



# FIRST THESSALONIANS

“For this reason we also thank God without easing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.”  
(1Thessalonians 2:13)



# Introduction to First Thessalonians

## **Authorship:**

It is widely accepted that Paul is the author of 1 Thessalonians. “The internal evidence is all that could be desired; the vocabulary is that of Paul and the epistle is Pauline in both style and thought.” (Kelcy, 14) “Paul’s authorship of First Thessalonians has not been seriously questioned except by a few modern liberal scholars.” (Nelson, 2020)

## **Date of Composition:**

Paul wrote First Thessalonians on his second missionary journey. It was during this time that the church was established in Thessalonica. Paul’s time with them was cut short (Acts 17:1-10). Therefore, Paul was deeply concerned about the church’s well-being.

“If the church was founded in A.D. 50-51, this letter would have been written in A.D. 51. The date of Paul’s Corinthian stay is tied to an inscription found at Delphi in 1909 which confirms that Gallio arrived in Corinth in early A.D. 52 (see Acts 18:12). Upon this evidence, we may conclude that 1 Thessalonians was written in A.D. 51, about six months after Paul’s first visit with the church (compare 2:17).” (Edwards, 215)

## **Purpose in Writing:**

Paul had a four-fold purpose in mind when writing to the church at Thessalonica:

- Persecution – “Paul and the new Christians at Thessalonica experienced persecution because of their faith in Christ.” (Wilson/Taylor, 479)
- Paul’s Ministry – Paul would not stop preaching and ministering regardless of circumstances.
- Hope – Paul discusses the second coming of Christ and gives hope for seeing our loved ones who have passed on once again.

- Being Prepared – We must be watchful, for we know not when the Lord will return. (Section taken from: Wilson/Taylor 479)

### **City of Thessalonica:**

Thessalonica was the capital of the province of Macedonia. It was also the largest city in Macedonia. Thessalonica enjoyed being a “free city” ruled by its own city officials. “Cassander, who was married to Alexander the Great’s half-sister, founded the city about 315 B.C. and named it in her honor. Being a seaport town, it became an important crossroad for trade and culture. Today the city is called Salonika and is still important.” (Shackelford, 352)

Paul supported himself while living in Thessalonica. He used goat-hair cloth for the tents he made. This cloth was a major contributor to the economy of Thessalonica.

The city was mostly comprised of Gentiles.

# Outline of First Thessalonians

## **I. PAUL'S PERSONAL MESSAGE**

- A. HIS THANKFULNESS -1:1-5
- B. THEIR FOLLOWING -1:6-10
- C. BACKGROUND FOR CHAPTER TWO -Acts 17:1-10
- D. HIS BEHAVIOR AMONG THEM -2:1-12
- E. SALVATION TO THEM -2:13-16
- F. PAUL'S DESIRE TO SEE THEM -2:17-20
- G. PAUL'S CONCERN FOR THEM -3:1-5
- H. TIMOTHY'S REPORT -3:6-10
- I. PAUL'S PRAYER FOR THEM -3:11-13

## **II. PAUL'S PRACTICAL TEACHINGS**

- A. A LIFE OF PURITY -4:1-8
- B. A LIFE OF LOVE -4:9-12
- C. A LIFE OF COMFORT -4:13-18
- D. A LIFE OF PREPARATION -5:1-11
- E. FINAL EXHORTATIONS -5:12-22
- F. CONCLUDING REMARKS -5:23-28



**I. PAUL'S PERSONAL MESSAGE****A. HIS THANKFULNESS -1:1-5**

1. Three names mentioned: (vs. 1)
  - a. Paul -identifies himself as the author of the epistle.
  - b. Silvanus -this is a Roman name evidently referring to Silas. He accompanied Paul on the second missionary journey when the church in Thessalonica was established -Ac 15:40; 17:1-9
  - c. Timothy -Paul had taken him under his wing as a co-worker and son in the faith -Ac 16:1-3
2. The church in Thessalonica
  - a. They were in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
    - 1) God has become their Father in the spiritual sense -Ro 8:14-16; Ga 4:6, 7
    - 2) They are in Christ through baptism -Ro 6:3, 4; Ga 3:26, 27
  - b. Paul presented a blessing of peace upon them.

For the Greeks, peace basically meant an absence of war. On the Hebrew tongue, however, it took on the meaning of the Hebrew word *shalom*, which encompassed the prosperity and wholeness of one's spirit, a sense of overall well-being. Jewish greetings would ordinarily include *shalom*. (Edwards, 19)

3. Paul mentions them always in prayer (vs. 2)
  - a. Paul tells them to pray without ceasing -5:17
  - b. He demonstrates this in his own life first
4. Three Christian qualities are mentioned: (vs. 3)
  - a. Work of faith -True faith produces work -Ja 2:14-ff; Heb. 11
  - b. Labor of love -This is manifested in putting others above our own needs -Ph 2:4. We strive

to do good to all, especially the household of faith -Ga 6:10

- c. Patience in hope -They persevered for the hope they had before them -Ro 8:18-25; 15:4
  - 5. They have the election by God (vs. 4)
    - a. The election is for all who obey the gospel of Christ.
    - b. The church was mostly comprised of Gentiles. They were now grafted in as the people of God.
  - 6. The word and the Holy Spirit (vs. 5)
    - a. The Spirit works through His word -1Co 2:4, 5
    - b. Paul may have been also referring to the signs of an apostle which were done through the Holy Spirit (2Co 2:12; Heb. 2:1-4)
  - 7. Paul and his companions were setting the good example before them (vs. 5)
- B. THEIR FOLLOWING -1:6-10
- 1. They followed Paul and the Lord -cf. (1Co 4:16, 11:1)
  - 2. They received the word of God
    - a. In much affliction (Below we will look at Acts 17:1-10 and see the affliction they endured)
    - b. In the joy of the Spirit.
      - 1) The Holy Spirit works through His word
      - 2) Jesus said His words are spirit and life -Jn 6:63
      - 3) Paul said the Spirit gives life -2Co 3:6
      - 4) The seed is the word of God -Lk 8:11
  - 3. Their example of faith became widely known in Macedonia and Achaia
    - a. "At the time this Epistle was written Greece was divided into the provinces of Macedonia and Achaia. Thessalonica was the capital of



- Macedonia and Corinth of Achaia.”  
(Lipscomb, 20)
- b. Usually Paul would comment on the progress of other congregations as he traveled. He did not have to do this with Thessalonica, for their progress has sounded forth.
4. What Paul taught about Jesus -vs. 9, 10
    - a. Their faith should be in Him, not idols
    - b. He is coming again
      - 1) The Second Coming of Christ was greatly anticipated by them.
      - 2) John looked forward the His return -Re 22:20
      - 3) This hope motivated purity -1Jn 3:3
    - c. He was raised from the dead. This is our living hope -1Pe 1:3
    - d. He delivers us from the wrath to come. -cf. (Ro 5:9)

#### C. BACKGROUND FOR CHAPTER TWO -Acts 17:1-10

1. Paul reasoned in their synagogue for three Sabbaths.
2. He showed how Jesus suffered and was raised from the dead.
3. Some of the devout Greeks were persuaded.
4. Some of the unbelieving Jews came and stirred up trouble.
  - a. They assaulted Jason’s house
  - b. They tried to make Christians look like rebels against Rome.

#### D. HIS BEHAVIOR AMONG THEM -2:1-12

1. Paul’s Suffering -2:1-3
  - a. He addresses his treatment in Philippi.
  - b. He addressed his trouble in Thessalonica

- c. Enduring all the persecution shows his sincerity.
  2. Paul's Motivation -2:3-9
    - a. He was entrusted with the gospel -1Ti 1:12; 2Co 4:6, 7
    - b. What Paul did not do:
      - 1) He did not use flattering words
      - 2) He did not seek the glory of men
      - 3) NOTE: His endurance of persecution proves this
    - c. The heart of Paul
      - 1) He displayed parental care
      - 2) He risked his life for their well-being
      - 3) Paul paid his own way -cf. Ac 18:3
  3. Paul's Witnesses -2:10-12
    - a. They knew his behavior while he was with them.
    - b. Parental care as a father. He encouraged them to walk worthy of God.
- E. SALVATION TO THEM -2:13-16
1. They had received the word of God. Not as from men, but as it is, the word of God.
  2. They imitated the churches of Judea.
  3. In doing so, they suffered persecution:
    - a. They had killed Jesus
    - b. They killed their own prophets
    - c. They persecuted Paul and his companions
    - d. They forbade them to speak the word of salvation
    - e. Consequences: Wrath has come upon them.
- F. PAUL'S DESIRE TO SEE THEM -2:17-20
1. They were taken away from them after a short period of time -Ac 17:1-ff

2. Satan hindered them from seeing them. Paul does not get into specifics. However, anytime the work of God is hindered, it is safe to say that the devil is behind it.
3. Paul expresses his great love for them.

G. PAUL'S CONCERN FOR THEM -3:1-5

1. The church in Thessalonica was young in the faith.
  - a. They had endured persecution from their own countryman -2:14
  - b. Paul was deeply concerned for them. He did not want them to give in to the pressures to quit the faith.
  - c. Paul thought it best to be left alone in Athens
    - 1) He states clearly that he sent Timothy to them to see about their faith.
    - 2) It is evident that Silas was either sent with Timothy or at least sent into the area, possibly Berea.
2. Paul sends Timothy to them -vs. 2, 3
  - a. Paul had a great love for Timothy. He called Timothy "his brother, minister of God, and fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ."
  - b. He was sent to "establish", "encourage", or "strengthen" them in the faith.
  - c. The afflictions Paul refers to are a part of living the Christian life. He mentions a similar statement in 1 Timothy 3:12.
3. He had told them before that persecution would come.
4. He was concerned that the devil had taken opportunity against them thus making all his labor in vain.

H. TIMOTHY'S REPORT -3:6-10

1. Paul is encouraged -vs. 6-8
  - a. Those who would work in opposition to Paul, were unable to convince the Christians at Thessalonica of anything negative concerning Paul.
  - b. They were keeping the faith. They had a great desire to see Paul again as he also had great desire to see them.
    - 1) At this time, Paul had been in Athens, a city overcome by idol worship.
    - 2) He was now in Corinth where trouble was also stirred by obstinate Jews (Acts 18:5, 6).
    - 3) Now Paul was comforted by the news of their faith.
  - c. Paul's desire is for them to be steadfast in their faith.
2. Paul's thankfulness -vs. 9, 10
  - a. It is as though Paul cannot thank God enough for the great faith of his brethren at Thessalonica.
  - b. He prays night and day to be able to see them.
    - 1) This shows again that he practices prayer as he also taught -1Th 5:17
    - 2) It also demonstrates his great love for them and his desire to fill what is lacking in them. This is likely referring to the need for deeper understanding concerning the Second Coming of Christ.

I. PAUL'S PRAYER FOR THEM -3:11-13

1. Paul's faith is in God and the Lord Jesus Christ. It is through them that a path will be made back unto them.

- a. It is believed that Paul did make it back to visit with them.
- b. He was back through Macedonia about three or four years later -Ac 20:1, 2
- c. There was possibly a third visit -1Ti 1:3
2. Prayer to abound in love
  - a. They were doing great in their love for others - 4:9, 10
  - b. Paul expresses the desire for them to grow for love for each other and for all men.
3. The Second Coming -vs. 13
  - a. The Lord Jesus Christ is coming again with all His saints. The word “saints” in the Greek means “holy ones”. This word can indicate either Christians or angels. Jesus brings back both with Him.
    - 1) Those who sleep in Jesus -4:14
    - 2) With His holy angels -Mk 8:38; 2Th 1:7, 8
  - b. Therefore, they should live holy and blameless before the Lord.

## II. PAUL'S PRACTICAL TEACHINGS

### A. A LIFE OF PURITY -4:1-8

1. Paul desires for them to abound more and more in the things they received.
2. Paul had taught them the commandments of God. They were to walk in them.
3. They should abstain from sexual immorality.
  - a. Their culture was filled with sexual immorality.
  - b. Sexual immorality encompasses every sexual act outside of biblical marriage.
  - c. They should know how to possess their own bodies (ie. Self-control -Ga 5:23; Lk 21:19).
4. They should not defraud their brother in this matter.

## FIRST THESSALONIANS

- a. Paul is still discussing sexual immorality.
  - b. Man is not to covet his neighbor's wife -Ex 20:17
  - c. Man is not to even look to lust -Mt 5:28
  - d. God is the avenger of such -Ga 6:7, 8
  5. We have been called to holiness -1Pe 1:16, 2Co 7:1; 1Jn 3:3
  6. Those who reject this, rejects God
    - a. All we can do is plant and water -1Co 3:6, 7
    - b. When men reject the message, they reject God -1Sa 8:7
  7. God gave the Holy Spirit to His apostles.
    - a. They are speaking (writing) on behalf of God - 2Pe 1:20, 21
    - b. The words of Paul are the commandments of the Lord -1Co 14:37
- B. A LIFE OF LOVE -4:9-12
1. Those of Thessalonica were growing in love and it was evident to others.
  2. They had been taught by God to love
    - a. God demonstrated His love through His Son - Ro 5:6-8
    - b. We know God through love -1Jn 4:7-11
    - c. If we claim to love God, but hate our brother, we are a liar -1Jn 4:20, 21
  3. Their love is known throughout Macedonia.
    - a. Churches were being established throughout Macedonia (ie. Philippi and Berea).
    - b. Thessalonica would use their location for the good of the brethren.
  4. Paul urged them to live a quiet life.
    - a. He is not intending for them to become hermits.
    - b. He desires for them to walk properly among others.

- c. Laboring with their hands. Adam in the garden of Eden, was cursed with mortality and death, not with the labor of his hands -cf. Ge 2:15

C. A LIFE OF COMFORT -4:13-18

1. We do not sorrow as those with no hope -vs. 13, 14
  - a. Some of the brethren had already died after a short time in the faith.
  - b. What happened to them? Paul said they were asleep.
    - 1) Sleep is often used as an expression of death -Jn 11:11
    - 2) The word “cemetery” indicates a sleeping place.
    - 3) This is not to be confused with “soul-sleep”. Soul-sleep is the belief that one ceases to exist after death.
      - a) The thief on the cross -Lk 23:43
      - b) Rich man and Lazarus -Lk 16:19-31
  - c. This does not mean we do not sorrow
    - 1) “Jesus wept” -Jn 11:35
    - 2) Paul was sorrowful over Epaphroditus -Ph 2:25-30
  - d. We know God will bring them back with Him when He comes!
2. The order of the Second Coming -vs. 15-18
  - a. We are assured of these statements, for they are the word of the Lord.
  - b. The priority belongs to those who have died in the Lord. They will rise first before any change is made in those of us who are alive and remain.
  - c. The Lord will descend from heaven.

- 1) Currently He is at the right hand of God - He 1:3; Ac 7:55, 56
- 2) He will come again in the like manner He left. -Ac 1:11
- d. The shout from heaven
  - 1) The voice of the Lord will be heard by the dead -Jn 5:28, 29
  - 2) E.g. -Lazarus -Jn 11:43
- e. Voice of an archangel

“The voice of the archangel may be employed to summon the heavenly hosts and marshal the innumerable company of the redeemed, for ‘they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other’ (Matthew 24:31)” (Shepherd, 59)

- f. The trumpet of God -cf. 1Co 15:52
- g. The dead in Christ will rise first. For those concerned about the fate of the deceased Christians, Paul gives great assurance that they will be the first raised from the dead. We will surely see them again and be with our Lord and them forever.
- h. Those who remain will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air.
- i. Our bodies will be changed -1Co 15:51, 52
- j. Jesus went to prepare a place for us and promised that He would return -Jn 14:1-4. This description will be the fulfillment of that promise.
- k. We are to comfort each other with these words.
  - 1) These words do comfort us for they are the words of our Lord -vs.15
  - 2) Death is not the end; we will all meet again.



## D. A LIFE OF PREPARATION -5:1-11

1. The Day of the Lord is like a thief in the night - 5:1-3
  - a. They already knew that the time of the Lord's return was beyond their knowledge. This information was reserved only for God -Mt 24:36
  - b. Jesus goes into great detail about "a thief in the night" -Mt 24:36-51
  - c. He then greatly discusses preparation for that Day -Mt 25:1-46
  - d. "Peace and safety!"
    - 1) Days of Jeremiah -Je 6:14
    - 2) Peter's words -2Pe 3:3-9
    - 3) Compare with many preachers today.
2. We are not of the night -5:4-7
  - a. The Day should not overtake them. Ie. They would always live righteously before God .
  - b. Light and darkness are often used as physical examples to explain the spiritual principle between good and evil -1Jn 1:5-7; Co 1:12, 13; Ep 5:8; Ac 26:18
  - c. "Sleep" -This is a spiritual sleep that causes a person to ignore their spiritual condition before the Lord. It is worth noting that this sleep is done most by those who have never come to Christ, but it certainly can include Christians who have become inactive in doing God's will. It is therefore imperative that we awaken spiritually before God -Ro 13:11-14
  - d. "Drunkenness"
    - 1) This could reference physical drunkenness that is a sin -Ga 5:21
    - 2) This could also serve as a contrast of how we should conduct ourselves as Christians.

- (ie. We should be sober minded -1Pe 1:13; 5:8)
3. We are of the light -5:8-11
    - a. The “breastplate of faith and love”
      - 1) The purpose of the breastplate is to protect the soldier’s vital organs.
      - 2) Faith is continuing to believe in God during good and difficult times -cf. 2Co 1:8-11
      - 3) Love -This is agape love. It is the love given to another even if they hate and ridicule you.
    - b. The “helmet of salvation”
      - 1) The helmet also protects the vital organs of the soldier.
      - 2) Salvation is the key to our hope we have in Christ. The more we focus on our great hope, the less room Satan has for tempting us to stray from God.
    - c. “God has not appointed us to wrath”
      - 1) Through Jesus we have been saved from wrath -Ro 5:9
      - 2) God is not willing that any should perish - 2Pe 3:9
      - 3) This does not mean that the wicked will not endure wrath -Mt 25:46; Re 14:11
    - d. “Whether we wake or sleep” -this is most likely a reference to our state of being when the Lord returns. Some will be awake (alive in the flesh) while others will be asleep (deceased).
    - e. Paul instructs them to continue in comforting and edifying one another.

E. FINAL EXHORTATIONS -5:12-22

1. Honoring those who labor among us -5:12, 13

- a. We should honor the elders who are over us and watch out for our souls -Heb 13:17
- b. Some have questioned how a young congregation (five to six months at the time of writing) could have elders already. There is no answer given.

Perhaps a few of the converts were spiritually mature Jews before their conversion, and therefore only needed to be convinced that Christ as the Messiah and obey the gospel in order to become mature Christians. (Roper, 181)

2. Peace among them -5:14, 15
  - a. “Warn the unruly” -This could include those who thought the return of Christ was imminent making it unnecessary to work and earn a living. However, this could be equally applied to any “unruly” in the church today.
  - b. “Comfort the fainthearted” -This may include those who thought death would prevent them from seeing the return of Christ. (Paul clearly addresses this in 4:14. Again this could be applied to any in the Lord’s church that struggle to understand certain biblical concepts.
  - c. “Uphold the weak” -As brethren we strengthen one another.
  - d. “Patience with all” -We never give up on one another.
  - e. Both in the church and in the community, no one is to render evil for evil. Rather we are to live at peace with all men -Ro 12:18-21
3. Christian attitude -5:16-18
  - a. “Rejoice always” -We have the blessed salvation from our Lord. We have more reason to rejoice than anyone else on the face of the earth! -cf. Ph 4:4; Ac 16:25

- b. “Pray without ceasing” -This does not mean we are constantly praying, but rather we make a habit of praying before God -Dan. 6:10; Mk 1:35.
  - c. “in everything giving thanks” -Even during trials and tribulation we can be thankful and rejoice -Ja 1:2-ff; Ro 5:3-5; Ac 5:40-42
  - d. The motivation for all the above things mentioned is the will of God is being done through our behavior.
4. Christian diligence -5:19-22
- a. “Do not quench the Spirit”
    - 1) From a non-miraculous point of view, it indicates living in immorality after one becomes a Christian.
    - 2) From the miraculous point of view, it indicates they may not have been using the gifts given by the Spirit.
  - b. “Do not despise prophecies” -cf. 1Co 14:1-5
    - 1) Prophecies would be miraculous to a degree in the first century church. This would include direct revelation from God and the predicting of future events.
    - 2) Today, prophecy is not given directly to man, but only through God’s written word.
    - 3) Therefore, we should never despise prophecy (God’s word), but hold fast unto it.
  - c. “Test all things” (cf. 1Jn 4:1). During the days of Paul and even still today, many teach doctrines that are proven to be false. Therefore, we must not believe everything we hear, but see whether they are of God or not. That which is good and right, we cling to and teach to others.

- d. “Abstain from every form of evil” -This includes everything from false teaching (Mt 7:15) to the works of the flesh (Ga 5:19-21). To abstain indicates that we should hate sin like God hates sin. When we do so, we will not toy with sin, but stay within the paths of righteousness.

F. CONCLUDING REMARKS -5:23-28

1. God will sanctify them completely -5:23, 24
  - a. God is of peace. Only through Jesus do we have peace with God -Ep 2:
  - b. We have been sanctified (ie. “set apart”) -1Pe 2:9, 10
  - c. “...your whole spirit, soul, and body...”
    - 1) The Greeks made a distinction between each of these terms.
    - 2) Here, as in other places (Mk 12:30), the emphasis is not on the individual parts of man, but rather man as a whole being (inward and outward).
    - 3) Paul’s desire was for all Christians to be able to stand firm in the day of Judgment.
  - d. God is faithful. He desires all to be saved. This includes the desire for Christians to remain faithful -Re 2:10. God helps us in this matter -1Co 10:13.
2. Paul requested prayer -vs. 25.
  - a. He prayed continually for them.
  - b. He recognized the need in his own life for prayer. Therefore, he would often make this request of his brethren.
3. Greeting one another -vs. 26
  - a. This is equivalent of our handshake today.

- b. It is to be done with sincerity. We do not just appear to be friendly with one another, but we are moved with genuine love for each other.
4. Paul wanted to ensure all the brethren were able to hear his words.
5. Paul ends with a prayer of blessing upon them. The grace (unmerited favor) of Jesus to be with them. Provided they are continuing in the faith, the grace of God will always be with them.

### Conclusion:

1. We see the deep concern Paul had for the church of Thessalonica. They were a young congregation and Paul was unable to spend as much time with them as he would have like to.
2. He has been encouraged by their faith and prays for their continuance in it.
3. He desires for them to grow more and more in love for the lost and each other.
4. He gave them the comfort about the Second Coming and the importance of being ready.
5. All these things that Paul communicated with Thessalonica is good for us to remember today.

# References:

Raymond C. Kelcy (1968) *The Letters of Paul to the Thessalonians*. R.B. Sweet Co, Inc; Austin, TX 78751

Earl D. Edwards, D. Miss (2008) *Truth for Today Commentary: 1 & 2 Thessalonians*. Resource Publications; Searcy, AR 72143

Neil S. Wilson and Linda K. Taylor (2001). *Tyndale Handbook of Bible Charts & Maps*. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc; Wheaton, IL

Thomas Nelson (1997). *Nelson's NKJV Study Bible*. Thomas Nelson Publishers; Nashville, TN

David Lipscomb (1983). *A Commentary of the New Testament Epistles*. Gospel Advocate Co; Nashville, TN 37202