

Week of June 18 - 24

Thessalonians Overview

The church at Thessalonica was established by Paul and his companions (Silas and Timothy) on their second missionary journey. As always, Paul visited the local synagogue and reasoned with the Jews for three Sabbaths about Jesus Christ. Though some were persuaded, including a large number of devout Greeks and leading women, the unbelieving Jews became jealous and created an uproar in the city. Consequently, Paul and Silas escaped secretly by night to Berea. Nonetheless, a healthy church was established in Thessalonica made up mostly by Gentiles and included Jason, Aristarchus, and Secundus. Because of his hasty departure from Thessalonica soon after the church's beginning, Paul was naturally anxious about the new converts there. When Timothy joined him at Athens, he asked Timothy to return to Thessalonica to encourage and ground the new converts in their faith and to find out how they were enduring persecution.

When Timothy returned to Paul in Corinth, the news was very encouraging. Despite persecution, they had remained strong and even showed themselves to be an example for others. But, as a young church, they needed further guidance about holy living. They also needed to be reassured that their loved ones who died in Christ would not miss out on the blessings involving the coming of our Lord. The letter is unique since each chapter ends with reference to the second coming of Christ.

This letter is considered one of the first of Paul's letters, written soon after arriving in Corinth on his second journey, somewhere around 52 A.D.

Thessalonica was the capital and largest city of the Roman province in Macedonia, Greece. Today it is known as Thessaloniki, or Salonica

Thanksgiving for the Thessalonians' Faith (Thessalonians 1:1-10)

Joined by Silas and Timothy, who had been with him when the Gospel was first preached in Thessalonica, Paul presented his greetings along with a prayer for grace and peace. He expressed thanksgiving for their work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope, knowing that God had chosen them.

His assurance of their election was strengthened by how they received the Gospel. It had come to them not only in Word, but in power, in the Holy Spirit, and with much assurance. Having imitated Paul and the Lord by receiving the Word with joy despite trials and sorrows, they, in turn, had become examples to the believers in Macedonia and Achaia and had taken the Word to every place. The news of their faith toward God spread, so Paul didn't need to tell others about them. Others were telling Paul of the Thessalonians' conversion from idols to serve the true God, and how they were waiting for Jesus to return from Heaven to deliver them from the wrath to come.

Paul's Ministry in Thessalonica (Thessalonians 2:1-12)

Having recalled their reception of the Gospel, Paul now talks about his own conduct while he was with them. He said his preaching was free of craftiness, deceit, flattery, and covetousness. Seeking not the glory of men, but of God, he spoke boldly despite the conflict he encountered and was as gentle to them as a nursing mother would be with her own children. His manner of life was sacrificial, working hard not to be a burden to them, but behaved honestly, justly, and blamelessly while he was among them. As a father does his children, he encouraged them,

comforted them, and charged them to walk in a way worthy of God, who was calling them into His kingdom and glory.

Paul's Reception in Thessalonica (Thessalonians 2:13-20)

Paul then reflected on his concern for their condition. Thankful for their reception of the Gospel as the Word of God and not of men, he wrote how they had imitated the churches in Judea in receiving the Word with persecution from their own countrymen, just as they suffered from their own people, the Jews. Even though it had been a short time since he has seen them, he wanted to come to them time and time again, but Satan had hindered him. His longing to see them was because they were his hope, joy, and crown and would bring him much pleasure when they stood together before Jesus Christ when he comes back again.

Timothy's Visit and Report (Thessalonians 3:1-13)

Paul then expressed his concern for their faithfulness and explained why Timothy had been sent to them instead of coming himself, instead remaining in Athens. Afraid that their troubles might have allowed Satan to tempt them and destroy his labors with them, Timothy was sent to establish and encourage them in their faith.

But Timothy brought back good news to Paul about the church at Thessalonica, telling him their faith and love and fond memories of Paul, and their desire to see him again were evident. This comforted Paul, who was suffering his own afflictions, and he was overwhelmed with thankfulness and joy. Praying night and day that he might see them again and perfect what is lacking in their faith, he offered a prayer that God and Jesus might direct his way to them. He also prayed that Jesus would help them increase and abound in love for one another and to all, and to establish their hearts blameless before God at the coming of Christ with all His saints.

Living to Please God (Thessalonians 4:1-12)

Paul began a series of apostolic instructions related to the Christian's walk in holiness, especially because of the coming of Christ. He urged them to abound more and more so they might please God, focusing on their sanctification and the need to abstain from sexual immorality. He then called on them to increase more and more in brotherly love, even though God had taught them to love another and had done so toward all the new converts in Macedonia. Lastly, he urged them to lead quiet lives, mind their own business, and work with their own hands so they might earn the respect of outsiders.

The Coming of the Lord (Thessalonians 4:13-18)

Paul then talked about those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. He did not want the Thessalonians to sorrow over them as others who have no hope. Since God raised Jesus from the dead, even so, He would bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. This led to a description of the Lord's coming, especially as it relates to how those who are alive and remain on earth until Jesus' second coming will in no way precede those who have already died. Indeed, when the Lord comes from Heaven, the dead in Christ will rise first, and those who are alive and remain on the earth will at that time be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air to be with Him forever. Christians should, therefore, comfort one another with these words.

The Sudden Coming of the Lord (Thessalonians 5:1-11)

Continuing his instructions, Paul knew he didn't need to write to the Thessalonians about the timing of the Lord's return, for they know full well that He would come as a thief in the night and with sudden destruction, catching many people unexpectedly. This should not be the case

for Christians, however, since they are "sons of light" and "sons of the day"; therefore they should watch and be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and having as a helmet the hope of their salvation. Knowing that God has appointed them to obtain salvation through Christ, they knew whether dead or alive, they would live with Christ. Through such hope, they should, therefore, comfort and encourage one another, just as they had been doing.

Final Instructions (Thessalonians 5:12-28)

A series of appeals followed: First, they were to recognize and honor those who labored among them and were over them in the Lord and to be at peace among themselves. Then, he encouraged them in their concern for one another, along with a call to rejoice always, to pray without ceasing, to give thanks in everything, to quench not the Spirit nor despise prophecies, yet testing all things, holding fast to what is right and abstaining from all that is evil. Paul ends his letter with a prayer for their sanctification as it relates to the coming of Christ, a reminder of the faithfulness of God, a plea for prayer in his behalf, and final instructions concerning greeting one another and, lastly, having the letter read to all believers.