

STUDY OF 1 & 2 THESSALONIANS



Lesson 1

Introduction and Living Faithfully While Waiting for the King

1. Introduction

i. Author

- Paul, likely along with co-laborers Silvanus (Silas) and Timothy (1 Thess. 1:1).
- This is one of 13 of the 27 New Testament books (Romans through Philemon) that Paul wrote.
- Paul founded the church of Thessalonica during his second missionary journey (Acts 17:1–9).
- These letters are widely considered Paul's earliest epistles.
- The teachings in this epistle align with other Pauline teachings on the Lord's return (1 Cor. 15; Phil. 3:20–21).

ii. Audience

- A young but vibrant church in Thessalonica, the capital of Macedonia (Acts 17:1–9).
- The congregation consisted of:
 - Jewish believers
 - God-fearing Gentiles
 - Former idol worshipers
- They lived in a city known for:
 - Wealth and trade
 - Pagan worship (especially the imperial cult)
 - Severe persecution of Christians
- Mainly Gentile believers who turned from idols (1 Thess. 1:9)

iii. Historical Context

- Paul had to leave Thessalonica abruptly due to riots instigated by opponents.
- The church continued to face intense social and political pressure (Acts 17; 1 Thess. 2:14).
- Because persecution continued after Paul left, some believers feared:
 - They had missed the Lord's return
 - Loved ones who died would miss the kingdom
 - Their suffering meant God had abandoned them
- They faced pressure similar to Israel's suffering in Zechariah 12 when nations rose against Jerusalem.

Paul's letters corrected their fears, strengthened their faith, and grounded them in eschatological hope.

Reminder, the meaning of *eschatological* is the theological study of "last things," including death, judgment, the afterlife, and the final destiny of humanity and the world.

iv. Main Theme(s)

- The certainty of Christ's second coming
- Endurance through trials
- Encouragement for believers grieving loss

- Holiness as preparation for Christ’s return
- Discerning truth from false teaching
- Living responsibly while waiting for the King
- Similar to Zechariah’s themes of the coming King, renewal, and God defending His people (Zech. 9–14).

v. Book Layout

1 Thessalonians

- Ch. 1: Faith, love, and hope
- Ch. 2–3: Paul’s ministry, spiritual care, and affection
- Ch. 4: Sanctification and comfort about the dead in Christ
- Ch. 5: Watchfulness, light vs. darkness, community instructions

2 Thessalonians

- Ch. 1: God’s righteous judgment
- Ch. 2: Clarifying misinformation about the Lord’s return
- Ch. 3: Discipleship, discipline, and steady living

I. *Living Faithfully While Waiting for the King* (1 Thessalonians 1–3)

A. The Power of the Gospel (1:1–10)

- Paul opens the letter by giving thanks and celebrating the Thessalonians for their faith, their love for others, and their hope in Jesus despite persecution (1:3).
- Paul recounts how they received the gospel with joy even though transferring their allegiance to the God of Israel came at a cost (1:4-6)
- The Thessalonians’ response to the Gospel became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.
 - Believers in Macedonia and Achaia and beyond were talking about:
 - The faith of the Thessalonians
 - How they turned from idols to serve the living God (1:9).
 - How they “wait for His Son from heaven” (1:10).

1 Thessalonians 1:7-10 (New International Version)

⁷ And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. ⁸ The Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, ⁹ for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell 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 rescues us from the coming wrath.

Reflection Question:

The Thessalonians turned from idols to serve God. What are some modern “idols” that believers today must consciously turn away from?

B. Paul’s Ministry and Spiritual Care (2:1-20)

- Paul cared for them like a mother (2:7) and father (2:11).

- Paul reminds us that the essence of Christian leadership is not about power and influence but about healthy relationships and humble, loving service.
- Just as Jesus was rejected and killed by his own people, so Paul is persecuted by his fellow Jews. The Thessalonians also experienced hostility from their Greek neighbors.
- Paul draws comfort from knowing that, together, their suffering is a way of participating in the story of Jesus' own life and death. Suffering did not mean God abandoned them (2:14–16).

C. Standing Fast in the Lord (3:1–13)

- Timothy is sent to strengthen and encourage the believers in Thessalonica (3:2).
- Paul reminds the Thessalonians that afflictions were appointed (3:3).
- Timothy brought back the report that the Thessalonians were still going strong. They were still faithful to Jesus, full of love for God and their neighbor, and longing to see Paul as much as he longed to see them (3:6).
- Paul concludes this portion of the letter with a prayer for endurance. He prays that God will grow the Thessalonians capacity to love, strengthen their commitment to holiness, and fix their hope on the return of Jesus Christ (3:12-13).

1 Thessalonians 3:3-4 (King James Version)

³That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto. ⁴For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know.

Main Takeaway:

Faithfulness is strengthened when we view suffering as part of God's redemptive plan and not a contradiction to it.

Reflection Questions:

1. The church waited expectantly for Christ's return. How does an awareness of Jesus' return shape your daily decisions?
2. Trials shook the Thessalonians, but Paul reframed them as part of God's plan (3:3). How have trials refined your faith instead of weakening it?

Lesson 2

Holiness, Hope, and the Coming of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4–5)

A. Sanctification and Holiness (4:1–8)

- Starting with chapter 4 Paul switches focus and provides guidance for living while waiting on the coming of the Lord.
- Paul challenges the Thessalonians to live a life that is consistent with the teachings they have received on how they should live in order to please God (4:1-2).
- Paul highlights that they should have a serious commitment to holiness (sanctification) and sexual purity.

1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 (New International Version)

³ It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; ⁴ that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, ⁵ not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God

1 Peter 1:15-16 (King James Version)

¹⁵ But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; ¹⁶ Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.

B. Brotherly Love and Daily Faithfulness (4:9–12)

- Following Christ also means making a commitment to love and serve others
- Paul acknowledges that the Thessalonians are already showing love to the brethren in Macedonia but he encourages them to let their love increase more and more (4:9-10)
- Paul also instructs them to live quietly, mind their business, and work with their own hands (4:11).

1 Thessalonians 4:9-10 (New International Version)

⁹ Now about your love for one another we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. ¹⁰ And in fact, you do love all of God's family throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more,

1 Thessalonians 4:11 (New International Version)

¹¹ and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you,

C. Hope for the Dead in Christ (4:13–18)

- After reminding the Thessalonians about the importance of sanctification Paul begins to address questions they raised about the future hope of Jesus' return.
- Paul encourages them to grieve differently over the believers who have "fallen asleep" in the Lord because we have hope in the resurrection power of Jesus Christ (4:13-14).
- Paul describes the order of events that will take place when Christ shall return and he lets them know that those who remain until the return of Jesus Christ shall not go before those that are asleep (4:15-17).

Steps	Reference
1. The Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trump of God	4:16
2. The dead in Christ shall rise first.	4:16
3. Those who are alive and remain will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air.	4:17

Although these steps are listed separately, they will happen quickly, almost simultaneously.

1 Thessalonians 4:14-17 (New International Version)

¹⁴ For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. ¹⁵ According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

1 Corinthians 15:51-54 (King James Version)

⁵¹ Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵² In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. ⁵³ For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. ⁵⁴ So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

D. The Day of the Lord and Final Instructions (5:1–28)

- Paul reminds the Thessalonians that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. (5:2)
- Christ's return will be sudden, unexpected, and unannounced, catching an unprepared world by surprise.

1 Thessalonians 5:2 (King James Version)

² For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.

2 Peter 3:10 (King James Version)

¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

- Paul admonishes them that as believers they should stay awake and be sober so that the coming of the Lord won't take them by surprise (5:3-8).
- Paul closes out the letter with final instructions on daily living emphasizing that living ready for Christ's return is not about watching the sky but being focused on daily living (5:12-22).

Instruction	Reference	Application
Know them which labor among you	5: 12	Respect and value your spiritual leaders
Esteem those which labor among you highly in love for their works sake	5:13	Honor your spiritual leaders in love, not out of formality.
Be at peace among yourselves	5:13	Unity is part of spiritual maturity.
Warn them that are unruly	5:14	Lovingly help those not walking in purpose or discipline.
Comfort the fainthearted	5:14	Lift up the weak, discouraged, or wounded.
Support the weak	5:14	Provide spiritual, emotional, or material support.
Be patient toward all men	5:14	Require and extend grace
Don't pay back wrong for wrong	5:15	Don't seek revenge
Strive to do what is good	5:15	Seek to do good for the church and the broader community.
Rejoice always	5:16	Joy is a fruit of the spirit and a discipline to practice. Joy is rooted in Christ, not circumstances.
Pray continually	5:17	Stay in ongoing communication with God.
Give thanks in all circumstances	5:18	A thankful heart keeps you aligned with God's perspective.
Do not quench the spirit	5:19	Stay open, sensitive, and responsive to the movement of the Holy Spirit.
Do not treat prophesies with contempt	5:20	Honor the ways God speaks (Scripture, preaching, wise counsel, or Spirit-filled encouragement).
Prove all things	5:21	Use discernment: test everything against scripture
Hold fast to what is good	5:21	Grab hold to what aligns with God's truth.
Abstain from even the appearance of evil	5:22	If something pulls you from God's presence, purpose, or purity, walk away from it.

Main Takeaway:

Live Holy, not out of fear bur out of expectation.

Reflection Questions:

1. Paul says sanctification is God's will for every believer. How does holiness prepare the heart for Christ's return?
2. "The Day of the Lord will come like a thief." How should this shape our priorities and values?
3. Which of Paul's instructions in 5:12–28 most challenges you? What might obedience look like in that area?

Lesson 3

Standing Firm Against Deception (2 Thessalonians 1–3)

Paul sent the second letter to the Thessalonians shortly after the first because some members of the congregation did not have a clear understanding concerning the teaching on the “Day of the Lord” that was shared in his first epistle. In addition, the Thessalonians were apprehensive about the persistent persecution that they were enduring. Paul wrote this letter to comfort and exhort the believers to continue serving the Lord in spite of the hardships.

A. God’s Justice for the Afflicted (1:1-12)

- Paul opens this second letter to the Thessalonians by celebrating their growing faith and increasing love not just for God but for each other (1:3-4).
- Suffering because you are associated with Jesus is actually a way to be counted worthy of the Kingdom of God (1:4-5)
- Paul reminds the Thessalonians that God will repay affliction to those who afflict His people (1:6–8).
- Paul emphasizes that the fate of those that don’t know God and who don’t obey the gospel is punishment with everlasting destruction (1:8-9).
- Paul closes this portion of the letter with a prayer that the lives of the Thessalonians would bring honor to the name of Jesus (1:11-12).

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12 (New International Version)

¹¹ With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness and your every deed prompted by faith. ¹² We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.^[a]

B. The Coming of the Lawless One and Standing Firm (2:1–17)

- Next, Paul addresses false teaching claiming the Day of the Lord already came.
- The church was concerned because false teachers, fake letters from Paul, and false prophetic claims told them they had missed the return of Jesus Christ (2:2).
- Paul emphasizes that two things must happen before Jesus returns (2:3-4).
 - There must be a rebellion
 - There will be a falling away from the truth and a rebellion against God.
 - The man of lawlessness is revealed
 - A future leader marked by deception, arrogance, and opposition to God.
 - The man of lawlessness is not named, only described in character and behavior.
- Paul reminds the Thessalonians that they know what is withholding the evil. However, the mystery of lawlessness is already at work (2:6-7).
 - Evil is already active in the world.
 - Deception is already spreading.
 - People are already turning away from the truth.
- The man of lawlessness will appear powerful, perform false miracles, influence through the imitation of the divine, and deceive those who reject the truth. Not everything supernatural is from God. Discernment is crucial (2:9-10).

- Those who continue to reject the truth will eventually lose the ability to perceive truth (2:11).

C. Encouragement to Stand Firm in Faith (2:13-17)

- Paul shifts from warning to reassurance.
- He reminds the Thessalonians that they are loved by God and chosen. They are also called to participate in Christ's glory (2:13-14)
- Paul encourages the Thessalonians to stand firm and hold onto the teachings that they have received. The truth of God should be their anchor (2:15)

Main Takeaway

Demonic deception increases before the Lord returns, but Christ's victory and truth remain unshakable.

Reflection Question:

How can believers today "stand firm" in truth amid misinformation and spiritual deception?

D. A Warning Against Idleness and Perseverance in Doing Good (3:6–15)

1. Paul admonishes the Thessalonians to separate themselves from those that do not follow the teachings they have received (3:6)
 - Some in the Thessalonian church had stopped working because they expected Jesus to return at any moment. The idleness or disorderly conduct Paul refers to here is about willful irresponsibility. Paul warns against empowering disruptive behavior.
2. Paul reminds the Thessalonians of the example he set when he was with them. He didn't ask for their support, but he worked a manual job to provide for himself (3:7-8). Ministry never excuses irresponsibility.
3. Some among the Thessalonians were living idle lives, not working, but choosing to be busybodies (3:10-11)
 - A busybody is meddlesome, nosy person who interferes with the private affairs of others often giving unwarranted advice or asking prying questions.
- Paul closes the epistle with encouragement for the Thessalonians' to not grow weary with doing good (3:13).
 - Don't let the actions of others influence you. Your obedience is to God, not people.

2 Thessalonians 3:13 (New Living Translation)

¹³ As for the rest of you, dear brothers and sisters, never get tired of doing good.

Galatians 6:9 (New Living Translation)

⁹ So let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up.

Main Takeaway:

Hope produces diligence, discipline, and steady purpose as we await the returning King.

Reflection Question:

How can Christians today avoid either extreme over-fixation on end-times or total neglect of end-times?

How has studying 1 and 2 Thessalonians over the past few weeks challenged you to take a more active and intentional approach to your faith? List the three most important lessons you've taken away from this study.

- 1. _____

- 2. _____

- 3. _____

