



The Message of the Bible

Week 33: 1, 2 Thessalonians

The Teaching of 1 Thessalonians

The Salutation (1:1)

1. The Thessalonian believers would have been familiar with both Silvanus and Timothy.
2. Silvanus (i.e., Silas) accompanied Paul during his time at Thessalonica (cf. Acts 17).
3. Paul had sent Timothy to Thessalonica “to strengthen and encourage” them (3:2).

Opening Thanksgiving (1:2–10)

1. In this opening paragraph, Paul gives the characteristics and/or reasons for his thanksgiving on their behalf.
 - a. Paul remembered them in his prayers (v. 2).
 - b. Paul bore in mind the reality of their faith, love, and hope. Their faith worked; their love labored; and their hope in God remained steadfast (v. 3).
 - c. Paul was confident that God had chosen them (v. 4).
2. Paul’s thanksgiving had confidence that their salvation was true for several reasons:
 - a. the demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit in their acceptance of the Gospel
 - b. the effect the gospel had in bringing “full conviction”
 - c. their imitation of Paul (and his companions) as well as the Lord, namely, that they persevered in the Gospel with joy despite persecution (see also 2:14–16).
 - d. the reputation of their faith
3. Their salvation was evident to Paul, for they had “turned to God from idols,” which meant that they had a change of lordship.
4. Specifically, the manifestation of their faith was (1) in their service to the true God and (2) in their waiting for the returning Son.
5. 1:10 is the first mention of the return of Christ in these two epistles. However, it will not be the last, because it is prevalent in both.

Paul’s Ministry among the Thessalonians (2:1–3:13)

1. In these two chapters, Paul goes into great detail of the type of ministry he had among the Thessalonians, as if in some ways to vindicate his work among them.
2. Although brief, Paul’s time with them was by no means unfruitful or in vain. On the contrary, the Gospel had been clearly taught in their midst.

3. The proclamation of the Gospel was accomplished (1) amidst opposition, (2) with clarity and accuracy, (3) in a God-glorifying way, and (4) with deep affection.
4. Paul's ministry of the Gospel was characterized by
 - a. labor and hardship,
 - b. an unpretentious attitude,
 - c. the proclamation of the Gospel,
 - d. blameless behavior, and
 - e. exhortation, encouragement, and testimony
5. The purpose of his ministry among them was straightforward—a walk worthy of their God (2:12).
6. Paul could have confidence in this type of ministry, because the message that Paul preached (and that they received) was not his own but was “the word of God” (2:13). Thus, the word itself had performed its work in them because of their faith.
7. Paul conveyed his affection for them in his eagerness to return to them (2:17–18). The reason he cared so deeply for them was that they were the fruit of his ministry and as such was their “hope or joy or crown of exultation” (2:19).
8. Moreover, they were a token of the genuineness of their ministry that would be evident at the coming of the Lord. Note that this is the second time Jesus' return is mentioned.
9. Unable to return to them in person, Paul sent Timothy to encourage them in their faith, which they desperately needed to avoid discouragement in the face of afflictions (3:1–5). Paul did not want their ministry in Thessalonica to be in vain.
10. Timothy had returned with the good news that they continued in their faith and love.
11. At the same time, Paul continued to pray that he might return to them, but he also prayed that the Lord would continue to increase their love and would establish their hearts blameless before Him (3:11–13). Specifically, Paul desired that God present them as holy “at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints” (3:13). This is the third mention of Jesus' return.

Ethical Exhortations (4:1–12)

1. In this section, Paul encourages his readers to “excel still more” in the things they had already been taught (vv. 1, 10).
2. The primary arenas in which they needed to excel were their sanctification (vv. 3, 4, 7), their love (vv. 9–10), and their living in the world (vv. 11–12).

The Coming of the Lord (4:13–5:11)

1. Paul then moves to teaching about the return of Christ, an issue that seems to have been a concern for the church in Thessalonica and needed clarification.
2. The concern seems to be primarily addressed toward the hope of those in Christ who had already died. Paul's teaching on this issue is clear:
 - a. When the Lord returns, the dead in Christ will rise to meet him (4:15–16).
 - b. Believers still alive at His coming will then meet Him in the air (4:17).

- c. The certainty of the return of Christ is to have a comforting effect within the church (4:18).
3. Although the return of Christ will come as a surprise, true believers are prepared for His return, which means salvation and life in His presence (5:1–11).
4. Again, teaching about Christ’s return is intended to be encouraging and edifying.

Community Life (5:12–22)

1. This section answers the question: How then should we live with one another in light of the Lord’s return?
2. As in other epistles, Paul commands center around their community life, whether it be their relationship with their leaders or in their ministry to the weaker one’s in their midst.

The Epilogue (5:23–28)

1. Paul’s concluding remarks begin with a prayer that God would sanctify and preserve them completely and blamelessly “at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 23).
2. As an encouragement to his readers, Paul appeals to God’s faithfulness in bringing this to pass (v. 24).

The Purpose of 1 Thessalonians

Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians primarily to encourage the new believers to persevere in their faith despite the opposition they faced.¹

The argument of this letter is simple and straightforward. Paul was writing to this early church, which had suffered much for the sake of the Gospel. He knew that they had weathered the persecution well, but he wanted to encourage them further. The central focus of the book is the eager expectation of the churches everywhere for the return of the Lord.²

Paul exhorted the Thessalonian believers to grow in holiness so that they might be blameless when Christ returns.

The Teaching of 2 Thessalonians

The Salutation (1:1–2)

Opening Thanksgiving and Prayer (1:3–12)

1. Paul thanked God for the same things as in the first letter: their growing faith, their love for one another, and their perseverance amid persecutions and afflictions.
2. Their suffering was evidence of their being counted worthy of the kingdom of God (v. 5). Moreover, the events surrounding the return of Christ would give relief to those who are afflicted (vv. 6–7).

¹ Elwell & Yarbrough, *Encountering the New Testament*, 330.

² Sailhamer, 555.

3. The background of Paul's teaching is Daniel 7, and the influence is unmistakable. In other words, the message of hope given by Daniel is the same message given to the Thessalonians. They were in exile waiting for the return of God and His kingdom, just as now the church waits for the return of Christ and the establishment of His kingdom.

Instructions about the Return of Christ (2:1–17)

1. The primary issue Paul is addressing is the false teaching stating that the day of the Lord had already come. This would indeed cause concern, because the Thessalonians would have been bypassed if Christ had already returned. Paul straightens them out.
2. Paul argues against such reports because the sequence of events as taught in Daniel had not yet occurred. Specifically, the “man of lawlessness” and his rebellion had not taken place.
3. This one described here is variously described in Daniel:
 - a. 2:40
 - b. 7:7
 - c. 7:8
 - d. 9:26
 - e. 11:36
4. Paul is basically elaborating for us on Daniel 9:26–27. His point is simple: These things have not taken place; therefore, Christ has not returned. As such, they should hold fast to the teachings they had received from Paul (v. 15).

Concerning Gainful Employment in the Present (3:1–15)

The Epilogue (3:16–18)

The Purpose of 2 Thessalonians

Paul called the Thessalonian believers to steadfastness and Christian growth in light of the return of Christ.

How should I respond?