

The Book Of First Thessalonians

Paul Teaches About

The Second Coming

Of Christ

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1 Thessalonians

OVERVIEW:

As with every member of the human family, first-century Christians came face to face with their mortality. Many of them met early deaths at the hands of those who hated Christ and all allied with him. Whether at the hands of zealous Jews (like Paul before his conversion), angry Greeks, or ruthless Roman authorities, persecution included stonings, beatings, crucifixions, torture, and death. To be a follower of Christ meant to give up everything.

Paul established the church in Thessalonica during his second missionary journey (in about A.D. 51). He wrote this letter a short time later to encourage the young believers there. He wanted to assure them of his love, to praise them for their faithfulness during persecution, and to remind them of their hope—the sure return of their Lord and Savior.

Paul begins this letter with a note of affirmation, thanking God for the strong faith and good reputation of the Thessalonians (1 Thes. 1:1-10). Then Paul reviews their relationship—how he and his companions brought the gospel to them (1 Thes. 2:1-12), how they accepted the message (1 Thes. 2:13-16), and how he longed to be with them again (1 Thes. 2:17-20). Because of his concern, Paul sent Timothy to encourage them in their faith (1 Thes. 3:1-13).

Paul then presents the core of his message—exhortation and comfort. He challenges them to please God in their daily living by avoiding sexual immorality (1 Thes. 4:1-8), loving each other (1 Thes. 4:9-10), and living as good citizens in a sinful world (1 Thes. 4:11-12).

Paul comforts the Thessalonians by reminding them of the hope of the resurrection (1 Thes. 4:13-18). Then he warns them to be prepared at all times, for Jesus Christ could return at any moment. When Christ returns, those Christians who are alive and those who have died will be raised to new life (1 Thes. 5:1-11).

Paul then gives the Thessalonians a handful of reminders on how to prepare themselves for the second coming—warn the idle (1 Thes. 5:14), encourage the timid (1 Thes. 5:14), help the weak (1 Thes. 5:14), be patient with everyone (1 Thes. 5:14), be kind to everyone (1 Thes. 5:15), be joyful always (1 Thes. 5:16), pray continually (1 Thes. 5:17), give thanks (1 Thes. 5:18), test everything that is taught (1 Thes. 5:20-21), and avoid evil (1 Thes. 5:22). Paul concludes his letter with two benedictions and a request for prayer.

As you read this letter, listen carefully to Paul's practical advice for Christian living. And when burdened by grief and overwhelmed by sorrow, take hope in the reality of Christ's return, the resurrection, and eternal life!

THE BLUEPRINT

Paul and his companions were faithful to bring the gospel to the Thessalonians in the midst of persecution. The Thessalonians had only recently become Christians, and yet they had remained faithful to the Lord, despite the fact that the apostles were not with them. Others have been faithful in bringing God's Word to us. We must remain faithful and live in the expectation that Christ will return at any time.

1. Faithfulness to the Lord (1 Thes. 1:1-3:13)

This letter is from Paul, Silas, and Timothy.

It is written to the church in Thessalonica, you who belong to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

May his grace and peace be yours.

[2] We always thank God for all of you and pray for you constantly. [3] As we talk to our God and Father about you, we think of your faithful work, your loving deeds, and your continual anticipation of the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[4] We know that God loves you, dear brothers and sisters, and that he chose you to be his own people. [5] For when we brought you the Good News, it was not only with words but also with power, for the Holy Spirit gave you full assurance that what we said was true. And you know that the way we lived among you was further proof of the truth of our message.

[6] So you received the message with joy from the Holy Spirit in spite of the severe suffering it brought you. In this way, you imitated both us and the Lord. [7] As a result, you yourselves became an example to all the Christians in Greece. [8] And now the word of the Lord is ringing out from you to people everywhere, even beyond Greece, for wherever we go we find people telling us about your faith in God. We don't need to tell them about it, [9] for they themselves keep talking about the wonderful welcome you gave us and how you turned away from idols to serve the true and living God. [10] And they speak of how you are looking forward to the coming of God's Son from heaven—Jesus, whom God raised from the dead. He is the one who has rescued us from the terrors of the coming judgment.

[2:1] You yourselves know, dear brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not a failure. [2] You know how badly we had been treated at Philippi just before we came to you and how much we suffered there. Yet our God gave us the courage to declare his Good News to you boldly, even though we were surrounded by many who opposed us. [3] So you can see that we were not preaching with any deceit or impure purposes or trickery.

[4] For we speak as messengers who have been approved by God to be entrusted with the Good News. Our purpose is to please God, not people. He is the one who examines the motives of our hearts. [5] Never once did we try to win you with flattery, as you very well know. And God is our witness that we were not just pretending to be your friends so you would give us money! [6] As for praise, we have never asked for it from you or anyone else. [7] As apostles of Christ we certainly had a right to make some demands of you, but we were as gentle among you as a mother feeding and caring for her own children. [8] We loved you so much that we gave you not only God's Good News but our own lives, too.

[9] Don't you remember, dear brothers and sisters, how hard we worked among you? Night and day we toiled to earn a living so that our expenses would not be a burden to anyone there as we preached God's Good News among you. [10] You yourselves are our witnesses—and so is God—that we were pure and honest and faultless toward all of you believers. [11] And you know that we treated each of you as a father treats his own children. [12] We pleaded with you, encouraged you, and urged you to live your lives in a way that God would consider worthy. For he called you into his Kingdom to share his glory.

[13] And we will never stop thanking God that when we preached his message to you, you didn't think of the words we spoke as being just our own. You accepted what we said as the very word of God—which, of course, it was. And this word continues to work in you who believe.

[14] And then, dear brothers and sisters, you suffered persecution from your own countrymen. In this way, you imitated the believers in God's churches in Judea who, because of their belief in Christ Jesus, suffered from their own people, the Jews.

[15] For some of the Jews had killed their own prophets, and some even killed the Lord Jesus. Now they have persecuted us and driven us out. They displease God and oppose everyone [16] by trying to keep us from preaching the Good News to the Gentiles, for fear some might be saved. By doing this, they continue to pile up their sins. But the anger of God has caught up with them at last.

[17] Dear brothers and sisters, after we were separated from you for a little while (though our hearts never left you), we tried very hard to come back because of our intense longing to see you again. [18] We wanted very much to come, and I, Paul,

tried again and again, but Satan prevented us. [19] After all, what gives us hope and joy, and what is our proud reward and crown? It is you! Yes, you will bring us much joy as we stand together before our Lord Jesus when he comes back again. [20] For you are our pride and joy.

[3:1] Finally, when we could stand it no longer, we decided that I should stay alone in Athens, [2] and we sent Timothy to visit you. He is our co-worker for God and our brother in proclaiming the Good News of Christ. We sent him to strengthen you, to encourage you in your faith, [3] and to keep you from becoming disturbed by the troubles you were going through. But, of course, you know that such troubles are going to happen to us Christians. [4] Even while we were with you, we warned you that troubles would soon come—and they did, as you well know.

[5] That is why, when I could bear it no longer, I sent Timothy to find out whether your faith was still strong. I was afraid that the Tempter had gotten the best of you and that all our work had been useless. [6] Now Timothy has just returned, bringing the good news that your faith and love are as strong as ever. He reports that you remember our visit with joy and that you want to see us just as much as we want to see you. [7] So we have been greatly comforted, dear brothers and sisters, in all of our own crushing troubles and suffering, because you have remained strong in your faith. [8] It gives us new life, knowing you remain strong in the Lord.

[9] How we thank God for you! Because of you we have great joy in the presence of God. [10] Night and day we pray earnestly for you, asking God to let us see you again to fill up anything that may still be missing in your faith.

[11] May God himself, our Father, and our Lord Jesus make it possible for us to come to you very soon. [12] And may the Lord make your love grow and overflow to each other and to everyone else, just as our love overflows toward you. [13] As a result, Christ will make your hearts strong, blameless, and holy when you stand before God our Father on that day when our Lord Jesus comes with all those who belong to him.

2. Watchfulness for the Lord (1 Thes. 4:1-5:28)

Finally, dear brothers and sisters, we urge you in the name of the Lord Jesus to live in a way that pleases God, as we have taught you. You are doing this already, and we encourage you to do so more and more. [2] For you remember what we taught you in the name of the Lord Jesus. [3] God wants you to be holy, so you should keep clear of all sexual sin. [4] Then each of you will control your body and live in holiness and honor— [5] not in lustful passion as the pagans do, in their ignorance of God and his ways.

[6] Never cheat a Christian brother in this matter by taking his wife, for the Lord avenges all such sins, as we have solemnly warned you before. [7] God has called us to be holy, not to live impure lives. [8] Anyone who refuses to live by these rules is not disobeying human rules but is rejecting God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

[9] But I don't need to write to you about the Christian love that should be shown among God's people. For God himself has taught you to love one another. [10] Indeed, your love is already strong toward all the Christians in all of Macedonia. Even so, dear brothers and sisters, we beg you to love them more and more. [11] This should be your ambition: to live a quiet life, minding your own business and working with your hands, just as we commanded you before. [12] As a result, people who are not Christians will respect the way you live, and you will not need to depend on others to meet your financial needs.

[13] And now, brothers and sisters, I want you to know what will happen to the Christians who have died so you will not be full of sorrow like people who have no hope. [14] For since we believe that Jesus died and was raised to life again, we also believe that when Jesus comes, God will bring back with Jesus all the Christians who have died.

[15] I can tell you this directly from the Lord: We who are still living when the Lord returns will not rise to meet him ahead of those who are in their graves. [16] For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the call of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, all the Christians who have died will rise from their graves. [17] Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and remain with him forever. [18] So comfort and encourage each other with these words.

[5:1] I really don't need to write to you about how and when all this will happen, dear brothers and sisters. [2] For you know quite well that the day of the Lord will come unexpectedly, like a thief in the night. [3] When people are saying, "All is well; everything is peaceful and secure," then disaster will fall upon them as suddenly as a woman's birth pains begin when her child is about to be born. And there will be no escape.

[4] But you aren't in the dark about these things, dear brothers and sisters, and you won't be surprised when the day of the Lord comes like a thief. [5] For you are all children of the light and of the day; we don't belong to darkness and night. [6] So be on your guard, not asleep like the others. Stay alert and be sober. [7] Night is the time for sleep and the time when people get drunk. [8] But let us who live in the light think clearly, protected by the body armor of faith and love, and wearing as our helmet the confidence of our salvation. [9] For God decided to save us through our Lord Jesus Christ, not to pour out his anger on us. [10] He died for us so that we can live with him forever, whether we are dead or alive at the time of his return. [11] So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.

[12] Dear brothers and sisters, honor those who are your leaders in the Lord's work. They work hard among you and warn you against all that is wrong. [13] Think highly of them and give them your wholehearted love because of their work. And remember to live peaceably with each other.

[14] Brothers and sisters, we urge you to warn those who are lazy. Encourage those who are timid. Take tender care of those who are weak. Be patient with everyone.

[15] See that no one pays back evil for evil, but always try to do good to each other and to everyone else.

[16] Always be joyful. [17] Keep on praying. [18] No matter what happens, always be thankful, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.

[19] Do not stifle the Holy Spirit. [20] Do not scoff at prophecies, [21] but test everything that is said. Hold on to what is good. [22] Keep away from every kind of evil.

[23] Now may the God of peace make you holy in every way, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until that day when our Lord Jesus Christ comes again. [24] God, who calls you, is faithful; he will do this.

[25] Dear brothers and sisters, pray for us.

[26] Greet all the brothers and sisters in Christian love.

[27] I command you in the name of the Lord to read this letter to all the brothers and sisters.

[28] And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you.

MEGATHEMES

THEME: Persecution

EXPLANATION:

Paul and the new Christians at Thessalonica experienced persecution because of their faith in Christ. We can expect trials and troubles as well. We need to stand firm in our faith in the midst of trials, being strengthened by the Holy Spirit.

IMPORTANCE:

The Holy Spirit helps us to remain strong in faith, able to show genuine love to others and maintain our moral character even when we are being persecuted, slandered, or oppressed.

THEME: Paul's ministry

EXPLANATION:

Paul expressed his concern for this church even while he was being slandered. Paul's commitment to share the gospel in spite of difficult circumstances is a model we should follow.

IMPORTANCE:

Paul not only delivered his message, but gave of himself. In our ministries, we must become like Paul—faithful and bold, yet sensitive and self-sacrificing.

THEME: Hope

EXPLANATION:

One day all believers, both those who are alive and those who have died, will be united with Christ. To those Christians who die before Christ's return, there is hope—the hope of the resurrection of the body.

IMPORTANCE:

If we believe in Christ, we will live with him forever. All those who belong to Jesus Christ—from throughout history—will be present with him at his second coming. We can be confident that we will be with loved ones who have trusted in Christ.

THEME: Being prepared

EXPLANATION:

No one knows the time of Christ's return. We are to live moral and holy lives, ever watchful for his coming. Believers must not neglect daily responsibilities, but always work and live to please the Lord.

IMPORTANCE:

The gospel is not only what we believe, but also what we must live. The Holy Spirit leads us in faithfulness, so we can avoid lust and fraud. Live as though you expect Christ's return at any time. Don't be caught unprepared.

An invitation is given to open your heart's door.

Rev. 3:20

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

To ask Jesus to come into your heart please pray this Prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, I believe you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I ask you to forgive me of my sins and coming into my heart. I accept you as savior and will follow you as Lord. Amen.

References:

Holy Bible: King James Translation

Holy Bible: Living Bible Translation

Additional comments and charts are taken from: *Life Application Study Bible*. Illinois: Tyndale House 2007. Print