



1 THESSALONIANS

Gosford
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Church

First Thessalonians

Today Salonica or Thessalonica or Thessaloniki is the second most important city in Greece. Thessalonica was quite a city in Paul's day too. In Acts chapter 17, Luke records how the gospel came to Thessalonica and other towns in Macedonia. Paul, accompanied by Silas, Timothy, and Luke, had just sailed across northern Aegean to Europe, and concluded a successful mission in Philippi. Luke remained there, but Paul, Silas, and perhaps Timothy went on to Thessalonica to preach, and saw a good response to the gospel there.



The port and part of the city centre today
Source: Wikipedia

When opposition arose, Paul and Silas fled to Berea, where they continued to preach the good news until Paul was forced to move on again, heading south. Silas and Timothy rejoined him in Athens. Concerned about the situation in Macedonia, Paul sent Timothy north to find out how the newly established church was faring. When Timothy returned, he caught up with Paul again in Corinth, and so it is from Corinth that Paul wrote this first letter to the Thessalonian church, on the basis of Timothy's report.

Timothy had apparently told Paul some very encouraging things about what he found in Thessalonica, especially how firmly the new church was standing in the Lord (1 Thess 3:6-8). However, we can perhaps read between the lines that Timothy also reported that Paul was being accused of being self-serving (1 Thess 2:2-6), and maybe even being criticised for not returning sooner, as Paul spends some time defending his conduct and protesting his deep care for the congregation (1 Thess 2:17 – 3:5).

The letter falls into two distinct but related halves. Paul uses the first half of his letter to reflect on the narrative of his relationship with the Thessalonians, praising their faith and love and their steadfastness under persecution, and explaining himself and his fellow missionaries (chapters 1 – 3). The second half of the letter is given to exhortations to continue in the Christian life, with some specific explanations of what this involves (chapters 4 – 5).

As we approach this letter, we need to be asking ourselves how this all applies to us today. While Paul was writing to a specific congregation at a particular time, in this letter we see a picture of a congregation soon after it was established. From this picture and from Paul's instructions we can draw timeless lessons that apply to all Christians in any age, as Paul shows us how Christ's church is formed by the gospel, shaped by the gospel, and called, both as individuals and collectively, to live a life worthy of the gospel.



Studies written by Rosemary Williamson, with study 2 by John Oakley.

Study 1

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 “You turned to God from idols”

Paul is writing to people who only recently heard the gospel. The whole congregation is composed of individuals and families who had just turned to Jesus a few months ago, some converting from Judaism and some converting from paganism. They were being persecuted, too. As John Stott says, ‘You would expect it to be a very wobbly church in a very precarious condition,’¹ but the surprising thing is that they were not.

Read **1 Thessalonians chapter 1**, and think about the tone of this chapter.

1. On the whole, does Paul sound positive or negative here? After reading this first part of the letter, how close do you think Paul is emotionally to the congregation he is writing to?

Go back and reread **1 Thessalonians 1:1-4**.

In verse 3, notice the three things Paul remembers about them when he prays for the Thessalonians: their faith, hope, and love (verse 3). We will see this triplet of faith, hope, and love frequently in this letter.

2. In verse 3

What does their **faith** result in? _____

What does their **love** result in? _____

What does their **hope** result in? _____

Start at verse 4 again, and read **1 Thessalonians 1:4-10**.

¹ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Thessalonians The Bible Speaks Today series* (IVP, 1991), p. 27.

Sometimes we worry about our friends and relations, or even perhaps about ourselves, as to whether they and we are really saved or not. By contrast, Paul doesn't seem to have any lack of confidence in his friends at Thessalonica. Notice that the Holy Spirit (verse 5) was at work in the men who preached the good news, and also at work in the hearts of those who heard the good news.

3. What happened to the hearers when the message of the good news came to them **with power**? What were some of the things that Paul recounts as evidence that the Thessalonians really had experienced true conversion? Verses 6-8
4. What was one of the disagreeable things that happened when they became imitators of Paul and his friends? verse 6 (see also 1 Thess 2:14-15a)

People 'everywhere' (verse 8) are talking about the Thessalonians believers. In particular, when the Macedonians and Achaians talk about them, they talk about how they are living out the Christian life. Let us consider the words that they use to describe what the Thessalonians do: they **turn**, **serve**, and **wait**.

5. What did the Thessalonians have to **turn** away from, in order to embrace the gospel of Jesus? (Verse 9) What did *you* have to turn away from, in order to follow Jesus?
6. Who do the Thessalonians **serve** now? (Verse 9) And this implies that they served who or what before they were converted?

7. *Why* are they **waiting** for God's Son from heaven? Verse 10
8. How would you know whether someone was **waiting** for God's Son from heaven? If we want to copy the Thessalonians here, what do you think it means for us to wait for God's Son from heaven?

Pulling it together

9. From this chapter, what do you think Paul's main motivation for preaching the gospel was?
10. Imitation and modelling are a theme which recurs throughout the letter. Who are you a model for? Is there anyone you are consciously imitating? When is it wise and when is it unwise to imitate other believers?

Living it out

The exalted status of believers: Paul says some remarkable things about the congregation in Thessalonica. He doesn't say they are in Thessalonica. Rather, he says the Thessalonian believers are ***in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*** (verse 1). He goes on to say that he is absolutely sure that they are *loved by God*, and that they have been *chosen by God* (verse 4).

11. How might it change how we relate to each other as believers if we were more conscious of this extraordinary status we have been given by God?

12. Many who have been Christians for a long time feel they are not experiencing the joy given by the Holy Spirit. Why do you think that is, and what can we do about it?

Concluding remarks

Paul is tremendously thankful for what God has done in the lives of his friends in Thessalonica. In this first chapter we have seen how the gospel totally transformed the Thessalonian believers. Their lives were realigned to a new way of seeing the world, dominated by their faith, hope, and love. May the gospel similarly transform us!

Key verse:

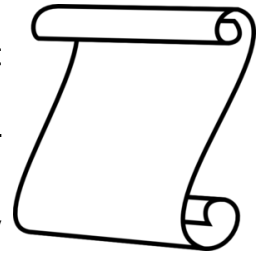
We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Thess 1:3

Prayer

- Pray for link missionaries Rick and Tracey Rempel, serving with MAF in Canada.
- Pray for SRE classes in Wyoming and Valley View Public Schools.

Notes on 1 Thess 1:1-10

Verse 1 In the ancient Mediterranean world, letters would begin with the writer's name, followed by the addressee. While it says all three men, *Paul, Silas, and Timothy* wrote the letter, actually it may just have been Paul, writing on behalf of the other two men as well who had been in the mission team which evangelised Thessalonica in the first place. We can be pretty confident Paul wouldn't have joined Timothy and Silas' names with his unless they were substantially in agreement with him. From this point on, we can say 'Paul says' or 'Paul writes', and so on, instead of the more cumbersome 'Paul, Silas, and Timothy' every time.



Silas was a trusted Christian leader. When the Council of Jerusalem sent their letter to the wider church about the decisions they had made, Silas was one of the people they sent with Paul to confirm that the letter was genuine (Acts 15:22). Soon afterwards Paul chose him to accompany him on his second missionary journey (Acts 15:39-30). He suffered beating and imprisonment with Paul in Philippi (Acts 16:16-40), and was involved with Paul in the initial evangelisation of Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-4). Silas and Timothy remained behind in Berea when Paul needed to leave Berea quickly. Paul left word that he was going to wait for them in Athens (Acts 17:13-15). We do not hear any more of Silas accompanying Paul after the mission in Corinth, but Peter refers to him as a faithful colleague who was helping him (1 Peter 5:12). In Paul's letters, Paul always refers to him as Silvanus, a Roman form of the Jewish name Silas. Luke always calls him Silas.

Timothy was a younger colleague of Paul's, whom Paul regarded highly (1 Thess 3:6). He is not part of the account of the evangelisation of Thessalonica given in Acts 17:1-10, so perhaps he had been left behind in the previous town Philippi to consolidate the work there, and only joined Paul and Silas in Thessalonica later. He reappears in the narrative of Acts at the next town, Berea, where he is left with Silas, presumably to consolidate the work when Paul had to leave (Acts 17:13-15). See map near the start of Study 3 on 1 Thess 2:17 – 3:13.

Verse 2 Most of Paul's letters begin with a thanksgiving after the opening salutation, as indeed do other Hellenistic (=Greek culture) letters from that time.

Verse 3 Faith produces *work*, but love enables us to *labour* (=toilsome work which requires real effort) when the going gets tough.

The triplet of faith, hope, and love which occurs in this verse is one of the bits of glue which glues this letter together. You may find it a good exercise for you to go through the book of First Thessalonians by yourself and find all the places where Paul talks about faith, hope, and love together, or where he alludes to them.

Verse 4 Paul says the gospel came *not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction*.

This could either mean that the Paul's preaching had power, the Holy Spirit was working through him, and he was deeply convinced of the truth of what he was

saying, or it could mean that the Thessalonians' response demonstrated that the Holy Spirit was working powerfully and convicting the hearers and convincing them of its truth. Personally, I have always thought it was the second.

Paul says the gospel came to the Thessalonians not simply with words, but also with *power*. We tend to notice the power Paul talks about, but let's not forget that he affirms that the message of the gospel comes with words! The need for clear, faithful preaching of the good news continues. The words are important. People cannot believe the message if they do not hear the message. At the same time, it is not up to us to convert people. We are dependent on the Holy Spirit and his power to convict hearers and to apply the word to their lives.

As far as power is concerned, some people see this as saying that Paul and his co-workers performed miracles among them. They may well have, but I don't think that is what these verses are saying. I think the power refers to the response in the hearers.

Are they three separate things, (1) power (2) the Holy Spirit and (3) deep conviction, or what? Personally I do not take them as three separate things. I interpret the phrases '*with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction*' to be elaborating what it means for the gospel to come to people with power. Evidence for this is what happens after they receive the gospel. The verses which follow say the Thessalonians go on to be exemplary in conduct and bold in their witness, despite persecution. To me that sounds like the result of power of the Holy Spirit at work, giving them conviction!

Verse 6 *You became imitators of us and of the Lord*—Imitation is one of the themes of this letter. See 1 Thess 2:14 (also 2 Thess 1:7; 2:14 and cf. 2 Thess 1:4).

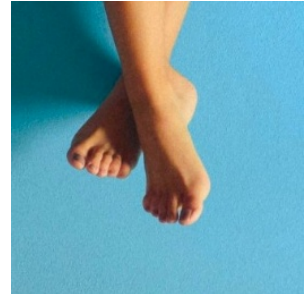
Verse 8 *we do not need to say anything about it*—see note on 1 Thess 4:9

Verse 10 Jews in Paul's time generally believed that there would be an apocalyptic end of the age, with divine judgment. What is different about the gospel Paul preached was the place given to Jesus. Paul preached that Jesus is the Lord who would deliver believers from the coming judgment in the apocalypse [Simpson: 938]. See also 1 Thess 5:9; 2 Thess 2:13.

Study 2

Mission Week: Being Beautiful Feet

Have you ever wondered if your feet could become beautiful? This Bible Study looks at God's mission in the world through the poetic imagery of "beautiful feet", as used in Isaiah 52 and Romans 10.



Read **Genesis 12:1-3**.

God calls Abram (Abraham) to leave his home place, his own people, and go where God leads him.



1. How will he get there?

2. What does God promise him and his descendants?

3. What does he promise to all peoples of the earth through Abram?

4. How did it work out? Were the ancient Israelites (the descendants of Abraham) a blessing to all nations?

Read **Isaiah 52:1-5**

5. What is the situation of Israel that Isaiah is describing here?

Read ***Isaiah 52:6-10***

6. What promise does God make to Israel in these verses?

7. Was verse 10 completely fulfilled in the return of the exiles to Jerusalem, or do you think it points beyond the return of the exiles to something bigger in the future?

Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12 is well known to Christians as the Suffering Servant prophecy, which describes the suffering and death of Christ to bring us salvation.

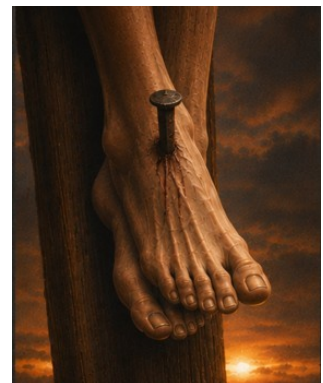
Read ***Isaiah 52:13-15***.

These verses describe Christ being both disfigured and exalted by his suffering on the cross and by this means “sprinkling” (cleansing/purifying) many nations.

8. Compare 52:15 with 52:10. In the light of v15, what do you think v10 is referring to when it says that “all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God”?



9. Who then are those with beautiful feet (52:7)?



Read **Matthew 28:18-20**

(NB: The word for “nations” [ethnos] does not refer to political entities as we use it today, but to ethnic groups. It is often used in the NT to refer to non-Jews, and when used in that sense is often translated as “Gentiles” or “pagans”. But in the phrase “all nations” [panta ta ethne] in verse 19 it is referring to all ethnic groups.)



10. What did Jesus command his disciples to do?

11. The remaining 11 disciples had been specially prepared by Jesus for this task over a 3-year period. Do you think this command of Jesus only applied to them, or also to all followers of Jesus? Why?

12. How can we have confidence to “go and make disciples” despite the indifference and opposition of the world?

Read **Acts 1:1-11**

13. How does Jesus describe the mission of the apostles in v8 once the Holy Spirit comes on them?

14. From your knowledge of the book of Acts, how did the good news of Jesus spread from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, Antioch, Asia Minor (modern-day Türkiye), and to Greece?

15. Since the time of the first apostles how has the good news of Jesus continued to be spread around the world?

16. Can you trace how it came to you and your ethnic group down through the ages? How many “go and make disciples” steps may it have taken for the good news of Jesus to come to you?

17. But is the task over? Has the good news of Jesus been preached to all ethnic groups around the world already? Have a look at this short video, Unreached People Groups, at www.youtube.com/watch?v=HUCxHY0bECc

(If you want to dig into this concept of Unreached People Groups a bit more, watch the first 3 minutes 32 seconds of the video Reaching the Unreached at <https://pioneers.org.au/learn/the-unreached/>. I don't recommend watching beyond that point because the video goes on to be even more statistically nerdy and its perspective narrows.) Scan the codes to access the videos.



18. Do we really need to take the Gospel to all ethnic groups? See Matthew 24:14.

In Romans chapters 9-11, Paul explains his concern for the Jews to be saved. But he makes it clear that Jews and all other ethnic groups can only be saved through calling on the name of Jesus in faith.

Read ***Romans 10:9-15***.

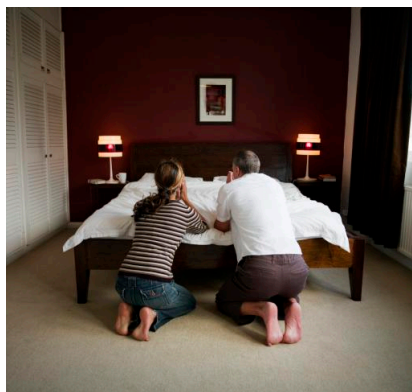
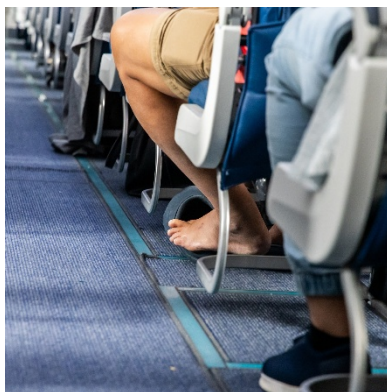
19. What does Paul say needs to be done?

20. How can we have the “beautiful feet” that Paul describes here, both individually and as a Church? See: Matthew 28:19, Romans 10:14-15, Romans 15:20-21*, Philippians 1:5, Colossians 1:6-7, 4:12-13

*Note that Paul here quotes Isaiah 52:15 which we looked at in Q8.

Key verse:

And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” Romans 10:15



Prayer

- 'Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” Matthew 9:37-38. Please pray that our church will again raise and send missionaries to work in the Lord’s harvest field.
- Pray for SRE classes in Narara and Niagara Park Primary Schools.

Study 3

1 Thessalonians 2:1-16 “We are not trying to please people, but God”

Having explained why he is so thankful to God for the Thessalonians, in the second chapter Paul goes on to recount what it was like when he and his co-workers were at Thessalonica, and in chapter 3 we will hear find out how he responds to the report he hears about them. From his account we can gain some insight as to how pastoral care and mission should be conducted.

1. What excuses do we sometimes make for not telling our friends the gospel?

Read **1 Thessalonians 2:1-12**.

2. Paul and his co-workers had just undergone suffering and insult in Philippi before they arrived in Thessalonica. And in Thessalonica, Paul also faced some serious opposition. What made Paul continue to preach boldly? What motivates him? verses 2, 4, and 8
3. Using verses 1-12, think about what Paul says here about his aim, his method of ministry, and his whole approach to life and service, and list things you notice.

What Paul was not	What Paul was

4. Paul claims that he and his co-workers were holy, righteous, and blameless when they were in Thessalonica (verse 10). If this is the standard for evangelists, how on earth can the rest of us normal people engage in evangelism?
5. Explore the pictures Paul uses to describe the pastoral approach of the mission team (verses 7-8, 11-12). What can we learn here about how to care for our friends, family, or others in our care?

Read **1 Thessalonians 2:13-16**.

6. Many people hear the gospel without being converted. How were the Thessalonians converted? (verses 13-14) What can we learn here about conversion in general? verses 13-14
7. Why has the the wrath of God come? On whom? And what does it look like? verse 16 (see Rom 1:18-32)

Pulling it together

8. Thinking about the whole passage 1 Thess 2:1-16, what motivates Paul?

9. According to this whole passage, what pleases God, and what displeases God?

10. How should we feel towards those on whom the wrath of God has come? What might this prompt us to do towards them? (1 Thess 2:2-12 and Rom 12:17-21)

Key verse:

We speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts. 1 Thess 2:4

Prayer

- Pray for Cathryn Chawla, serving with Mark Drama Australia.
- Pray for SRE classes in Lisarow Public School.

Notes on 1 Thess 2:1-16

Key points:

Paul models to the Thessalonians what they should be like, and we see in him a model for ourselves as well, in two particular areas:

A. Paul always speaks as someone who has been appointed a guardian of the Word of God. While we are not apostles like Paul, neither were the Thessalonians, and yet Paul is trying to pass on to them the same attitudes. If we see ourselves as having been made trustees of the gospel, we will be challenged by Paul's words and example to take it as seriously as Paul does; that is, we will safeguard it, study it, apply it, and obey it.

B. Paul expresses his deep love and commitment to the Thessalonians, treating them like his own children, and pouring out his life on them. He is always thinking of their best interests, and this affects how he lives his daily life in front of them. He shows us how deeply we should love those around us and be deeply concerned for their growth in godliness. Like Paul, we should be modelling Christ to those who are watching us. Why? Because we are trying to please God.

2:4 *we are not trying to please men but God* Cf. 1 Thess 4:1

2:6 *We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else--* Some commentators maintain that in 1 Thess 2:1-12 Paul is defending his ministry against accusations from the Jews in Thessalonica that he was doing something shifty. A variation of this is the view that he is answering charges that he and his companions were hypocrites, whose motivation for preaching was not love of God or the Thessalonians but rather a desire to gain money. Another view is that the Thessalonian believers themselves were unhappy that they were undergoing persecution while Paul had managed to skip off free. According to this view some of the believers were questioning why Paul hadn't returned—had he abandoned them? On the other hand, more recent scholarship, which pays more attention to the forms of rhetoric commonly used in the ancient world, explains this passage as 'an example of a common ancient rhetorical pattern in which the speaker or writer provides an example to be emulated by describing his own behaviour in antithetical terms ('not that, but this') [Simpson p. 936].

Does it matter which view we take? Well, it matters if we want to be clear about what Paul's purpose in writing this section is. Is he primarily trying to defend himself, or is he setting forth a pattern of behaviour to be followed? Saying he is doing both is an attractive solution (but it may be a lazy cop-out, too). Another reason we need to sort out what Paul is doing here is that this passage can sound to our modern ears like Paul thinks he is just the cat's pyjamas, and that feeling can make us dislike him and then not pay good attention to what the Scripture is teaching us.

We definitely know that the mission team faced some real opposition from Jews when they were in Thessalonica. A riot was started, and Paul and his colleagues were accused of treason (Acts 17:5-9 especially verse 7). The Jewish opponents pursued them to Berea as well (Acts 17:13). It is possible that the same people have continued to criticise Paul to the church members in Thessalonica, and the believers may have started to believe the charges against Paul, whatever they were, or they may at least have started to wonder. However, the evidence from 1 Thess 2:14 implies that the persecution they were continuing to experience came from fellow Gentiles, not Jews.

In another letter, Paul says he tries to please everyone in every way (1 Cor 10:33). You might like to think about how we can reconcile this with his claim here in verse 6 that he *doesn't* try to please people.

2:12 *live lives worthy of God*—In 2 Thess 1:5, Paul says the Thessalonians' faith, love, and perseverance under persecution are evidence that they will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God. With this in mind, he prays for them, that they may be counted worthy of their calling (2 Thess 1:11).

2:14 Imitation is one of the themes of this letter. See also 1 Thess 1:6 (also 2 Thess 1:7; 2:14 and cf. 2 Thess 1:4).

2:15 *They displease God*—rather an understatement, as they are militantly opposing God's messengers, including the Messiah Jesus. *They are hostile to all men* in the sense that by opposing the gospel, they are working against men's salvation, as is explained in the next verse.

2:16 '*At last*' = literally, '*finally*', '*completely*', '*at last*', '*to the end*', or '*forever*'. We may be a bit uncomfortable about the level of hostility Paul is expressing here toward the Jews. It is worth noting that in the ancient world, polemics were often strongly worded [Simpson 936]. Don't forget too that in other letters, Paul reserves some of the severest criticism for himself, as having been a persecutor of the church. So just how anti-Semitic was Paul? It is worth remembering that at the time when Paul was writing, it was the Jews who had chased him out of Damascus, Jerusalem, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra (where he was stoned and left for dead), not to mention Thessalonica. When his contemporary Jews reject him and his message, Paul sees this as the Jews confirming that they are guilty for their sin of rejecting the OT prophets (cf. 2 Cor 11:24-25), because they are still rejecting the Lord's messengers. While verses 14-16 seem to reflect a disturbing measure of hostility and anger to the Jewish people, they could instead be read as expressing Paul's extreme grief and frustration over the inevitability of God's punishment on Paul's own people, who are opposing God's amazing work of bringing Gentiles and Jews alike into his kingdom and glory (v. 12). [cf. Paul's anguish for his people in Romans chap 9]. The persecutors are bringing inevitable divine punishment on themselves

They always heap up their sins to the limit—Jesus also saw the Jews' sin as steadily filling up to its full measure (Matt 23:32). They reach the climax of their sins in the rejection of Jesus.

Paul's statements here do not necessarily mean that Paul has no hope for the Jewish people. While he was primarily the apostle to the Gentiles (Rom 1:5, 11:13; Gal 1:15-17, 2:7-8), he saw the evangelisation of the Gentiles as a necessary catalyst to bring in the Jews, so there was a sense in which his ministry to the Gentiles was always for the sake of the Jews (e.g. Rom 11:13-14, 25-26; cf. Rom 10:19).

You may be surprised that Paul speaks of *the wrath of God* as already having *come upon them*. Huh? When Paul says that *the wrath of God has come on them at last/ completely/forever*, he may have in view the wrath that came on the Jewish people at a specific point in the past, such as the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B. C., and/or the Babylonian Exile. Some commentators think that Paul is referring to the terrible famine Judea underwent in 45-47 A. D., or to the massacre of the Jews at the temple during Passover 49 A. D., the same year Emperor Claudius banished the Jews from Rome (Acts 18:2), all of which would have been very recent memories at the time Paul was writing.

It may be that Paul says the wrath of God has come on them already because it is so certain, it is as if it has already happened. Some commentators take the meaning as '*the wrath of God is over their heads*' [e.g. Stott: 57].

In Jewish tradition, the wrath of God was experienced by Israel throughout their Exile [Scott: 801]. In fact, there is a sense in which their Exile has not finished yet, so they are still under the wrath of God. While in one sense the wrath of God has already come on them, the completion of God's wrath is still coming—'*Jesus . . . rescues us from the coming wrath*' (1 Thess 1:10b) which we can see from the context is tied to with the day we are waiting for, when Jesus comes from heaven (1 Thess 1:10a). On *the wrath to come*, see also 1 Thess 5:9.

Study 4

Thessalonians 2:17–3:13 “Now we really live”

To start off...

1. Read **Acts 17:1-9** to review the circumstances of Paul’s departure from the church after he first evangelised them, and reflect on what the aftermath was like for the new believers.



In the first part of 1 Thessalonians chapter 2, Paul discusses the way he and his co-workers conducted their mission while they were present in Thessalonica. Now in the second part of the chapter he moves on to talk about what it was like for him and the others to be absent from the believers in Thessalonica.

Read **1 Thessalonians 2:17 – 3:5**.

Paul expresses fears that the trials that he knew the young Christians at Thessalonica would face after he had gone would unsettle their faith (3:2-5).

1. So what did Paul do to get news from the Thessalonians? (2:17; 3:1-2)

2. What motivates him to get this news? (2:17-20)

3. Notice how highly Paul thinks of Timothy; he calls him *God's co-worker* (see 3:2). He sent Timothy to Thessalonica specifically to strengthen and encourage the new Christians in their faith, so trials wouldn't unsettle them (3:2.) What do you think he did to fulfil this task?

Read **1 Thessalonians 3:6-13**.

4. Paul had been going through *distress and affliction* [ESV verse 7]. When Timothy returns from Thessalonica, what specific things does he report which bring special comfort and joy to Paul? (verses 6-8).

5. Paul still wants to see them—perhaps even more than he did before—and supply what was lacking in their faith (3:10-11). Throughout the letter Paul has been quite complimentary about the Thessalonians faith, hope, and love, so what do you think he thought was *lacking in* [their] *faith*, which he could *supply*? 3:10 [Hint: see verses 11-13!]

6. Presenting the Thessalonians to God at the Second Coming is one of the things Paul is really looking forward to (1 Thess 2:19-20). Who are you so proud of that you are looking forward to presenting them to God on the Last Day?



Living it out

7. How can our church become a place where love will ‘*increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else*’ (3:12)?
8. How can you as an individual help love increase within our congregation or within our Growth Group?
9. How can we as a group help love increase within our congregation or within our Growth Group?

10. What can we learn here from Paul about praying for our children/parents/spouse/loved ones? (1 Thess 3:10-13).

11. Who can you be praying for this week, that God would show you ways to love them more?

Concluding remarks

Paul is always looking forward to the day when Jesus comes again. In fact, he talks about it at the end (or nearly at the end) of every single chapter in this letter. He has set his heart on showing the Thessalonians off! He's already thrilled with the progress that they have made, but he keeps praying for more. The goal of his prayer, and indeed of all his striving, is that the Thessalonians may be found blameless and holy on the day that Jesus returns. An overflow of love (verse 12) is the only route to achieving that level of godliness (verse 13).

Key verse

May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones. 1 Thess 3:13

Prayer

- Pray for Sally Trethewy, working with Scripture Union NSW.
- Pray for SRE classes in Ourimbah Public School.

Notes on 1 Thess 2:17—3:13

2:17 *torn away*—literally, ‘*orphaned*’

Sometimes people think Paul was a harsh man, but notice the many expressions he uses that show us how much Paul loved the people under his care e.g. *our intense longing for you* 2:17; *you are our glory and joy* 2:20; *when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith* 3:5; *night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again* 3:10.

2:18 We don’t know what means Satan used to prevent Paul from going back. Perhaps one of the things was that the city officials had forced some sort of guarantee out of the Thessalonians Christians that he wouldn’t—see Acts 17:9.

2:19 In New Testament times, wreaths of laurel leaves were awarded to winning athletes to wear as crowns.

3:2 It seems like when Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica, which was in Macedonia, he must have sent Silas somewhere else in Macedonia on a similar mission, leaving himself alone in Athens. The Macedonian churches included Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea, and maybe others. Timothy and Silas later caught up with Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:1, 5).

3:3 “If anything can dampen hope, it is the affliction and suffering that beset believers. Paul anticipates this obstacle, reminding believers that afflictions are God’s destined pathway (. . . 1 Thess 3:3) for every believer (1 Thess 3:3-5; cv. Acts 14:22). Relief from afflictions will come only at the revelation of Jesus Christ from heaven (2 Thess 1:7). In the meantime the pressures of life are the means by which believers are “made worthy of the kingdom of God” (2 Thess 1:5, 11)’ [Schreiner: 272-73].

‘Suffering is the inevitable experience of both the preachers and the Christian community (1 Thess 3:3-4)’ [Simpson: 939]. Perhaps the Thessalonians had been surprised by the ferocity of the persecution against them, but Paul says it was only to be expected. See also Rom 8:17-18; 2 Tim 3:12; Mark 10:30; 1 Pet 4:12-13.

3:5 The *tempter* is Satan e.g. 1 Cor 7:5; Matt 4:1-11.

3:6 It seems like Paul started writing this letter to the Thessalonians while he was in Corinth (Acts 18:5) just before or just after Timothy returned from seeing them.

3:9 Cf. 3 John 4

3:10 Even though Paul is already delighted with the way the Thessalonians are continuing in faith, ‘[f]aith is not a static quality’ [Schreiner: 294], so there is always room for improvement.

3:12 Chrysostom said, “Do you see the unchecked madness of love which is indicated by the words?” [cited by Morris, p. 109].

3:13 *when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones*—Who are all these holy ones? Sometimes in Scripture “holy ones” clearly means angels, and sometimes it clearly means believers. The fact that Jesus is coming with *all* his holy ones makes it reasonable to take this verse as saying Jesus will come back accompanied by his angels and departed Christians [as argued by Leon Morris, pp. 111-12].

Study 5

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12 “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified”

Paul has just said that he wants to see the believers in Thessalonica blameless and holy when Jesus returns (1 Thess 3:13). In chapters 4 and 5 he turns to practical ways that this holiness will be reflected in Christians’ daily lives. He addresses three issues which remain very relevant for us today: sex, work, and death. He is, as always, especially concerned about how we treat each other in our relationships within the church.

Read **1 Thessalonians 4:1-12** through to get the feel for this passage.

1. What does God want for us, and what sort of life has he called us to? verses 3 and 7
2. Do you think when our friends/work colleagues/family members look at us, this is the sort of life they see?

Re-read **1 Thessalonians 4:3-8**.²

² verse 4 is a bit tricky to translate, hence the footnotes in most Bibles. Without going into the technicalities of the Greek, one clue as to how we should translate this verse will be to look at the context. The immediate context is the rest of verses 4 and 5. Whatever Paul is talking about, it is clear he wants them to act not in the passion of lust like the heathen (verse 5). So it looks like sexual self-control of oneself, in and out of marriage, is in view here.

The first thing Paul talks about when he talks about the Thessalonians' need for sanctification is that they should abstain from sexual immorality (verse 3b). Verses 4-6a seem to be elaborating on what abstaining from sexual immorality will involve, and verses 6b to 7 give us the reasons.

3. How does **not** knowing God affect unbelievers' sex lives? verse 5

4. Conversely, how does knowing God affect how we conduct our sex lives? verse 5

5. Do you think Paul is talking about married people or unmarried people here?

6. What are two serious consequences if we don't control ourselves sexually? verse 6

7. What help is available to us, as we seek to walk the way of holiness and honour in sexual matters? verse 8

Now re-read **1 Thessalonians 4:9-12**.

Paul is still talking about how we can be blameless and holy when Jesus returns (1 Thess 3:13). He turns from our sexual relationships to other relationships in the Christian community.

8. How do you think God taught them to love each other? (verse 9)

9. Why do you think living quietly is something to aspire to? What would be the opposite of living quietly? (verse 11)

10. How do we reconcile Paul's teaching to live quiet lives and to mind our own business (verse 11) with Jesus' command for us to be light and salt in our communities (Matthew 5:13-16)?

11. What do we think Paul's instruction to work with our hands means for us? Verse 11 (Hint: see verse 12 too.)

12. Which verse 12 in mind, how do you think Paul's instruction to work with our hands in verses 11 applies to:

- a. retired people?
- b. Stay-at-home mothers?
- c. Unemployed people who are desperately seeking work?
- d. Very wealthy people?
- e. Unemployed people who are not seeking work?
- f. Those who are mentally or physically ill or incapacitated?
- g. Students?

13. How does working properly (verse 11) help us to obey the command to love each other (verse 9)? verse 12 (see also Ephesians 4:28)

14. What results does Paul expect to see, if people follow his instructions to lead a quiet life, mind their own business, and work with their hands? verse 12

Pulling it together

15. In following Paul's instructions in this section, what idols might we be turning from? (1 Thess 1:9).

For personal reflection

16. What things might Christians do that might detract from the respect outsiders have for their daily life?

17. Paul has given instructions in the passage concerning how we should conduct our sex lives, our relationships with other Christians, and our work lives. Share how knowing Jesus:

a. *has* impacted you in these areas

b. *should* impact us in these areas

Concluding remarks

If Paul were alive today, it looks like his great desire for us believers would be for us to be blameless and holy when Jesus returns (1 Thess 3:13). Like the Thessalonians, we need to learn more and more about how to please God in our everyday lives. And Paul has given us some practical ways in the matters of sex, work and how we treat each other in our relationships within the church.

Key verse:

For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. 1 Thess 4:7

Prayer

- Pray for Bible Society Australia.
- Pray for SRE classes in Point Clare and Kariong Public Schools.

Notes on 1 Thess 4:1-12

4:5 Similarly 1 Cor 6:19-20.

4:11 Many commentators see the instruction here *to work with your hands*, together with the warning not to be idle in 1 Thess 5:14 and 2 Thess 3:6-12, as implying that some people in the Thessalonian church had ceased to work because they thought Jesus was about to come back. In fact, Paul does not say what is motivating people to be idle, and he doesn't say that the idleness only came about after they were converted. So we don't know whether the commentators are right or not. What we do know is that we shouldn't be idle!

4:12 *so that you will not be dependent on anybody*—Cf. Paul and his co-workers in 2 Thess 3:10-12.



Study 5

1 Thessalonians 4:13—5:11

**We do not want you to grieve like the rest of men,
who have no hope
We belong to the day**

Paul's letter is full of words of assurance, encouragement, and hope. At this point he turns to something that may have been bothering the Thessalonians, and reassures them. It seems that they knew Jesus was going to be returning, and they were eagerly awaiting his return, but were concerned about what would happen to believers who had already died. Would they miss out on this great day?

1. Think of a time when someone close to you died. What were the most helpful things people said to encourage you when you were grieving?

Read **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**.

2. What sets apart Christians from other people? verse 13

3. What do Paul and the others believe about Jesus, and what does Paul say follows logically from that? verse 14

4. *Why* will believers who have died be resurrected, and those living be lifted up into the clouds? See verses 14-17 (especially verse 17); see also 1 Thess 5:10.

Living it out

5. Paul says we should '*encourage each other with these words*' (verse 18). With which words?

6. Notice that Paul doesn't say that we shouldn't grieve at all (verse 13). On the basis of this passage, what do you think Christian grief should look like?

Having addressed the issue of bereavement by encouraging his friends to view it in the light of the Second Coming of Jesus, Paul addresses another question. How do we know whether we are going to be ready when Jesus returns?

Read **1 Thessalonians 5:1-11**.

Paul uses two similes or pictures to illustrate what it will be like when the day of the Lord arrives.

7. In what way will the Lord's coming be *like a thief in the night*? And in what way will the Lord's coming *not* be like a thief in the night for the Thessalonians? verses 2 and 4

8. When Paul likens the Lord's coming to *the labour pains of a pregnant woman*, what does that show us about Jesus' return? verse 3

Paul says that as we are sons of the light (verse 5), Jesus' return shouldn't surprise us (verse 4). He implies that there are behaviours which are normal for people who are not Christians to engage in, but which are inappropriate for Christians, because they render us unprepared for Jesus' thief-like return.

9. What sort of behaviour is Paul warning the Thessalonians against?

10. What sort of behaviour does Paul want from his friends (and from us), so that we can live in the light? verse 8

11. What do you think it means to put on the armour of faith, hope, and love? How do we put them on? verse 8

12. Who are those who are awake in verse 10, and who are those who are asleep in verse 10? What happens to both groups?

Pulling it together

In chapter 5, Paul is continuing the discussion he started at the end of chapter 3 about how we can be strengthened so that we can be blameless and holy when Jesus returns (1 Thess 3:13).

13. How would you describe the tone of this whole passage, 1 Thessalonians 5:1-12?

14. Taking the passage as a whole, what fundamental motivation is Paul giving us for right living and the building up of our church community?

15. What practical things can we do this week to demonstrate love and promote encouragement in our church fellowship?

Concluding remarks

In this passage Paul has once again pushed us to consider how we are living, and pointed out why we are living the Christian life. God has appointed us for salvation, and we will be spending eternity with Jesus. For this reason we should not be fooling around, but rather living alertly and encouraging each other to live alertly.

Key verse

But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. 1 Thess 5:8

Prayer

- Pray for Matt and Mel Crocker as they serve at Grace Presbyterian Church in Wallsend.
- Pray for SRE classes in Gosford and East Gosford Public Schools.

Study 6

1 Thessalonians 5:12-28 “Live in peace with each other”

Paul has been calling on believers to be blameless and holy when our Lord Jesus returns (1 Thess 3:13), explaining how we should live in order to please God (1 Thess 4:1). And here in the last bit of 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, Paul touches on how local church leaders, and indeed all believers, are to encourage this.

Read **1 Thessalonians 5:12-15**.

1. In these verses, who is Paul addressing? For example, according to the text, who is responsible for warning the idle, encouraging the timid, and helping the weak? Who is responsible for making sure that no-one repays wrong for wrong?
2. What do you think it means for someone to be ‘*over you in the Lord*’? verse 12 Who is over *you* in the Lord?
3. What responsibility do leaders have for the spiritual life of the congregation?
4. What responsibility does everyone have for the spiritual life of the congregation?

5. What does Paul assume that the leaders of the congregation are doing?
verse 12

6. How does Paul want the 'normal' members of the congregation to relate to the leaders? verses 12-13 (and verses 14-15?)

Read **1 Thessalonians 5:16-22**.

7. If we disallow the possibility of prophecy, what danger do we run?
verses 19-21

8. Whose responsibility do you think it is to 'test everything'? verse 21

9. How can we test things like prophecy or teaching to distinguish out whether they fall into the category of the good you are supposed to hold onto or the evil you should avoid? verses 19-22

Read **1 Thessalonians 5:23-25**.

10. What does Paul pray for the Thessalonians? (verse 23)

11. Compare Paul's prayer now with the prayer he offered in 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13. What assurance does he add this time? (verse 24)
12. A kiss was used as by the early church as a symbol of fellowship, unity, and peace. Do you think a '*holy kiss*' (verse 26) would be open to misinterpretation in Australian society today? What symbols do we use today to mark our fellowship, unity, and peace?
13. Why do you think Paul says the letter should be read to all the brothers? Who is supposed to pay attention to this letter? Who is he holding accountable? (verses 25-27)

Living it out

14. How could we apply verses 16 and 17 to our life together as a congregation?
15. What action or attitude (stated or implied) in this passage which displeases God is particularly relevant to you?

16. Discuss how we might be more patient towards people in church who try our patience.

Concluding remarks

In verse 14, Paul urges the members of the congregation at Thessalonica to warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, and be patient with everyone. Notice how this is actually what Paul himself has been doing in the letter. He has been warning those who are idle (1 Thess 4:11-12), encouraging those who are afraid about loved ones who have died (1 Thess 4:13-18) and helping the weak learn how to control themselves (1 Thess 4:1-10). So once again, Paul is in fact urging the Thessalonians to imitate him, and do for each other what he has been doing for them.

Perhaps ‘being patient with everyone’ is reflected in the instructions to the congregation about how they should relate to the leaders, and also in the instruction Paul gives that everyone should live in peace with each other—this instruction must surely include how the leaders should relate to the congregation, and how the members of the congregation relate to the leaders, as well as how the members relate to each other.

Key verse

And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. 1 Thess 5:14

Prayer

- Pray for Rick and Kayleen Manton, serving in Indigenous Ministry with APWM.
- Pray for SRE classes in Somersby and Central Mangrove Public Schools.

Study 8

Capturing the whole letter

This final study is an opportunity to review the scope of First Thessalonians, pay attention to what it says, and work out how to put it into practice.

Read **1 Thessalonians** as a whole. (As this is done note one verse that particularly strikes you for question 6 below)

1. Considering the letter as a whole, what have we learned about faith, hope, and love?
2. What would Paul say is our greatest hope?
3. What would you say is Paul's greatest concern?
4. What do we learn about faithful pastoral relationships from this letter?

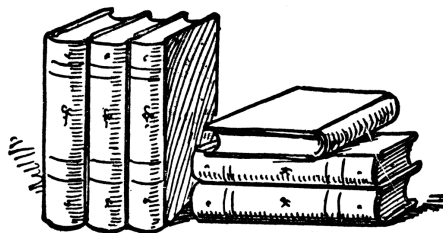
Applying the word

5. What does this letter imply about how we ought to relate to our brothers and sisters at church?
6. Identify a key verse for you in 1 Thessalonians. Share that verse's significance for you.
7. Twice Paul urges the Thessalonians to '*encourage one another with these words*'. What are some situations where we could encourage someone with these words?
8. Review what Paul has said about members of the church looking out for each other and helping each other grow as Christians. How can we put this into practice in our church?
9. Consider what Paul has said to the congregation at Thessalonica about the mutual responsibilities of leaders and members. How can we put what he says into practice in our church?

Prayer

- Pray for mission organisation Langham Partnership Australia.
- Pray for SRE classes in Kulnura and Peats Ridge Public Schools.

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