



# 1 Thessalonians



THRU**the**BIBLE

NOTES & OUTLINES WITH

*J. Vernon McGee*

EPISTLES



# 1 Thessalonians

**WRITER:** Paul

**DATE:** A.D. 52-53

**PLACE:** Thessalonica was a Roman colony and very important in the life of the Roman Empire. It was located 100 miles west of Philippi and about 200 miles north of Athens. It was the chief city of Macedonia. Cicero said, “Thessalonica is in the bosom of the Empire.” It was first named Therma because of hot springs in that area. In 316 B.C. Cassander (who succeeded Alexander the Great) named it in memory of his wife, Thessalonike, a half-sister of Alexander the Great. Thessalonica is still in existence, and the present-day name is Salonika.

The church in Thessalonica was a model church. Paul cited it to the Corinthians as an example (see 1 Thessalonians 1:7; 2 Corinthians 8:1-5).

**OCCASION:** This was the earliest epistle written by Paul. It was written from Athens or, more likely, Corinth on his second missionary journey. Paul had to leave Thessalonica “posthaste” due to the great opposition to the gospel. The enemy pursued him to Berea,

and again Paul was forced to leave. He left Silas and Timothy at Berea and went on to Athens. It was evidently there that Timothy brought him word from the church in Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 3:6), together with some questions that they had raised. Paul wrote his first epistle in response to their overture.

**THEME:** Although Paul was in Thessalonica less than a month (Acts 17:2), he touched on many of the great doctrines of the church. Among them was the second coming of Christ. This theme was not above the heads of the new converts, according to the great apostle. The particular phase in the second coming of Christ which he emphasized was Christ's coming for believers. The second coming of Christ in relationship to believers is a comfort (1 Thessalonians 4:18). This aspect is quite different from His catastrophic and cataclysmic coming in glory to establish His kingdom by putting down all unrighteousness (Revelation 19:11-16).

**PURPOSE:**

- 1 - To *confirm* young converts in the elementary truth of the gospel.
- 2 - To *condition* them to go on unto holy living.
- 3 - To *comfort* them regarding the return of Christ.

A heathen inscription in Thessalonica read: "After death no re-  
viving, after the grave no meeting again."

## OUTLINE:

- I. **The Christian's ATTITUDE toward the return of Christ**, Chapter 1  
(to serve . . . to wait . . . , vv. 9, 10)
- II. **The Christian's REWARD at the return of Christ**, Chapter 2
- III. **The Christian's LIFE and the return of Christ**, Chapters 3:1–4:12
- IV. **The Christian's DEATH and the return of Christ**, Chapter 4:13-18
- V. **The Christian's ACTIONS in view of the return of Christ**, Chapter 5  
(Note 22 specific commands to Christians, beginning at v. 11.)

For this book I suggest two outlines. Each gives a needed emphasis that is not in the other.

- I. **Coming of Christ is an INSPIRING HOPE**, Chapter 1
  - A. Introduction, vv. 1-4
  - B. Gospel received in much assurance and much affliction, vv. 5-7
  - C. Gospel results, vv. 8-10
- II. **Coming of Christ is a WORKING HOPE**, Chapter 2
  - A. Motive and method of a true witness for Christ, vv. 1-6
  - B. Mother side of the apostle's ministry (comfort), vv. 7-9
  - C. Father side of the apostle's ministry (charge), vv. 10-13
  - D. Brother side of the apostle's ministry (challenge), vv. 14-16
  - E. Reward of a true witness for Christ, vv. 17-20
- III. **Coming of Christ is a PURIFYING HOPE**, Chapters 3:1–4:12
  - A. Timothy brings a good report of Thessalonians, Chapter 3:1-8
  - B. Paul urges Thessalonians to continue to grow in faith, Chapter 3:9-13
  - C. How believers are to walk, Chapter 4:1-12
- IV. **Coming of Christ is a COMFORTING HOPE**, Chapter 4:13-18  
*(What death means to a Christian; what the Rapture means to the church.)*
- V. **Coming of Christ is a ROUSING HOPE (leads to action)**, Chapter 5  
*(Dead believers are asleep in Jesus; living believers are awake for Jesus.)*
  - A. Call to be awake and alert in view of Christ's coming, vv. 1-10
  - B. Commandments for Christians, vv. 11-28

## COMMENT:

### I. Coming of Christ is an **INSPIRING HOPE**, Chapter 1

#### A. Introduction, vv. 1-4

V. 1—Silas and Timothy had recently returned from Thessalonica with a good report and some questions for Paul to answer. The greeting is Paul's usual friendly greeting to a church that is spiritually sound.

“Grace” (*charis*) is the Greek form of greeting.

“Peace” (*shalom*) is the Hebrew greeting.

We must know the grace of God before we can experience the peace of God. Grace is love in action.

V. 2—This is the same expression he directs to the Philippians (1:3), couched in different verbiage.

V. 3—Paul always associates these three Christian graces together: faith, love, hope (see 1 Corinthians 13).

Faith seems to be in opposition to work;

Faith produces works.

Love seems to be in opposition to labor;

Love produces labor.

Hope seems to be in opposition to patience;

Hope produces patience.

V. 4—“Election”—no one who was not running has ever been elected—God has no write-in candidates. Election is God's side of salvation. Our side is still “whosoever will” may come. God gives a legitimate and sincere offer of salvation. “Ho, every one that thirsteth ...” (Isaiah 55:1).

#### B. Gospel received in much assurance and much affliction, vv. 5-7

V. 5—Paul makes it clear that the gospel was given not only in word but in power and the Holy Spirit. Our Lord confirmed this method in John 16:7-11. Without the Holy Spirit, the gospel is mere words.

V. 6—Paul could cite Silas, Timothy and himself as examples. Paul puts together two experiences that the world cannot link together—*affliction* and *joy*.

V. 7—The Thessalonians were examples to all in Macedonia, and Paul cited them to the Corinthians.

### C. Gospel results, vv. 8-10

V. 8—The example of the Thessalonians spread south to Greece.

V. 9 1 - “How ye turned to God from idols” is the “work of faith” (v. 3). Paul did not preach against idolatry. He presented Christ. When the Thessalonians turned to Christ, they automatically turned from idols. Their turning from idols was repentance. You cannot turn to Christ without turning from something.

2 - “To serve the living and true God” is the “labor of love” (v. 3). The relationship between the heavenly Father and the believer who is a son of God is a love relationship. “We love him, because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

V. 10 3 - “To wait for his Son from heaven” is the patience of hope. All of this rests upon the resurrection of Jesus, and it delivers us from “the wrath to come”—which is the Great Tribulation. The patience of hope is to wait, not for wrath, but for Christ.

## II. Coming of Christ is a **WORKING HOPE**, Chapter 2

A. Motive and method of a true witness for Christ, vv. 1-6

V. 1—“In vain” means *empty*—without results.

~~Paul was salt in Thessalonica—salt irritates;~~

~~Paul was light in Thessalonica.~~

He was there less than one month (see Acts 17:1-3). This, written up in any modern Christian publication, would bear one of these captions: “Paul Does It Again” or “What One Christian Did in Three Weeks” or “Paul Opens New Work in Thessalonica” or “Paul Turns World Upside Down.”

V. 2—“Gospel of God”—note Paul’s use of the word “gospel” (vv. 4, 8, 9). The commentary on this verse is found in Acts 17:5-10.

V. 3

1 - “Deceit” means *error*—the content of the exhortation was not adulterated.

2 - “Uncleanness” is sensuality; the intent was not motivated by greed.

3 - “Guile”—his method was not wrong.

Paul did not lower his standards to accommodate the prejudices and passions of the old nature.

V. 4—“Allowed” is *approved*—he had been tested, he was no novice. Paul was not a man-pleaser; he never sought popularity.

V. 5—He never flattered a prominent person; he did not play up to the rich; he did not butter up anyone.

“Cloak of covetousness” is a cloak of many colors. It could be money, but more likely honor, fame or position.

V. 6—Paul never sought position or honors. Preachers can be bought by the dozen with honorary degrees.

#### B. Mother side of the apostle's ministry (comfort), vv. 7-9

V. 7—“Nurse” is *nursing mother*, the word used for a mother bird.

V. 8—“Dear” is *beloved*—Paul had a genuine love for believers. He was willing to die for the Thessalonian believers.

V. 9—“Laboring night and day”—he was not a paid nurse who worked by the hour; he did not belong to the union.

#### C. Father side of the apostle's ministry (charge), vv. 10-13

V. 10

1 - “Holy”—careful discharge of duty to God.

2 - “Justly”—careful discharge of duty to man.

3 - “Unblamably”—no charge can be maintained against the apostle and his companions. A holy life does count.

V. 11

1 - “Exhorted” (Greek *parakaleo*): came to the side of; helped, entreated, convicted (the same word is used for the Holy Spirit).

2 - “Comforted” (KJV) is *persuaded*.

3 - “Charged” has a note of severity, discipline; it is a virile, robust, firm, masculine word.

“Father” indicates that this is the father side of his ministry.

V. 12—“Walk worthy” (see Ephesians 4:1). “Kingdom” refers to the millennial kingdom. “Glory” refers to the eternal kingdom.

V. 13—Note the supernatural character of the Word of God in two aspects:

1 - How it is preached—minister

2 - How it is received—hearers

#### D. Brother side of the apostle's ministry (challenge), vv. 14-16

V. 14—Churches in Judea had likewise suffered. Suffering is the glue that holds believers together. Today the church is coming unglued. Many are praying for revival, and it may take some great time of testing before revival can come.

V. 15—Paul holds his own people responsible for the death of Jesus. He himself may have participated in the events that led to the crucifixion. The tables were turned when he became a believer.

V. 16—God permits sin to run its full course. The cup of iniquity must be filled up to the brim.

#### E. Reward of a true witness for Christ, vv. 17-20

V. 17—Paul had a great desire to see the Thessalonians again.

V. 18—Paul had spiritual discernment to see that it was Satan's strategy that kept him from returning to Thessalonica. "Satan" means *adversary*.

V. 19—"Crown of rejoicing" is a victor's crown given to those who witness for Christ and win others. At the coming of Christ, the very presence of those who have been won by a witness will be in itself the crown of rejoicing.

V. 20—Paul's joy here (and hereafter) is the Thessalonian believers he had won.

### III. Coming of Christ is a PURIFYING HOPE, Chapters 3:1–4:12

#### A. Timothy brings a good report of Thessalonians, Chapter 3:1-8

W. 1, 2—Paul had to leave Thessalonica so quickly that there were many unfinished teachings he was not able to develop. He not only longs to return but wonders about the future of the believers. Paul longs to comfort them. He demonstrates a labor of love. Love is not affection; love seeks the welfare of another.

V. 3—Paul wants the Thessalonians to stand for the Lord in the midst of afflictions. A believer will not escape trouble. He is actually appointed to suffer (John 16:33; 2 Timothy 3:12; 1 Peter 4:12-19).

V. 4—"Tribulation" is *affliction*.

Since this epistle is eschatological in content, it might be well to note that this is an example of fulfilled prophecy. Paul predicts that the Thessalonians would endure afflictions. They had. The purpose of afflictions is to promote sanctification in the life of the believer.



V. 5—Afflictions also test the genuineness of the coin of belief. Paul recognizes that all professions of faith are not genuine. Afflictions reveal the genuine believer, and this is the occasion of his rejoicing.

V. 6—Timothy brings a good report from the Thessalonians and that they were enduring afflictions.

V. 7—Paul likewise is enduring afflictions, and the good report causes him to be comforted.

V. 8—“We live” means that, as believers, we *enjoy life*. “If” is *since*. It could be translated, “While ye are standing fast in the Lord we are happy.”

### B. Paul urges Thessalonians to continue to grow in faith, Chapter 3:9-13

V. 9—“Joy” occurs twice in this verse. “Affliction” or “tribulation” occur three times in this chapter. Affliction increases the capacity of the heart for joy.

V. 10—“Lacking”—Paul’s labor in Thessalonica had been suddenly and rudely interrupted. Paul longs to finish his work among them.

“Faith” is *doctrine*.

V. 11—Paul is praying for a return visit to Thessalonica.

V. 12—“Abound” is *exceed*. “Love” is the Greek *agape*. Love is seen only in action in this epistle—“labor of love” (1:3). Again, love is not affection; love seeks the welfare of another.

V. 13—“To the end”—love is not an end in itself. Holiness is the end result in the life of a believer, which will not be fully attained until the return of Christ—“at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.”

“Unblamable” (see also 2:10) means that no charge can be made. On a bulletin board outside a church was this question: “If you were tried in court as a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?” A believer must one day appear before the judgment (Greek *bema*) seat of Christ, who will judge his works to see if there is to be a reward. Also, He judges character to see if there is something that must be corrected (1 John 2:28).

### C. How believers are to walk, Chapter 4:1-12

W. 1, 2—The Ten Commandments have no part in a sinner’s salvation. The Ten Commandments are not the standard for Christian conduct. There are commandments for believers (see 22 command-

ments in chapter 5). If man could not keep the Ten Commandments (Acts 15:10), how can he keep higher commandments? This can be attained only by an outside power (the Holy Spirit, v. 8). See also Romans 8:3, 4; Galatians 5:22, 23.

“Walk”—the walk of the believer is all important; he mentions it again in v. 12. The walk is a parenthesis around this section. A believer cannot do as he pleases; he does as Christ pleases.

V.3–Chastity is the subject in vv. 3-8. Immorality (see *ASV*) is condemned.

A child of God cannot live an immoral life.

V.4-6—A child of God cannot be sanctified when his relationship is immoral with the opposite sex—or dishonest with the same sex.

V.7—A child of God cannot continue in sin (the prodigal son may get into the pig pen, but he cannot *live* in the pig pen).

V.8—A child of God is indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5; 8:9; Galatians 5:5; Ephesians 2:22).

V.9—Charity is the subject in vv. 9, 10. A believer must have love for the brethren—it comes supernaturally (Galatians 5:22).

V.10—This is the area of growth and development.

V.11—Calmness is the subject here. “Study to be quiet”—only the Spirit of God conducts this type of school. (Man teaches how to speak.) *Be ambitious to keep still* is one translation. “[Tend to] your own business” is also a Christian virtue. “Work with your own hands” is a commandment for believers.

V.12—“Walk honestly” is to gain the respect and confidence of mankind, as in v. 1 where the walk is to please God.

#### **IV. Coming of Christ is a COMFORTING HOPE, Chapter 4:13-18**

*(What death means to a Christian; what the Rapture means to the church.)*

This section has been labeled one of the most important prophetic passages in the Scriptures—and it surely is that. Actually, the primary consideration is not the Rapture, though this passage clearly teaches it. The question that Paul is answering is about believers who die before the Rapture. Paul had taught the young church in Thessalonica the truth of the imminent coming of Christ for His own. After Paul left Thessalonica there was evidently a time of lapse for several months, as he had gone to Berea, Athens, and then to Corinth. During this interval some of the believers had

died. Had they missed the Rapture? Paul had not dealt with this aspect of the subject while he was with them. He now answers their specific question.

V. 13—"I would not have you to be ignorant" is Paul's diplomatic method of dealing with the ignorance of believers. He meant they were ignorant, but he does not speak that bluntly.

"Who are asleep" is *who are sleeping*.

"Sleeping" (Greek *koimaomai*) means lying sleep. This word is used for natural sleep also (see Luke 22:45; Acts 12:6). The same word is used for the death of the body—never the soul. The very nature of the word prevents use of the term "soul sleep."

The death of a believer's body is called sleep because:

- 1** A sleeping body and a dead body are similar. The sleeper does not cease to exist—the inference is that a dead person does not cease to exist. Sleep is temporary—death is also. Sleep has its waking; death has its resurrection.
- 2** The word comes from the Greek *keimai*, which means *to lie down*. Only a body can lie down—certainly not a soul. By the same token, only the body is spoken of in resurrection. The word for "resurrection" is the Greek *anastasis* which means *to stand up*. A soul can neither lie down nor stand up!
- 3** God created man (his body) out of the dust of the earth and breathed into him the breath (soul or spirit) of life; and man became a living soul (see Genesis 2:7). When man sinned, God pronounced this judgment:

*In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.* (Genesis 3:19)

The body returns to the dust, but the spirit returns to God who gave it.

*Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.* (Ecclesiastes 12:7)

For a Christian, death means to be absent from the body and to be present or at home with the Lord. The body is merely a frail tent that is laid aside temporarily (see 1 Corinthians 15:51-54; 2 Corinthians 5:1-9; Philippians 1:23; 1 Thessalonians 5:23).

**4** Early Christians called the burying place for bodies a cemetery, derived from the Greek *koimeterion*, which means *rest house for strangers; sleeping place*. We call such a place a hotel or motel where we spend the night and rise up in the morning to continue our journey. “Even as others who have no hope” is *even as the rest who have no hope*. The pagan philosophy concerning death was dark and hopeless. Theocritus, a Greek poet of the third century B.C., wrote: “Hopes are among the living, the dead are without hope.” Moschus, his contemporary, speaking of the plants that perish in the garden: “Alas! alas! ... these live and spring again in another year; but we ... when we die, deaf to all sound in the hollow earth, sleep a long, long endless sleep that knows no waking.”

V. 14—“Jesus died”—not *is sleeping*. Jesus died a substitutionary, redemptive death in which He bore the penalty of sin. He cried, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46). Death means separation.

In the Scriptures, the word “death” is used in three ways:

- 1** Physical death, which is separation of the physical from the spiritual. Adam died physically 930 years after the fall.
- 2** Spiritual death—Adam died spiritually the day he rebelled against God. He was then separated from God—without hope and without God in the world.

*Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation: but is passed from death unto life.* (John 5:24)

*Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.* (John 11:25)

*For to be carnally minded is death: but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.* (Romans 8:6)

*And you hath he [made alive], who were dead in trespasses and sins.* (Ephesians 2:1)

**3** Eternal death—separation from God. This is the “second death” referred to in Revelation 20:14.

“Sleep in Jesus” is fallen asleep in Jesus (physical death).

V. 15—“By the word of the Lord” indicates that it is a direct revelation from the Lord.

“Prevent” (KJV) means *to go before*.

V. 16—“Shout” is a word of command.

“Voice”—the voice of the shout is like that of an archangel, referring to the quality of the voice of the Son of God. It speaks of majesty and authority.

“Trump of God” has no reference to the ridiculous thought that Gabriel blows a trumpet. Rather, the voice of the Lord Jesus is like a trumpet:

*I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet. (Revelation 1:10)*

This is not a trio but the solo voice of the Son of God. This was His method when He raised the dead—He spoke directly to them. He did not need an archangel or a trumpet to assist Him in raising the dead.

V. 17—Those who are living will not precede the dead, but the dead in Christ will go first.

“Caught up” (Greek *harpazo*) means *grasped hastily; snatched up; raptured; lifted and transported*.

To argue that the Scriptures do not teach the Rapture is merely to indulge in the subtle game of semantics. The Bible teaches the Rapture.

V. 18—This is a comfort to believers. The Tribulation is a terror to the world and would be for believers if we had to go through it.

## **V. Coming of Christ is a ROUSING HOPE (leads to action), Chapter 5** *(Dead believers are asleep in Jesus; living believers are awake for Jesus.)*

A. Call to be awake and alert in view of Christ's coming, w. 1-10

V. 1—“Times and the seasons” are not the property of the church. The church is looking for a person, not times and seasons.

V. 2—“Day of the Lord” is a period of time that begins with the Great Tribulation and continues through the Millennium. It relates to the nation Israel (Isaiah 2:11, 12; Joel 2:1, 2).

V. 3—The world will think it is entering the Millennium, but in reality it will be entering the Great Tribulation. This is the false peace of Antichrist.

V. 4—The Lord does not come to the church as a thief in the night.

V. 5—The church is made up of children of light (Philippians 2:15).

V. 6, 7—This is for the children of light. It is a call to be awake.

V. 8—A call to soldier duty.

V. 9—“Wrath” evidently refers to the Great Tribulation, the “great day of his wrath” (Revelation 6:17). Believers are promised deliverance from it by the Lord Jesus Christ.

### B. Commandments for Christians, vv. 11-28

*(There are 22.)*

V. 11—Encourage one another.

1 - “Comfort [encourage] yourselves.”

2 - “Edify [build up] one another.”

V. 12 3 - Understand those who teach the Word—duty to pastor.  
If you can't support the pastor, leave the church.

V. 13 4 - “Esteem” (respect) the teacher.

5 - “Be at peace”—there should be peace among believers.

V. 14 6 - “Warn them that are unruly” (those out of step).

7 - “Encourage the fainthearted”—help them to get in step.

8 - “Support the weak”—they cannot get in step.

9 - “Be patient toward all men”—don't lose your temper.

V. 15 10 - Don't fight one another.

11 - Follow Captain Good.

V. 16 12 - “Rejoice evermore [always]” (“happy” is not a New Testament word).

V. 17 13 - “Pray without ceasing [constantly]”—this is more than an attitude.

V. 18 14 - Give thanks in all circumstances—not once a year on Thanksgiving Day.

V. 19 15 – The Holy Spirit is likened to a fire. To quench the Spirit means to refuse to do the will of God, refuse to let the Holy Spirit have His way.

V. 20 16 – Do not look down upon Bible study as something beneath you. Do not be indifferent to the Word of God.

V. 21 17 – Do not be credulous, taken in by flattery (2 John 7, 10, 11).  
18 – Hold to that which is true and genuine.

V. 22 19 – This is the answer for the questionable pastime.

V. 23–Man is a triune being—body, soul (mind), and spirit.

V. 24–You can depend upon God.

V. 25 20 – Pray for those who labor in the gospel.

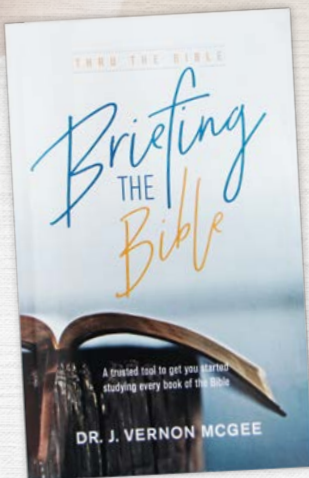
V. 26 21 – A handshake will do.

V. 27 22 – This epistle is to be read in the church.

V. 28–Paul is brief and to the point. This section is practical. We need to watch our step as we look up for the coming of Christ.



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