

A LOOK AT THE BOOK

1 Thessalonians

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The "hard" questions of life—Young people ask:

- What should I major in?
 - What will I do with my life?
 - How can I know God's will for my life?
 - Who will I marry?
 - Where will I live?
 - What kind of car will I drive?
 - Lord, please don't come yet! Give me a chance to live a little first!
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- What are we living for?
 - What is really important in my life?

While the believers at Thessalonica weren't asking the same questions, they were asking similar questions concerning their future.

AUTHOR AND DATE

Pauline authorship designated by tradition as well as by internal evidence.

The letter was written about A.D. 51.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The church at Thessalonica was one of the first churches in Macedonia which Paul began on the second missionary journey. Acts 16-17

His ministry there was fruitful. There was a positive response.
1 Thess. 1:3-10

It was founded in the midst of heavy Jewish opposition and persecution which continued after Paul's departure and was the source of their major problem.

The testimony of their changed lives resulted in persecution. 1:3

Result of their suffering

They felt alone and discouraged.

They thought that Paul hadn't come because he didn't really care about them.

Paul's concern for them

He tried to go visit them but was not able to go 2:17-18

Satan thwarted him from getting there 2:18

Finally he did send Timothy to them to encourage them 3:1-5

Timothy's report

The church was growing.

They were discouraged.

They were still questioning why Paul had not gone to them.

They thought he hadn't come because he didn't care about them.

PURPOSE AND THEME

His message corresponds to three main purposes he had in writing the letter:

1. Paul wrote to defend himself concerning their doubts about him.

Results desired: That we might trust Paul and his love for us.

Message: He is sincerely interested in them and would like to visit them personally but has not been able to do so.

He wants them to keep growing as they have been.

2. He wants to stimulate us to be faithful and not become discouraged because of affliction.

Results desired: Faithfulness and joy in the midst of affliction.

Message: He exhorts us to live a holy and blameless life and to be joyful in the midst of suffering.

3. He wants to answer their doctrinal question about those who died before the Lord's return.

Results desired: Knowledge concerning the doctrine of the rapture and the Day of the Lord.

Message: He teaches us that the dead in Christ will be raised together with the living .

God will save us all together from the wrath of the day of the Lord.

ORGANIZATION

The structure of the letter reveals four main sections:

1. Encouragement by assuring them of his interest in them and in the affliction through which they are passing. 1:1-3:13
2. Exhortation to live a holy and blameless life. 4:1-12

3. Instruction concerning those who have died and concerning the Day of the Lord. 4:13-5:11
4. Specific commands that we ought to follow in our daily lives. 5:12-28

ARGUMENT

RELATION WITH THE THESSALONIANS 1-3

Paul first responds to the Thessalonians' doubts concerning his interest in them.

GREETING 1:1

THANKSGIVING FOR THEIR RESPONSE TO THE GOSPEL 1:2-10

He begins the argument by reminding them of their initial response when he first visited them.

His thanksgiving 1:2

Their response to the Gospel 1:3

He is thankful that when the gospel was preached, they did respond favorably.

Evidence of their election 1:4-10

Their changed lives were a clear testimony to the effect of the gospel in them.

Everyone was talking about it.

They turned around completely from pagan idolatry to worship and serve the one true God and to wait for the return of His Son.

Power of the Spirit 1:4-5a

Their conviction 1:5b

Their imitation of Paul 1:6

Their model testimony 1:7-10

Their conversion from idols to God

Their service to God

Their expectation of Jesus' return

EVIDENCE OF PAUL'S CONCERN FOR THEM 2:1-12

To further demonstrate his concern for them he reminds them of the attitude and conduct he demonstrated toward them in that initial visit.

His pure motives 2:1-6

He showed his pure motives in his concern for them then.

Faithful in spite of suffering 2:1-2

When preaching the gospel meant suffering persecution, he did not escape from it.

If he were afraid of persecution, he would never have begun his ministry among them.

Desire for divine approval 2:3-4

From the beginning he demonstrated that his concern was for God's approval, not man's.

Lack of flattery or self-exaltation 2:5-6

He was sincere before them, never using flattery nor seeking praise from others.

His pure methods 2:7-9

In his methods before them he was also blameless.

Demonstration of love 2:7

He showed them a gentle display of love and concern.

Sacrificial service 2:8-9

His ministry was characterized by selfless, sacrificial service.

His pure life 2:10-12

In their lives before them also, Paul was careful to observe spotless Christian conduct.

As a mother, he showed gentle love; as a father, he showed concern to guide them in a path which would be worthy of God.

RESPONSE BY THEM TO PAUL'S MINISTRY 2:13-16

They were so convinced at that time by his conduct and attitude that they accepted the authority of his message and chose to follow the example of the church in Judea, of Christ, the prophets, and of Paul himself, in suffering for the gospel's sake.

Accepted his message 2:13

Imitated those who suffered 2:14-16

ANSWER TO THEIR QUESTION CONCERNING PAUL'S ABSENCE 2:17-20

After reminding them of the evidence they have already seen demonstrated of his concern for them, Paul explains the reason he has not been able to visit them.

He wanted to come and tried to do so, but he was prevented by Satan from going.

Although he has not been able to go to them, he does care about them and is glad for their progress.

Desire to go 2:17

Attempt to go 2:18a

Prevention by Satan 2:18b

Continuing concern 2:19-20

TEMPORARY SOLUTION BY TIMOTHY'S VISIT 3:1-10

While he knows they will not be satisfied with a substitute, Paul sends Timothy in his place as a substitute.

His visit provides at least a temporary solution for their problem.

Paul has been encouraged by the positive report Timothy brought back.

PRESENT INTEREST DEMONSTRATED BY PRAYER FOR THEM 3:11-13

He continues to pray for them, day and night.

He is praying that God will enable him to go to them and that they will continue to develop in love and faithfulness.

That he could go 3:11

That they would grow 3:12

That they would be strengthened 3:13

EXHORTATION TO ABOUND IN HOLY CONDUCT 4:1-12

The second major theme is an exhortation to holy conduct.

In the light of their suffering, the easiest solution would be to go back to the old life.

Pagan people imitated their gods: wine, sex, parties.

God's people were to be different!

God's people were to look like their God: *HOLY!*

MORAL CONCERNS 4:1-8

In spite of the fornication which was so common in their city, God wants our lives to be different.

Therefore Paul exhorts us to maintain moral purity.

The power God wants to control our desires is available to us through the Holy Spirit.

Since God Who gave us the Spirit is holy, He wants us to be holy also.

FRATERNAL CONCERNS 4:9-12

Not only is God concerned about our moral conduct, He is also concerned about our relationships with one another.

God is love and wants His children to love one another also.

The Thessalonians have shown their love for one another.

Paul is just concerned that their love continue to grow.

Specific evidences of our love include helping those who are suffering near us.

We will not be interfering in the affairs of others.

Instead, we will keep busy working so that we will have a good testimony before those around us.

INSTRUCTION CONCERNING ESCHATOLOGY 4:13-5:11

Doctrinal problems had developed concerning the last days.

They were suffering for their faith and needed assurance concerning the things they were going through and what they should expect in the future.

This wasn't just curiosity about the future.

Not a prophecy conference to find out interesting things about the future.

They were facing hard times and needed security.

They were after some answers.

CONCERNING THE DEAD IN CHRIST 4:13-18

The first problem concerned the Christians who had died before the Lord's return.

The problem 4:13

They believed that the Lord's return was imminent.

Christ was going to come soon, any day now.

However, before He could come back, some died.

They would no longer be present when Christ returned.

What would happen to them?

They needed an answer from God to know how to deal with the questions they were asking and to know how to face the days in which they were living.

The solution 4:14-17

Resurrection 4:14

Paul's response was that if death was not able to stop the Lord's resurrection, it couldn't stop ours either.

Rapture together 4:15-17

Those who have died will be resurrected and *precede* those who remain alive.

First -God will raise the dead in Christ.

Then -God will raise the living who have trusted in Him.

The command: Given-shout issued-command with authority

Carried-voice of the archangel

The angels are charged with carrying out God's will.

God's messengers, the archangels, carry the command to the other angels.

Fulfilled-Trumpet of God-military signal to the troops.

Then there will be a meeting of the two groups in the air.

All will be glorified (1 Cor. 15)

Both groups will meet the Lord.

Both groups will remain with Him forever.

The result 4:18

This should serve as an encouragement to those who were suffering for their faith.

We are to encourage one another with this truth.

General comments:

1. Those affected are the "dead in Christ"—This is a description of New Testament believers, not Old Testament saints (Cf. Dan. 12).
2. It doesn't give any indication of when this event takes place here.
 - Only refers to the relationship between the dead and the living.
 - The whole argument presupposes the imminence of our Lord's coming.
 - The Second Coming of Christ can't be imminent (cf. Matt. 24 & 1 Thess. 5).
3. The trumpet—"the last trumpet" of 1 Cor. 15:52.

Compare Rev. 11—the 7th trumpet = Second Coming

These are two different programs.

It's possible to have the final trumpet in one program, without having the final trumpet in a different program.

Practical implications for our life today:

- 1. When faced with the death of those we love,
we can *comfort one another*.**

Comfort = *parakaleo* => encourage

1 Thess. 4:18; 4:13; John 14:1-3

- 2. We ought to stand firm and continue growing.**

1 Cor. 15:58 (51-57)

In the light of Rev. 4, the churches in Rev. 2-3 are exhorted to remain faithful.

- 3. We ought to purify ourselves.**

1 John 3:2-3

What does the future hold? We don't know.

There are evidences that the Lord may return soon.

What will we dedicate our lives to?

If we dedicate them to serving the Lord, we can't lose!

If we have another 100 years, we will have the best possible life during that time.

We will enjoy privilege and blessing serving Him.

If we die next week, or if Christ comes today, we will be with Him and achieve our heart's desire: to see Him.

"For me to live is Christ and to die is gain!" Phil. 1:21

CONCERNING THE DAY OF THE LORD 5:1-11

Chapter 5 comes after chapter 4! –so also do its events.

Paul continues describing the events which will occur on the earth following the rapture, in *the Day of the Lord*.

"The Day of the Lord"

Non-eschatological use– Any time period when God demonstrates His sovereign control over history in the midst of His people.

Eschatological use– The period when God demonstrates His sovereign control over history in the midst of His people– either for blessing or for judgment.

Judgment = Daniel's 70th week

Blessing = fulfillment of the covenant promises = Millennium.

The "Day of the Lord" in eschatology begins with the 70th week and continues through the millennium.

Sometimes the term focuses on one aspect, sometimes it focuses on the other, or on the entire period.

Throughout Paul's discussion of the Day of the Lord, a distinction is made between those who are ready (the brethren) and those who aren't expecting it (the world).

As a thief in the night 5:1-3

Without announcement–by surprise

The fact that it is presented after the rapture could be an indication that the period follows the rapture (compare verse 10 - "asleep" - seems to indicate that the same discussion begun in 4:13 is continuing).

This discussion of the day of the Lord has to be interpreted in the light of Daniel.

- It begins with Antichrist's covenant (5:3) => They are saying "Peace and safety!"
- No one knows when it will arrive (5:2-3).
- So it comes like "a thief in the night."

This doesn't mean that the rapture begins the day of the Lord.

There will probably be a pause in between - a time of preparation
Before the covenant is signed.

5:3 - Places the emphasis on their lack of preparation for that day.

When it comes, it will begin an irreversible process that will lead to the start of a new epoch.

Like a woman at childbirth - it begins with labor pains but at the end there is a birth - something new begins.

Notice the change from "they" to "you"

You: "know full well"

They: "are saying, 'Peace and security'"
"destruction will come upon them suddenly"
"shall not escape"

But you:

This is the period when God will reveal His anger against those who have rebelled against Him.

That day will come quickly and unannounced, when least expected, just like a thief attacks in the night.

It will take the world by surprise - no advance announcements.

Compare 5:3 with Ez. 38-39; Dan. 9:26-27;

"They will all be saying: "Peace and safety (security)."

World peace will be on everyone's mind - All will be expecting it.

Not a surprise for God's children 5:4-8

Why won't it be a surprise?

- We know the order of events as revealed in God's plan (Ch. 4 => 5).
- The contrast between you and them (5:2-3)
- We will be ready personally - difference in their nature (5:4-8)

Although the world will be surprised, God's children will not be surprised.

We are related to the day of the Lord.

Contrast between = darkness => unbelievers
= light => believers (4-9)

We walk in the light, while the world is in darkness.

Since we walk in the light and know about God's program, we should live accordingly.

Our lifestyle should be distinct.

Not for wrath for God's children 5:9-10

The Day of the Lord—presented as a day of wrath.

God's wrath is not designed for those who walk in the light. 5:9

It is for those in the darkness—those who are resisting God.

God's wrath is for one kind of people; we are a different kind of people.

God has not designated us as the objects of judgment.

We are set apart for salvation.

This knowledge isn't intended to make us lazy or complacent.

It is to produce faith and hope in the midst of affliction and uncertainty.

Result of the message 5:11

Since we are going to be spared God's judgment, we should encourage and build up one another.

What difference should the expectation of this day make in our lives? 5:8, 11

CONTRAST

| Surprised | Not surprised |
|--|---|
| | <i>God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation. 5:9</i> |
| | 1 you don't need to be told |
| | 2 you know full well about the Lord's coming like a thief in the night. |
| 3 they are saying, "Peace and safety!" destruction will come upon them suddenly like birth pangs they shall not escape | |
| 4 [they are in darkness] [the day will overtake them like a thief] | 4 you are not in darkness the day will not overtake you like a thief |
| 5 [they are not sons of light nor sons of day] [they are of night and of darkness] | 5 you are sons of light and sons of day we are not of night nor of darkness |
| 6 they sleep [they are not alert nor sober] | 6 we are not to sleep as others we are not of night nor of darkness |
| 7 they sleep at night they get drunk at night | 7 [we do not sleep] [we do not get drunk at night] |
| | 8 we are of the day we are to be sober we are to put on the breastplate of faith and love the helmet of the hope of salvation |
| | 9 we are not destined for wrath we are destined for obtaining salvation |
| | 10 we are destined to live together with our Lord Jesus Christ. |

EXHORTATIONS CONCERNING SPECIFIC NEEDS 5:12-28

The final section of the letter contains a series of specific exhortations which Paul wants us to apply in our lives.

CONCERNING THE ELDERS 5:12-13

First he instructs us concerning our attitude toward the elders.

They are to have authority over the church and to admonish those who walk improperly.

The church is to respect them as leaders, appointed by God to direct His church.

Their authority 5:12a

Their correction 5:12b

Their respect 5:13

CONCERNING OTHER BRETHREN 5:14-15

Second, Paul instructs us concerning our relationship with one another.

We are to admonish the lazy, encourage the discouraged, support the weak, be patient with everyone, seek vengeance against no one, and attempt to show kindness to all.

Warning for the lazy 5:14a

Encouragement for the discouraged 5:14b

Support for the weak 5:14c

Patience with everyone 5:14d

Vengeance against no one 5:15a

Kindness for everyone 5:15b

CONCERNING THE INDIVIDUAL 5:16-22

Third, Paul instructs us concerning our own personal lives.

Our lives are to be characterized by an attitude of praise and desire for fellowship with God.

Continual joy 5:16

We should rejoice continually.

Continual prayer 5:17

Pray without ceasing.

Continual thanksgiving 5:18

Give thanks in *all* circumstances.

Not extinguishing the Spirit 5:19

Stop extinguishing the Spirit's ministry in the church.

His exhortation indicates that they should *stop* doing something they were doing—perhaps preventing others from participating in ministry in the church.

Not discrediting prophecies 5:20

Again Paul issues a call to *stop* what they were doing.

Don't make light of the prophecies.

Continual evaluation of good and evil 5:21-22

Evaluate everything and cling to that which is good.

Cling to what's good.

Avoid what's evil.

SUMMARY 5:23

In summary, let God do His work of sanctifying us in every area of our lives.

SOURCE OF ABILITY 5:24

The power for this kind of transformation can never come from personal efforts, nor from rules and regulations.

We will fulfill this only as God provides us with the power and ability.

CONCLUDING PERSONAL NOTES 5:25-28

Paul concludes the letter with some personal notes.

A greeting is sent to the brethren, and a charge given to read the letter to the church.

The letter ends with a benediction.