

1 Thessalonians

Background

- Acts 17:1 – 16
 - Luke was left behind in Philippi (“we” in Acts 16:16, “they” in Acts 17:1).
 - The results of their efforts in Amphipolis and Apollonia are not known.
 - As usual, Paul started at the synagogue (Acts 3:26, 13:26, Romans 1:16, 2:9, 2:10).
 - The majority of those who responded were Gentiles (1 Thessalonians 1:9, they had turned from idols).
 - Paul was able to speak three times before violence broke out due to envy among unbelieving Jews.
 - The believers sent Paul and Silas to safety in Berea.
 - After the unbelieving Jews of Thessalonica sent a mob to Berea, Paul was sent on to Athens to wait for Silas and Timothy who remained in the region of Thessalonica and Berea for a short time.
- Acts 18:1 – 5
 - Timothy joined Paul shortly but was sent back to Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 3:1 – 2)
 - After that, Paul moved on to Corinth and found work with Aquila and Priscilla.
 - When Silas and Timothy arrived, Paul’s work went into a higher gear, perhaps because they had brought money from Macedonia.
- Philippians 4:15 – 16 The Philippian Christians sent money to Paul and company while they were in Thessalonica and afterwards.
- 1 Thessalonians 2:9 – 3:7
 - Paul and company worked at least part of the time while in Thessalonica (2:9)
 - Paul desired to go back and visit them (2:18)
 - While in Athens, Paul sent Timothy back to check on them (3:1 – 2).
 - Before this writing, Timothy came back with a good report (3:6).
- The Christians in Thessalonica had been taught three times by Paul, for a short time by Timothy, and for a period of uncertain (but short) duration by Silas.

Encouragement by a Reminder of their Progress (1:1 – 2:16)

- (1:1) “Grace and peace” This common opening (in every letter except Hebrews, James, 1 John, and 3 John) is not a standard greeting but sets the tone for that which follows. The letter should be viewed as an outgrowth of the grace of God and should result in peace for the reader. Overlooking the source and result leads to the distortions referenced in the various letters.
- Paul’s prayers concerning them (1:2 – 4, 2:13)
 - In later letters (Colossians 1:3 – 6, Philippians 1:3 – 7, Ephesians 1:15 – 21), Paul begins in the same way, recounting his prayers.
 - Even though he knew them briefly, Paul comments on their faith, love, and hope (1:3). Further, he attributes to them the appropriate responses to those concepts: work, labor, and patience.
 - Election (1:4)

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- Election puts the initiative on God. God planned and called (2:12) long before we sought Him. We were all slow to accept it. So, no credit accrues to us for our faith.
- Romans 9:11 That the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls.
- Ephesians 1:4 He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world
- 1 Peter 2:9 You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people
- 1 Peter 1:2 Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ
- 2 Peter 1:10 Make your call and election sure
- Paul was thankful that they looked past him and saw God (2:13).
- The focus of the message began with grace (election, God's initiative), but did not stop there. Rather, the message concluded with peace (trusting God's promises, loving people, and living confidently in that hope).
- Evidence (1:5 – 2:11)
 - The work of the Spirit (1:5 – 6, 2:13).
 - How they responded (1:7 – 10)
 - Evangelism
 - Openmindedness
 - Radical change in focus, not just morality
 - Boldness despite difficulty (2:2).
 - No error (inconsistency), uncleanness (maintaining his own Jewishness, not an excuse to abandon his morality), or deceit (2:3).
 - No flattery or rhetoric (2:4 – 5). No demand for honor (2:6).
 - Not income-producing (2:5) although he had the right to demand it (2:6). Rather, they worked (2:9).
 - Gentleness and affection (2:7 – 8, 11).
 - Devout, just, and blameless (2:10).
 - Are these the qualities of an apostle or of any Christian?
 - Suffering because of doing good (1 Peter 2:20-21, 3:13 – 17, 4:14 - 19)
 - Remarkable behavior as a proof of the gospel (2 Corinthians 3:18 – 4:18)
 - To please Jesus in all respects (Colossians 1:10)
 - Simple and without regard to funding (1 Timothy 1:3 – 7, 6:3 – 7, 2 Timothy 4:3 – 4)
 - Gentle (Galatians 6:1, 2 Timothy 2:24 – 27)
 - Not a financial burden (Philippians 4:10 – 17, 1 Timothy 5:17, 3 John 5 – 8)
 - Evidence is not solely historical, but also includes our behavior (John 17:20 – 24, 1 Peter 4:11, 2 Corinthians 4:7).
- That you should walk worthy of God (2:12)
 - Walking worthy includes many character traits: humility, gentleness, patience, and unity (Ephesians 4:1 – 6). Church practices are not mentioned.
 - Walking worthy is a result of being filled by God with the knowledge of His will, wisdom, and understanding (Colossians 1:9 – 12). Worthiness again is attributed to God, not to our searching, studying, or achieving.

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- Walking worthy is parallel with overflowing with “the work of faith with power.” (2 Thessalonians 1:11 – 12).
- Walking worthy of the gospel is demonstrated in unity, increasing faith, and a lack of fear (Philippians 1:27 – 28)
- The purpose of the evidence was to produce a result, not to win the argument.
- Receiving the Word may produce physical difficulties (2:13 – 16).
 - The Word effectively works in us (2:13).
 - The Thessalonian Christians suffered similarly to the Judean Christians (2:14).
 - Obviously, those who persecute believers do not please God. In addition, such people are at odds with just about everyone (2:15). See 2:2 – 11.
 - Most commentators explain “wrath has come upon them to the uttermost” either in the destruction of Jerusalem or at Judgment, inventing a past tense that describes the future, insisting without evidence that Paul wrote it in the past tense because he was so certain of that outcome. Rather, this wrath may be seen in the past to the time of writing as described figuratively in Revelation 12:13 – 17. Satan already was causing havoc on earth. The Christians were protected. Palestine was already suffering greatly, which is why revolution was a realistic option in 67 AD.
- **Concern of the teacher for the student (2:17 – 3:13)**
- The value of the student to the teacher (2:17 – 20)
 - The motivation was relationship, not truth or doctrine.
 - Paul found his joy in the successes of faith of others.
 - Paul’s victory parade was embodied in those relationships.
 - If the teacher is vitally interested in the students, how many such long-term relationships can a teacher maintain before every day is filled?
- The value of continuing growth (3:1 – 7)
 - The purpose of sending Timothy was to make them strong and to encourage them
 - The goal was a perspective rooted in one’s spirit. Physical difficulties can be a source of great deception.
 - Growth is more than expected but essential to survival.
- The methods of continuing growth (3:8 – 13)
 - Prayer for the growth of others.
 - Face time between students and teachers to bring faith to the point of being consistent
 - Increase in seeking what is best for others (love)
 - Blameless hearts result in holiness (guilt focuses on failure)

Beyond physical affliction, we face other temptations (4:1 – 8)

- In contrast to cultural norms
 - Godly purposes versus lust
 - Honor versus fraud
 - Holiness versus uncleanness

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Expressions of love (4:9 – 12)

- Characteristics of daily life
 - Taught by God to love
 - Jesus
 - Grace
 - Planning
 - How do we mimic these characteristics?
 - Increasing love: How do we do that?
 - Lead a quiet life, mind your own business, work with your hands
 - Walk properly toward those outside
 - Colossians 4:5 – 6 Wise, redeeming time, grace and wit
 - 1 Peter 3:15 Giving a reason for your hope
 - 2 Corinthians 4:7 That the power may be of God
 - Ephesians 4:48 Steal no more but work that you may have something to share
 - That you may lack nothing ((2 Thessalonians 3:6 – 12)
 - How does this compare to modern church leadership?

The hope of the Last Day (4:13 – 5:11)

- Perhaps these Christians had heard only minimal teaching on this topic.
- This “coming of the Lord” refers to the end of the earth because Paul specifies that no signs will be given (5:2, 2 Peter 3:10, Matthew 24:35 – 44, Luke 12:39 - 40). The destruction of Jerusalem had clear signs and predictions. When signs of the Last Day are asserted, we may be certain that they are incorrect (5:3).
- Our understanding of the faithful who have died physically
 - We do not grieve for their loss of physical life (Philippians 1:21 – 23)
 - Although grief for our own loss is normal (Philippians 2:27)
- Sequence
 - God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus (4:14)
 - Those whom He brings with Him are also said to rise first (4:16)
 - Therefore, the faithful dead will come with Jesus and then be changed (rise). Comparing to 1 Corinthians 15:35 – 53, using Paul’s illustration,
 - The spirits of faithful dead are ungerminated seeds that were sown by the mortal faithful.
 - The seeds will germinate when Jesus returns and become permanent.
 - When Jesus appears, there will be a lot of noise (shout, trumpet).
 - The physically alive faithful will be changed after the physically dead faithful.
 - All the faithful, now changed, will return to heaven with Jesus.
- Applications
 - Comfort, particularly when a faithful person dies physically (4:13, 18).
 - Treat each moment as though it were the last (5:4 – 7).
 - Tools of the vigilant
 - Self-control (5:6), a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22 – 23).

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- Faith, love, hope (5:8). Being certain of the end of the universe should increase trust in God's promises, greater concern for others, and eager anticipation.
- Salvation (5:9) and the sacrifice of Jesus (5:10). These maintain our perspective that we are responding to the love of God, not accruing achievements.
- Eternity with Him (5:10) is more in keeping with love than "eternity in heaven."
- Building up one another (5:11) cannot happen when one is alone.

In summary... (5:12 – 28)

- Characteristics of those with faith, love, and hope (5:12 – 22)
 - Following can be a challenge. "Those who labor among you" likely are Paul, Silas, and Timothy. Jason, mentioned in Acts 17 probably should not be included because he was not "before you in the Lord," but rather heard the gospel with the others. No other church leaders are mentioned.
 - "Being at peace with one another" can be challenging as the relationships of hegemony work themselves out.
 - The "unruly" are further described in 2 Thessalonians 3:6 – 15: those who would not work to support themselves but rather expected the church to support them.
 - The "fainthearted" and the "weak" were likely those who were discouraged by their physical difficulties. Patience would be required.
 - Persecution can lead to the desire for revenge. The faithful seek what is good for all.
 - Rejoice always. Paul's examples of joy were in the successes of faith.
 - Prayer is not formal but a continuing conversation.
 - Being known as thankful (happy) people recommends the gospel.
 - The Spirit sometimes (often) operates in ways we did not expect. Leave room for the initiative and creativity of God.
 - Do not reject a claim to speaking a message from God out of hand. Rather, investigate everything carefully.
 - Keep the good parts; don't throw out everything if you think you have found a flaw.
 - Do not excuse bad behavior with "We're only human." Success is possible through the Spirit.
- Final summary (5:23 – 28)
 - Sanctification is not partial but complete.
 - Reminder: the promises of God are a sure thing.
 - Copy Paul, pray frequently and fervently for the faithful.
 - Have a close relationship with local believers to the level of family.
 - Spread the good news around.