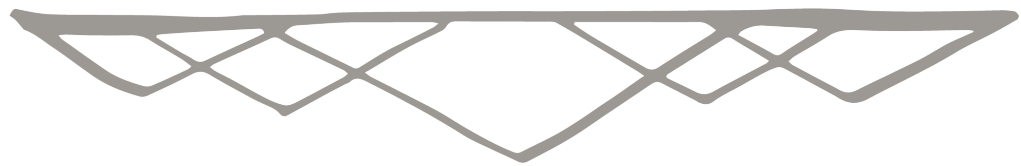


1 & 2 Thessalonians





Introduction to 1 Thessalonians

Paul writes to the church at Thessalonica to encourage believers. He is enthusiastic—both about the Thessalonians’ faith and about the way in which they have shared the good news of Jesus in their region (1 Thess 1:7–8). But Paul also addresses two pressing issues. First, he offers an explanation and a defense of his work among them. Second, he assures them that all fellow believers who have already died will be resurrected to life with Jesus (4:15–18). This letter charges the Thessalonians—and us—to place our confidence in Christ.

BACKGROUND

The opening verse lists Paul as the primary author, along with Silvanus (Silas) and Timothy. Paul wrote the letter from Corinth during his 18-month plus stay there in AD 50–51 (Acts 18:11). This can be dated precisely because of an archaeological inscription found at Delphi that mentions Gallio, the proconsul who heard charges against Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:12–17; compare 1 Thess 3:4).

Before writing this letter, Paul had visited the city of Thessalonica on his second missionary journey (circa AD 49–51). He started his ministry in Thessalonica by preaching in the local synagogue, leading several people to follow Jesus (Acts 17:2–4). However, a riot instigated by other Jews compelled him to leave the city (17:5–10). After Paul went south to Athens, he sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to check on the believers there (1 Thess 3:1–2). Later, Timothy joined Paul in Corinth and gave him an update on the Thessalonians, and Paul decided to write to them (Acts 18:5; 1 Thess 3:6).

Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia (northern Greece), a Roman province. It was one of the major commercial centers in the area and a strategic city for Paul’s ministry. First Thessalonians and Acts suggest that most of the church there consisted of non-Jewish people (1 Thess 1:9; 2:14; Acts 17:4). During Paul’s visit and after his departure, the believers in Thessalonica experienced persecution (1 Thess 1:6; 2:14; 3:3–4). Roman emperor worship—which was popular in the city—made the residents suspicious of Christians, who claimed that Jesus was a king (Acts 17:7). In response to this persecution, Paul encourages the Thessalonians to continue in the faith and to put their hope in the resurrected Christ, who suffered and died for them and who will come again (1 Thess 4:13–18).

STRUCTURE

Like a typical Graeco-Roman letter, 1 Thessalonians has a greeting (1:1), a body (1:2–5:22), and a conclusion (5:23–28). The body of the letter can be divided into two sections: The first section (1:2–3:13) looks backward to Paul’s time with the Thessalonians; the second section (4:1–5:22) addresses issues and concerns in the church. Immediately after the greeting, Paul gives thanks for the Thessalonians’ conversion (1:2–10). Paul then defends his conduct when he was with them





(2:1–12), expresses thanks for their response (2:13–16), states his desire to visit them (2:17–20), and describes Timothy’s visit and return (3:1–13).

In the second section of the letter body, Paul offers guidance on a variety of practical issues. First he addresses sexual conduct (4:1–8), then brotherly love (4:9–12). Then he answers questions about Christians who have died (4:13–18) and Christ’s return (5:1–11). He gives several quick instructions (5:12–22) before concluding the letter.

OUTLINE

- Paul and the Thessalonian church (1:1–3:13)
- Practical instructions and Christ’s return (4:1–5:22)
- Prayer and conclusion (5:23–28)

THEMES

In the midst of great difficulties, Paul encourages the Thessalonians—noting that the message he preached, and the gospel they received, is authentic (2:13–16). The good news of Jesus could have come only from God, and they can trust it to sustain them until the very end (5:1–11). They have proven that they can endure persecution and turn away from idols (1:6, 9), and now they must continue to faithfully follow Jesus (4:1–12; 5:12–22).

Paul’s message in 1 Thessalonians is that we can trust the character of God and the truth of the gospel (1:10; 2:19–20; 5:1–11). Paul reassures believers who have died that they have not missed anything; both the living and the dead will participate in Christ’s return (4:13–18). This would have encouraged the Thessalonians to endure persecution, even to the point of death.

Since Christ will surely come again, we must live faithfully in light of this reality. Like the Thessalonians, we still grieve for those who have died. But we do not grieve like those who have no hope. Because Jesus has been raised, our resurrection is certain—and we can face any hardship with the confidence that God is with us.

Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). Faithlife Study Bible. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.





Chapter One

Paul visited Thessalonica during his second missionary journey (ca. AD 49–51; Acts 17:1–9). Preaching in the local synagogue, Paul converted many Thessalonians—both Jew and Gentile—to Christianity (Acts 17:2–4). Some Jews, however, became jealous and caused a disturbance in the city (Acts 17:5). They accused Paul of claiming there was another king, named Jesus (Acts 17:7)—an act of treason against the Roman emperor. Before they could arrest him, Paul was sent away, leaving behind a community of new believers.

Concerned they might not withstand the threat of persecution, Paul sent Timothy to encourage the Thessalonians (1 Thess 3:2). He likely wrote the letter from Corinth between AD 50–51 (compare Acts 18:1), making it one of the earliest books of the NT.

Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). Faithlife Study Bible (1 Th 1:1–10). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

¹Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,
To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:
Grace to you and peace.

Verse one is typical of Paul's normal opening words for his letters. Paul is the author of this letter. Silvanus (a.k.a. Silas) and Timothy are Paul's companions on Paul's missionary journey, and mentioned here as co-senders of this letter because they both had served the Thessalonians (Acts 17:4, 14).



²We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, ³ remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 13 Paul teaches that faith, hope, and love are the abiding characteristics of all believers. In verse three he mentions faith, hope, and love again, but ties them to Christian behavior: *work of faith, labor of love, and steadfastness of hope*. These virtues aren't abstract, but instead they're real, detectable, tangible qualities that can be seen in our conduct.

Q: Faith, hope, and love are the three core Christian virtues. What are some ways these should be noticeable in our witness? (See also 1 Corinthians 13:13)





4 For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

Paul is clear. The evidence that the Thessalonians were chosen by God for salvation is the tangible presence of Holy Spirit's power in their lives. Sure, the Gospel came to them in word, for how will they believe unless someone preaches? But the evidence that they believed the Gospel that Paul, Silas, and Timothy preached is rooted in the presence of Holy Spirit power at work in their lives.

Q: Why is it important that the Gospel be demonstrated in the power of the Holy Spirit, and not just in word? (See also 1 Corinthians 2:3-4; 4:20)

6 And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. 8 For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything.

A further evidence that their faith was genuine is that they became imitators of Paul, Timothy, and Silas, but most importantly of Jesus. Today it's popular to call people worthy of imitation *influencers*. Why does their imitation serve as evidence that their faith was genuine? Because believing in Jesus brought a lot of trouble into your life. In a culture where there were many gods to worship, and the worship of those gods was intimately tied to every fiber of the social structure, making the claim that there is only one God of gods (Deuteronomy 17:10) and further claiming Jesus Christ is His Son wasn't just revolutionary, it was disrupting. See Acts 16:16-24 and Acts 18:21-41 for examples of local economies being disrupted by the message of the Gospel.

Q: Who are the influencers in your faith journey? Are your influencers leading you to become an example to other believers, even in places hostile to the Gospel? (See also Titus 2:1-4)

9 For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.





One of the primary motivators of the Christian faith is that Jesus Christ will return. When Paul heard reports of the Thessalonians, there are three elements of the report that he hears again and again. First, he hears from others about how well the Thessalonians received Paul, Timothy, and Silas. They took them in and extended gracious hospitality while they remained there as ministers. Second, people report back about their endurance of affliction. Turning away from their former idols to serve the *living and true God* brought troubles for them. Third, he heard about their anticipation for Christ's return to deliver us from the wrath to come. The promise of Christ's return is what makes the troubles of this world bearable. One day we will return to deliver us, and that day will be glorious!

Q: How does the return of Jesus increase our faith, hope, and love? (See also *Titus 2:11-14*)



Notes

A large rectangular area filled with a grid of small dots, intended for taking notes.





A large rectangular area filled with a grid of small, evenly spaced dots, intended for handwriting practice.

