis, would that explain some of the wording issues people raise?
3. “Scholarly” Answers to These Problems...
- a. Perhaps Paul did write both letters, he just wrote them to **two different recipients**.
 - 1) Option 1: Some have argued that there were Jewish and Gentile factions in the congregation at Thessalonica
 - a) 1 Thessalonians was addressed to the Gentile majority group
 - b) 2 Thessalonians to the Jewish minority.
 - 2) Option 2: Goguel proposed that 2 Thessalonians had originally been written to a congregation in Berea, the city which Paul visited following his expulsion from Thessalonica (Acts 17:10-15).
 - 3) Option 3: E. Earle Ellis believes that 1 Thessalonians was written to the congregation as a whole, and 2 Thessalonians was targeted for the congregational leaders.
 - 4) None of these separate recipient hypotheses has found wide acceptance among scholars and commentators.
 - b. **Reversed Sequence** (discussed earlier in the Date of 2 Thessalonians)
 - 1) Charles Wanamaker argues that since the canonical order of the NT books is not based on chronological order, the present order in the NT does not rule out this hypothesis.
 - 2) All things considered, the arguments for 2 Thessalonians being written first are not persuasive.
 - 3) There are strong reasons for believing that indeed 1 Thessalonians came first.
 - a) The reasons include references in 2 Thessalonians to a previous letter.

- b) The story about how Paul and his companions went about their ministry and how they were welcomed in Thessalonica seems appropriate in a first letter (1 Thess. 1:5-10; 2:1-12).
 - c) A reference to the growth of the Thessalonian congregation (2 Thess. 1:3-4) fits naturally in a sequel.
- c. **The pseudonymity of 2 Thessalonians** is another explanation for the combination of striking similarities and major differences between 1 and 2 Thessalonians.
- 1) This proposal has gained widespread academic support.
 - 2) A survey of articles given at a 1988 colloquium dealing with the Thessalonian correspondence reveals that among scholars, the advocates of Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians are definitely in the minority.
 - 3) Some scholars suggest a date shortly after Paul's death, when the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple led to apocalyptic excitement and the setting of dates; this letter was written to defuse such eschatological excitement.
 - 4) Others, such as Wilhelm Wrede, propose that a writer around A.D. 100 wrote 2 Thessalonians in Paul's name to oppose the notion, which seemed to be rooted in the eschatology of 1 Thessalonians, that the *parousia* had already occurred (Wrede's position summarized by Jewett, 5-10).
 - 5) Five Main Arguments for Pseudonymity...
 - a) Argument 1: Vocabulary and Style: Word choice and stylistic features distinguish 2 Thessalonians from 1 Thessalonians.
 - 1] Answer: The range of unusual words and expressions and distinctive styles is not wider than that in other Pauline letters.
 - b) Argument 2: Tone: 2 Thessalonians seems more cool and formal than 1 Thessalonians.
 - 1] Answer: The second letter is less personal in tone because of the aggravated situation being addressed.
 - c) Argument 3: Form: 1 and 2 Thessalonians share some unusual formal features (such as an opening thanksgiving followed later by renewed thanksgiving), suggesting that 2 Thessalonians is a pseudonymous letter patterned after 1 Thessalonians.
 - 1] Answer: Departures from standard letter format occur in other letters as well (i.e. Galatians lacks a thanksgiving section entirely). The circumstances of writing shape the form.
 - d) Argument 4: Theology: In 2 Thessalonians the gospel, the Christian life, and the mission of the church are viewed in ways that seem to reflect a post-apostolic era.
 - 1] Answer: "Judgements and apostolic and post-apostolic theology are chronically difficult to make because of the circular reasoning which often goes into such judgements." (Elias, 377)

- e) Argument 5: Eschatology: In 1 Thessalonians the coming of Christ is viewed as near, sudden, and without warning, whereas 2 Thessalonians introduces a timetable of signs and events preceding this event.
- 1] Answer: Early Christian expectation of the coming of Christ maintained an emphasis on both surprise and signs (Mark 13:14-37).
 - 2] Answer: Rather than developing a timetable, 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 and 13-15 provide proofs that “*the day of the Lord*” has not yet come.
4. Based on the evidence, it seems to me that the best answer for authorship of 2 Thessalonians is Paul.
 5. One astute observer states, “I don’t understand the big deal. If there wasn’t a first letter we wouldn’t be arguing this point at all.”

VI. The Purpose of Writing

A. First Thessalonians...

1. After the church had been established, there was a riot led by the Jews (Acts 17:1-9). Paul is forced to flee.
2. He goes to Berea and has a similar experience when Jews from Thessalonica arrive to stir up trouble for him there, so again, he is forced to flee.
3. He arrives in Athens.
 - a. Preaching there with little result, he travels on to Corinth.
 - b. No wonder that he could say to the Corinthians, “*I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling*” (1 Cor. 2:3).
4. With a heavy heart, Paul is greatly concerned about the brethren at Thessalonica when Silas and Timothy arrive at Corinth with a great report concerning the brethren (Acts 18:5).
5. Some believe that Timothy brought a letter to which 1 Thessalonians was Paul’s reply.
 - a. They point to the words “*now about*” (1 Th. 4:9, 13, 5:1), which Paul uses when answering points raised in a letter to him from the Corinthians (1 Cor. 7:1, 25; 8:1).
 - b. They suggest that Paul deals with some topics as though he would prefer not to (1 Th. 4:9; 5:1), which means he is answering points they had raised in a letter.
6. It seems like Jewish opponents of the church were slandering Paul.
 - a. “If they could persuade the converts that Paul was simply trying to make money out of them and that his message was his own with no divine authorization, they would make it hard for the new Christians to hold on to their faith.” (Carson, 351)
 - b. Paul spends a lot of time in the first three chapters rebutting these charges.
 - c. He wants to encourage his brethren in a time of persecution
 - d. He wants them to remain pure and not adopt the sexual standards of the world.
7. In short, Paul wrote to meet the needs of the flock.

- a. They were a new church, not long enough in the faith to understand many things that more mature Christians might take for granted.
- b. Paul, their father in the faith, was concerned about them and wrote to help them go forward in the service of their Lord. (Carson, 352)

B. Second Thessalonians...

- 1. Though unable to visit them (1 Thess. 2:18), the apostle had maintained contact with the church.
- 2. He was generally pleased with their progress (2 Thess. 1:3-4), yet there were still some issues that needed to be resolved.
- 3. In his second letter, Paul addressed three essential matters.
 - a. First, the persecution, which had begun while he was there with them, was still ongoing.
 - 1) In chapter 1, he encouraged the Thessalonians to stand firm and remain faithful to the Lord despite their suffering.
 - b. Second, Paul had instructed the Thessalonians about the end times while he was with them (2 Thess. 2:5), and in 1 Thessalonians (4:13-5:11).
 - 1) Yet they were still confused, fearing they had missed the resurrection.
 - 2) Though the severity of the persecution they were undergoing contributed to that mistaken belief, the main reason for their confusion came from some false teachers who taught that the Day of the Lord had arrived.
 - 3) Those deceivers claimed Paul, Silas, and Timothy now taught that.
 - 4) They even produced a forged letter supposedly from the apostle Paul to support their claim.
 - 5) Paul wrote chapter 2 to calm the Thessalonians' fears, clarify his teaching, and thus reassure them that the Day of the Lord had not arrived.
 - c. Finally, the problem of idleness Paul had addressed in his first epistle (1 Thess. 4:11-12) had escalated.
 - 1) Some, expecting the Lord to return at any moment, had stopped working altogether.
 - 2) Cynicism in Thessalonica ran rampant.
 - a) This philosophical movement was rooted in the life and teaching of Diogenes of Sinope (ca. 400-325 B.C.).
 - b) The name came from Diogenes being called *kuōn* (dog) and his followers *kunikoi* (doglike), from these words, the name Cynic is derived.
 - c) They were called this because he and his followers manifested certain kinds of shameless behavior in public.
 - d) Cynics were wandering moralists with a life-style of simplicity and voluntary poverty.
 - e) They tried to attain a sense of detachment from society through such activities as:

- 1] Using coarse language,
 - 2] Wearing filthy clothes,
 - 3] And performing acts such as sexual intercourse in public (cf. 1 Thess. 4:5).
- f) Their public lectures and discussions were characterized by boldness of speech (cf. 1 Thess. 2:2).
- g) Finances often came from their followers or through public begging (cf. 1 Thess. 2:5). (Elias, 365)
- 3) The apostle sternly dealt with them and the related issue of church discipline in chapter 3.

VII. Major Themes...

A. Hope

1. 1 Thess. 1:3; 2:19; 4:13; 5:8
2. 2 Thess. 2:16

B. Faith

1. Mentioned in regard to the Thessalonian's faith 12 times
2. 1 Thess. 1:3; 1:8; 3:2; 3:5; 3:6; 3:7; 3:10; 5:8
3. 2 Thess. 1:3; 1:4; 1:11; 2:13; 3:2

C. Love

1. 1 Thess. 1:3; 3:6; 3:12; 4:9; 5:8; 5:13
2. 2 Thess. 1:3; 2:10; 2:16; 3:5

D. Sanctification

1. 1 Thess. 4:3; 4:4; 4:7; 5:23
2. 2 Thess. 2:13

E. The Virtue of Hard Work

1. 1 Thess. 2:9ff
2. 2 Thess. 3:7ff

F. The Return of the Lord

1. 1 Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 4:15-17; 5:2; 5:23
2. 2 Thess. 1:10; 2:1; 2:3; 2:8

G. Admonition of the Unruly

1. 1 Thess. 5:14
2. 2 Thess. 3:6ff

H. Prayer

1. 1 Thess. 1:2; 2:13; 3:9; 3:10; 5:17; 5:18; 5:25
2. 2 Thess. 1:3; 1:11; 2:13; 3:1

VIII. Text of 1 Thessalonians

A. Introduction (1:1-4)

1. Greeting (1:1)

- a. Paul begins in typical fashion (cf. Rom. 1:7, Eph. 1:2)
- b. He names Timothy and Silvanus (Silas) as being with him and perhaps co-authoring this letter.
 - 1) Timothy was from Lystra (Acts 16:1-3) and joined Paul there.
 - a) Paul considered him his son in the faith (1 Cor. 4:17, 1 Tim. 1:2)
 - b) He traveled with Paul on both his second and third journeys.
 - 2) Silvanus (or Silas) was from Jerusalem.
 - a) When Paul and Barnabas had their argument over John Mark, they split ways.
 - b) Barnabas took John Mark and Paul took Silvanus.
 - c) Probably the same Silvanus that was helpful to Peter (1 Peter 5:12)

2. Giving thanks for the brethren (1:2-4)

- a. For their work of faith...
 - 1) They took their new found faith seriously, even in an unfriendly climate.
 - 2) “*Work*” is “that which displays itself in activity of any kind, deed, action” (BDAG)
 - 3) Their faith was shown in their actions (James 2:22) which Paul commends them for later in the chapter.
- b. For their labor of love...
 - 1) Where the term “*work*” deals with a particular act, the term “*labor*” denotes the manner with which the act is carried out
 - a) “Toil resulting in weariness” (Vine).
 - b) “To engage in activity that is burdensome, work, labor, toil” (BDAG)
 - 2) Their love for the Lord, their love for their brethren, and their love for lost souls motivated them to intense labor to the point of fatigue and beyond.
- c. For their steadfastness of hope...
 - 1) To be steadfast is to have “the capacity to hold out or bear up in the face of difficulty, patience, endurance, fortitude, steadfastness, perseverance” (BDAG)
 - 2) They had felt the pressure from the Jews. They suffered as they helped Paul leave town. However, they never let go of their hope.
 - 3) The brethren there had the same understanding of Paul when he wrote, “*hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*” (Rom. 5:5)
 - 4) “*This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil.*” (Heb. 6:19)

- d. God's choosing of them...
 - 1) They had developed the understanding necessary to be obedient to the will of God.
 - 2) As such, they had joined the ranks of the elect. (cf. Eph. 1:4-6)

B. The Presentation of the Gospel (1:5)

- 1. Paul attributes the effective nature with which the message was preached, not to his own power, but to the power of God.
 - a. "Not in word only"
 - b. "In power"
 - c. "In the Holy Spirit"
 - d. "In full conviction"
- 2. They were not like other teachers of their day who were seeking for personal gain. They had proven that fact, not just by their words, but also by their actions.

C. The Reception of the Gospel (1:6-10)

- 1. *"You became imitators of us and of the Lord."*
 - a. Despite the persecution Paul was facing and knowing they would face similar, they sought to pattern their lives after Paul and the Lord.
 - b. They did so with joy. Joy which could only be divine in nature. A Joy similar to the apostles in Acts 5:41.
- 2. *"You became an example."*
 - a. They became Christians worth imitating. Not because they were blazing their own or some new trail, but because they were following the trail already cut out by the blood of Jesus Christ.
 - b. Not only were they a model for Christian living in the midst of trials, but they were also a model for evangelism.
 - 1) Understanding the opportunities their location allowed for, they taught the Gospel to as many as would listen.
 - 2) So much so that Paul could say, *"For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything."* (1:8)
 - 3) Everyone knew how these brethren had rejected the so-called gods of their day and turned to THE God.
 - 4) They now actively serve Him as they wait for the Lord's return.

D. Reflecting on Their Own Work in Thessalonica (2:1-12)

- 1. The brief stop in their city was not a waste of time.
 - a. After being persecuted and run out of cities, one might think that the pain was not worth the price and give up.
 - b. However, Paul and his companions were not ones to throw in the towel.

2. They preached with boldness. (cf. Acts 4:23-31)
 3. They preached in purity.
 - a. They spoke the pure and undefiled Word of God.
 - b. They didn't resort to any sort of trickery or games.
 - c. God's word was enough.
 4. They preached to please God.
 - a. Their goal was not to tickle men's ears and tell them lies.
 - b. Their goal was to get men to see their sin and see God's salvation.
 5. They preached without thought of personal gain.
 - a. There was no greed within their heart.
 - b. They went above and beyond to prove this by not accepting compensation from them, but rather working with their own hands.
 - c. They weren't preaching for glory. They didn't need men to lift them up.
 - d. Paul and his companions only wanted to give to the Lord.
 6. They were gentle, as a mother.
 7. They poured their heart into these brethren.
 - a. Laboring night and day so as not to burden any of them.
 - 1) They didn't want to be a financial burden to them by taking their money.
 - 2) They didn't want to be a burden to them by only being available at certain times.
 - 3) Instead, they worked with their own hands and were ready to teach whenever the people were ready to listen.
 - b. They behaved in a manner that was pleasing to the Lord.
 8. They were encouraging as a father encourages his children.
- E. Prayer of Thanksgiving (2:13-20)
1. The brethren received the things Paul presented as the Word of God.
 2. The Thessalonian brethren modeled their collective efforts after the churches of the Lord in Judea, even to the point of similar persecution.
 3. Paul's description of the sin of the Jews and their doom. (2:15-16)
 4. "*You are our glory and joy.*" (2:20)
 - a. Paul earnestly desired to be back with them, but could not. He simply says "*Satan hindered us.*" (2:18)
 - b. This is probably a reference to the "pledge" Jason and the brethren there made to the city authorities (Acts 17:9).
 - 1) The pledge was a financial sum that Jason had to post as a bond.
 - 2) This amount would be forfeited over to the city if Paul returned.

- 3) Paul then viewed that as Satan keeping him from returning, at least during the time of the current leadership there in the city.

F. Timothy's Return and Report (3:1-13)

1. The "pledge" evidently only limited Paul's return to the city. So he sends Timothy back to check on the brethren.
2. The purpose was two-fold:
 - a. To check on how they are handling the persecution
 - 1) After all, Paul had warned them that these things would happen (3:4)
 - b. To encourage and strengthen.
3. Good News! (3:6-10)
 - a. Their faith and love continue to grow.
 - b. They long to see Paul as much as he longs to be with them.
 - c. They are standing their ground!
4. Prayer for reunion and growth (3:11-13)

G. "Excel Still More" (4:1-12)

1. As Paul prays in 3:11-13 and points out here, there is always room for growth and improvement.
2. The will of God is sanctification.
 - a. "Personal dedication to the interests of the deity, holiness, consecration." (BDAG)
 - b. The Lord wanted them to be set apart, separated from the world and completely devoted to Him.
3. Specifically, Paul wanted them to "*abstain from sexual immorality*" (4:3)
 - a. Learn how to "possess your own vessel..."
 - 1) In sanctification - completely dedicated to the Lord
 - 2) In honor - "the amount at which something is valued, price, value" (BDAG)
 - 3) Not in lustful passion
 - 4) Don't sin and take advantage of your brother.
 - b. The brethren of Thessalonica lived in a time in which...
 - 1) People were dedicated to personal gratification
 - 2) People valued their own pleasure above the lives of others
 - 3) People acted out in lewd and indecent ways
 - 4) People didn't care about right and wrong, nor did they care about defrauding another.
4. Transition (4:7-8)
 - a. God has called us to be different from the world, set apart, pure.
 - b. Do not reject God's teaching.

5. “*Excel still more*” in your love for brethren (4:9-12)
 - a. It is interesting how these two are coupled together.
 - 1) Sinful worldly love is wrong (4:3-6)
 - 2) Godly, brotherly love is always right (4:9-12)
 - b. “*Make it your ambition...*” (4:11)
 - 1) “Consider it an honor, aspire, with focus on the idea of rendering service”
(BDAG)
 - 2) “*To lead a quiet life*”
 - 3) “*Attend to your own business*”
 - 4) “*Work with your hands*”
 - c. The purpose for this... (4:12)
 - 1) “*So that you will behave properly toward outsiders*”
 - 2) So that you will “*not be in any need.*”
 - d. The admonition is to work to provide for yourself and others rather than loafing and being a burden upon others.
 - e. Perhaps we can label this as the Lord’s financial strategy for His people.
- H. The Return of the Lord (4:13-5:11)
 1. Paul begins this section by addressing a concern that they obviously had.
 - a. What if someone had died before the Lord returns?
 - b. Will they miss out?
 - c. There will be a reunion with these loved ones (4:14-17)
 - 1) Those who are alive will not precede those who have died in Christ. (4:15)
 - 2) The Lord’s descent described...
 - a) “*With a shout*”
 - 1] “A summons to carry out a procedure, a signal or cry of command” (BDAG)
 - b) “*With the voice of an archangel*”
 - 1] Archangel - “member of the higher ranks in the celestial hierarchy, chief angel” (BDAG)
 - 2] Is this referring to the actual sound of the Lord’s voice?
 - a] As one that has authority to shout the commands?
 - 3] Is this a picture of the Lord returning with a chief angel to help carry out the commands of destruction and salvation?
 - a] Jude 9 is the only other passage which uses the term “archangel” describing Michael.
 - c) “*With the trumpet of God*”
 - 1] Trumpets were used throughout scripture for various events.

- a] It seems many of those events involved making some announcement or sounding an alarm.
 - b] It served to gather everyone's attention.
 - 2] In this case, that the Lord has returned to gather His faithful together.
 - 3) Both those who are alive in Christ and those who had died in Christ will be reunited again (4:17). Not just with each other, but to also be with the Lord
 - d. *"Therefore comfort one another with these words."*
 - 1) Though men may try to teach something different in order to shake your faith, do not buy in to any other teaching than this.
 - 2) Through persecution, death, and false teaching, persevere with, encourage, and comfort one another as together you look forward to the return.
2. *"The day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night."* (5:2)
 - a. When will the Lord return? When will this great day of reunion take place?
 - 1) While they are saying "peace and safety," then comes death and destruction (5:3)
 - 2) It will be suddenly like a woman with labor pains (5:3)
 - 3) It will catch a lot of people off their guard.
 - b. Be prepared! (5:5-8)
 - 1) You are not in the darkness; rather you are sons of light.
 - 2) Don't "*sleep*" - (to be spiritually indolent, be indifferent - BDAG) as others do.
 - 3) Rather, be "*alert*" (to be in constant readiness - BDAG) and "*sober*" (well-balanced, self-controlled - BDAG)
 - 4) "Having put on..."
 - a) Breastplate of faith and love
 - b) Helmet of hope
 - c) Cf. Eph. 6:10-26
 - c. Christ - Our Only Hope (5:9-11)
 - 1) God has given his children a supreme destiny: salvation through His Son.
 - 2) It will be a destiny which all believers will be able to share
 - 3) *"Therefore encourage"*
 - a) "To ask to come and be present where the speaker is, call to one's side" (BDAG)
 - b) From the same word in 4:18 translated "*comfort*"
 - 4) *"And build one another up"*
- I. Final words of encouragement (5:12-22)

1. *“Appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work.”*
 - a. Though elders are not mentioned in the letter, it does seem that Paul has left someone in charge.
 - b. Perhaps Jason, Aristarchus, and/or Secundus?
2. *“Live in peace with one another.”*
 - a. Get along. Work together.
 - b. Brethren should be united in fighting Satan and his followers, not one another!
3. *“We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly,”*
 - a. Admonish - “to counsel about avoidance or cessation of an improper course of conduct, admonish, warn, instruct” (BDAG)
 - b. Unruly - “to being out of step and going one’s own way, disorderly, insubordinate” (BDAG)
4. *“Encourage the fainthearted,”*
 - a. Encourage - different word than (4:18 and 5:11)
 - 1) *Parakaleo* (used in 4:18 as “comfort” and 5:11 as “encourage”)
 - a) *Para*, beside or near + *kaleo*, to call
 - b) “An exhortation, or consolation, comfort” (Vine)
 - 2) *Paramutheomai* (used in 5:14 as “encourage”)
 - a) *Para*, beside or near + *muthos*, speech
 - b) “Speaking closely to anyone, denotes consolation, comfort, with a greater degree of tenderness than *parakaleo*” (Vine)
 - b. Fainthearted - “small-souled” (Vine)
5. *“Help the weak”*
 - a. Help - “to have a strong attachment to someone or something, cling to, hold fast to, be devoted to” (BDAG)
 - b. Weak - “of that which lacks strength: ‘weak, powerless’. esp. those suffering from a debilitating illness, sick, ill” (BDAG)
6. *“Be patient with everyone.”*
 - a. Patient - “to remain tranquil while waiting, have patience, wait or to bear up under provocation without complaint, be patient, forbearing” (BDAG)
7. *“See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people.”*
 - a. cf. Gal 6:10: *“So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith”*
8. *“Rejoice always”*
 - a. Rejoice - “to be in a state of happiness and well-being, rejoice, be glad” (BDAG)

- b. Despite their persecutions, rejoice!
 - c. cf. James 1:2-3: *“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.”*
9. *“Pray without ceasing”*
- a. Pray about everything. Pray about everyone. Pray anywhere.
 - b. Let prayer be something that is a distinguishing characteristic of your life.
10. *“In everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”*
- a. In a day and time where people have forgotten how to say “thank you,” we must remember to always be thankful!
 - b. cf. John 17:11-19; Phil. 4:6
11. *“Do not quench the Spirit”*
- a. Quench - “to cause an action, state, or faculty to cease to function or exist, quench, literally: extinguish, put out” (BDAG)
 - b. Were they trying to repress the exercise of certain spiritual gifts—i.e. prophecy to the point where Paul needed to warn them to stop? Opinions vary.
 - c. The imagery here is that of putting out a fire.
 - 1) There is a work going.
 - 2) People are responding.
 - 3) Souls are being saved.
 - 4) Don’t stifle that in any way!
12. *“Do not despise prophetic utterances, but examine everything carefully”*
- a. Despise - “to show by one’s attitude or manner of treatment that an entity has no merit or worth, disdain” (BDAG)
13. *“Hold fast to that which is good.”*
- a. Hold fast - “to adhere firmly to traditions, convictions, or beliefs, hold to. Keep in one’s memory, retain faithfully. (BDAG)
 - b. Having examined everything thoroughly, finding it to be true, never let it go!
14. *“Abstain from every form of evil.”*
- a. Abstain - “to hold oneself away from.” (Vine)
 - b. Paul’s exhortation was a general call for these believers to make some important decisions.
 - 1) Is _____ truth or error?
 - 2) Is _____ good or evil?
 - 3) Is _____ righteous action or sin?
 - c. Making those decisions, using God’s word, then there is a command to completely avoid any of the teachings, influences, or behaviors that would be inconsistent with God’s will, regardless of where this evil may come from.

- J. Final Thoughts and Goodbye (5:23-28)
 - 1. Paul prays (5:23)...
 - a. For their complete sanctification.
 - b. For their preservation, knowing the trials they are facing.
 - c. That they would be “*without blame*” at the Lord’s return.
 - 2. Statement of trust and confidence in the Lord (5:24)
 - 3. Solicitation of prayers (5:25)
 - 4. Greet all brethren and make sure they read this letter (5:25-27)
 - 5. “*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.*” (5:28)

IX. Text of 2 Thessalonians

- A. Introduction (1:1-2)
 - 1. Salutation (1:1)
 - a. Again Paul lists himself along with Silvanus (Silas) and Timothy as the authors of the letter.
 - 2. Greeting (1:2)
- B. A Source of Encouragement (1:3-12)
 - 1. Spiritual Growth (1:3)
 - a. Their faith continues to grow.
 - b. Their love for one another continues to grow.
 - 1) They followed Paul’s instructions from the first letter. (cf. 1 Thess. 4:9-10)
 - 2. A Good Example to Follow (1:4)
 - a. Perseverance in the face of persecution.
 - b. Faith in the midst of affliction.
 - c. Unwavering endurance.
 - 3. God’s Righteous Judgment (1:5-10)
 - a. God will repay affliction with affliction (1:6)
 - 1) Dealing retribution (1:8)
 - a) Upon those who do not know God (1:8a)
 - b) Upon those who do not obey God (1:8b)
 - 2) Sentencing them to eternal destruction (1:9)
 - b. God will comfort the distressed (1:7)
 - 4. Prayer for the Faithful (1:11-12)
 - a. That they would be counted as worthy
 - b. That God would fulfill “*every desire for goodness*”
 - c. That God would fulfill “*the work of faith with power*”

d. To the extent that Jesus will be “*glorified*” and they with Him.

C. The Return of the Lord (2:1-17)

1. Don’t be “*shaken*” or “*disturbed*” (2:2)

a. Reasons that might cause a disturbance:

1) “*Spirit...as if from us*”

a) False prophet

2) “*Message...as if from us*”

a) “Word of mouth” communication

3) “*Letter...as if from us*”

a) Written communication

4) “Taken together, these words indicate the careful and extensive way that this false teaching was presented; it had all the marks of authenticity—divine revelation, proclamation, and the authority of apostolic writing” (MacArthur, 268).

b. Subject of disturbance: The Lord has already returned.

2. Events to Precede the Return of the Lord (2:3-4)

a. “*Apostasy comes first.*”

1) “Defiance of established system or authority, rebellion, abandonment, breach of faith” (BDAG)

b. “*The man of lawlessness is revealed*”

1) “*The son of destruction*”

2) “*Opposes...every so-called god*”

3) “*Exalts himself above every so-called god*”

4) “*Takes his seat in the temple of God*”

5) “*Displays himself as being God*”

3. Revelation of the Lawless One (2:5-12)

a. He is being restrained currently (2:6)

b. Though restrained, the mystery of lawlessness is already at work (2:7-8)

1) Restraining force will be removed.

2) Man of lawlessness will be revealed.

3) The Lord will slay him with his breath.

c. Description of the Lawless One (2:9-10)

1) His coming is in “accord with the activity of Satan.”

2) He will come in power.

3) He will come with signs.

4) He will come with false wonders.

- 5) He will come with all deception of wickedness.
 - d. Punishment of Those Who Did Not Receive the Love of the Truth (2:10-12)
 - 1) They perish (2:10) (“to cause or experience destruction or ruin.” (BDAG))
 - 2) God sends a “*deluding influence*” (2:11)
 - a) Deluding: “wandering from the path of truth, error, delusion, deceit, deception” (BDAG)
 - b) The purpose of God’s action:
 - 1] “*So that they will believe what is false*”
 - 2] “*That they all may be judged*”
 - a] Because they (the perishing in v. 10) did not believe the truth
 - b] Because they took pleasure in wickedness.
4. Thanksgiving and Prayer (2:13-17)
 - a. God has chosen you from the beginning (2:13-14)
 - 1) Through sanctification
 - 2) Through faith
 - 3) Through the gospel
 - b. Stand firm! (2:15)
 - 1) “*Hold to the traditions...that you learned from us*”
 - c. Prayer for comfort and strength (2:16-17)
- D. Final Exhortations (3:1-15)
 - 1. “*Pray for us.*” (3:1-2)
 - a. Pray for our work.
 - b. Pray for our safety.
 - 2. Maintain your confidence in the Lord (3:3-5)
 - a. He will strengthen.
 - b. He will protect.
 - c. He will direct your hearts.
 - 3. Admonitions Concerning the Unruly and Lazy (3:6-13)
 - a. “*Keep away from the unruly*” (3:6)
 - 1) Keep away - “to keep one’s distance, keep away, stand aloof from someone. to shun something, avoid, try to avoid.” (BDAG)
 - a) Also translated “withdraw” (ASV, KJV, NKJV)
 - 2) Unruly - “in defiance of good order, disorderly” (BDAG)
 - b. “*Follow our example*” (3:7-9)
 - 1) Live disciplined lives.

- 2) Work hard.
- 3) Do not intentionally burden your brethren.
- c. The Rules Concerning Work Ethic(3:10-12)
 - 1) *“If anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either.”*
 - a) Addressing the Cynicism that runs rampant in the city and has affected some of the members of the church there. (See notes in section above on “Purpose of Writing”)
 - 2) *“Work quietly.”*
 - 3) *“Eat your own bread.”*
- d. Admonition for the faithful: *“do not grow weary of doing good.”* (3:13)
 - 1) Though some are going to take advantage of your kindness, don’t grow weary.
 - 2) Though some will never return your kindness, don’t grow weary.
 - 3) Though some will never even say “Thank You,” don’t grow weary.
 - 4) cf. Gal. 6:6-10
- 4. Admonitions Concerning Those Who Reject the Teaching of Paul (3:14-15)
 - a. *“Take special note of that person”*
 - 1) “To note in writing, note down, write. To take special notice of, mark.” (BDAG)
 - b. *“Do not associate with him”*
 - 1) “A way or journey together” (Vine)
 - 2) “Mingle, associate with” (BDAG)
 - c. *“Do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.”*
 - 1) Admonish - “to counsel about avoidance or cessation of an improper course of conduct, admonish, warn, instruct.” (BDAG)
- E. Farewell (3:16-18)
 - 1. A prayer for peace (3:16)
 - 2. Signature and confirmation of authorship. (3:17)
 - 3. *“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.”* (3:18)

X. Difficult Questions...

- A. What does Paul mean by *“they always fill up the measure of their sins”* (1 Thess. 2:16)?
- B. When Paul says *“do not quench the Spirit”* (1 Thess. 5:19), is he referring to the use of miraculous gifts or something else? Can we be guilty of this today?
- C. What does it mean to *“despise prophetic utterance”* (1 Thess. 5:20)?
- D. In 2 Thess. 2:3-10, Paul discusses the man of lawlessness.
 - 1. Is this one specific person in the past history of mankind (or the future)?
 - 2. Is this one type of person?

- E. In 2 Thess. 2:11 Paul states that “*God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false.*”
1. Does this mean that God will play an active role in helping people believe a lie?
- F. In both letters, Paul speaks a great deal about the second coming of the Lord.
1. In 1 Thess. - Like a thief in the night.
 2. In 2 Thess. - Signs will precede the return.
 3. Was this going to be an event that would take place in the life of the recipients?
- G. How do we apply Paul’s statement today that “if a man is not willing to work, then neither should he eat”?
- H. In the final chapter Paul uses three different words to describe how we should act toward those who are not following Paul’s teaching. The NASB uses the terms “*keep away from,*” “*take special note of,*” and “*do not associate with.*”
1. What are the differences in these three ideas?
 2. Are these actions that we should only take in regard to our brethren?
 3. When do we take these actions?

Conclusion...

- I. “Victory over falsity” (Cornwall, 237).
 - A. This is what the name “Thessalonica” means.
 - B. After a detailed study of these letters, surely we all can see that the brethren there lived up to this name.
- II. People generally have not studied these books as they have others such as Romans, Hebrews, or Revelation.
- III. However, they teach us some invaluable lessons about how we should live and act as the people of God.
 - A. They encourage believers to stand firm in the midst of persecution (1 Thess. 2:14-16).
 - B. They encourage believers to live orderly lives (2 Thess. 3:6-13).
 - C. They show the church’s responsibility to discipline sinning members (2 Thess. 3:6, 14-15).
 - D. They also emphasize the church’s responsibility to reach the lost world with the saving truth of the gospel (1 Thess.. 1:8-10).
- IV. May we all be as committed as these brethren were so we too can have “victory over falsity.”

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