

# General Study Of Thessalonians – Part 1

We may ask why there are two letters that are very like each other, and must have been written within weeks, perhaps even days, of each other.

**The second letter was written mainly to clear up a misconception about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The first letter insists that “the Day of the Lord” [1 Thessalonians 5:2] will come like a thief in the night, and urges watchfulness, [1 Thessalonians 5:6]. But this had produced the situation where people did nothing but watch and wait.**

**In the second letter Paul explains what signs must come first before the Second Coming, [2 Thessalonians 2:3-12].**

The Thessalonians had got their ideas about the Second Coming out of balance and proportion.

Certain phrases in Paul’s preaching had been taken out of their context and over-emphasised, the second letter seeks to put things back in their proper balance to correct the thoughts of the excited Thessalonians regarding the Second Coming.

**In these two letters we see Paul solving the day-to-day problems which arose in a growing and expanding church.**

Paul’s first visit to Thessalonica is narrated in **Acts 17:1-9**.

The young church which Paul was forced to leave behind was exposed to some active persecution.

Paul was very anxious for his converts’ welfare, and wondered how they would stand, especially as his sudden departure prevented him from giving them all the instruction that he regarded as adequate for the establishment of an infant Christian community, [**1 Thessalonians 3:10**].

Paul’s hands were tied by his Thessalonian friends’ guarantee, he could not go back at present, [**Acts 17:9**].

Paul sent Timothy to Thessalonica and he returned to report that the Christians in Thessalonica, far from succumbing to the persecution, were standing firm and actually propagating the gospel message on their own initiative.

Paul was overjoyed with Timothy’s good news and wrote his first letter at once to congratulate and encourage them, [**1 Thessalonians 1:1-10**].

**1 Thessalonians 2:1-9** [NIV] *“You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure. We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition. For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed, God is our witness. We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else. As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.”*

Paul's conduct has been represented in an unfavourable light to the converts whom he had left behind at Thessalonica, so he defends himself. Paul and his companions had made no attempt to exploit them or live at their expense, on the contrary, they had shown all gentleness and care towards them.

*"We worked night and day,"* [1 Thessalonians 4:11; 2 Thessalonians 3:7; Acts 18:3; Acts 20:34].

**This policy not only reflected a desire to be financially independent of those among whom they ministered, it also separated them from the ordinary religious traffickers of the day, and showed the converts a good example.**

**1 Thessalonians 2:10-12** [NIV] *"You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory."*

**The highest of all incentives for holy living is set before them. In the New Testament as in the Old Testament, the people of God must display the character of God.**

By faith they had already entered the Kingdom [created family] of God, but the revelation of its full glory belonged to a day yet future, they were however heirs of that glory and must live accordingly.

**1 Thessalonians 2:13-15** [NIV] *"And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe. For you, brothers, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews, who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to all men"*

Paul was so accustomed in hearing his message denounced as man-made, not only by non-Christian Jews, but by many Jewish Christians as well, that he found it especially encouraging when it was sincerely welcomed as good news from God, [**Galatians 1:11-12**].

Just as the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem were persecuted by other Jews, so the Gentile Christians in Thessalonica were being persecuted by their fellow Gentiles.

**Persecution is discouraging, especially when it comes from your own people.**

**When you take a stand for Jesus Christ, you may face opposition, disapproval and ridicule from your neighbours, friends and even family members.**

**1 Thessalonians 2:16** [NIV] *"in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last."*

**A similar effort is being made today to stop people from knowing our Saviour and Creator God, Jesus Christ.**

**The delusion of evolution that tells unthinking people that there is no need for a Creator God, brings on each generation evil results and the eventual wrath of God on those who teach this lie.**

This is fully expanded in **Romans 1:18-32**. There are also articles on this website on this subject. [Please download and study all the articles under the main heading, 'Evolution – The Delusion Of.']

**A study of these articles will help you avoid being blinded to the truth of the gospel message by Satan, [2 Corinthians 4:4] and expose him as the liar he is, [John 8:44].**

**1 Thessalonians 2:17-18** [NIV] *“But, brothers, when we were torn away from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. For we wanted to come to you, certainly I, Paul, did, again and again, but Satan stopped us.”*

It was not lack of interest that prevented Paul from going back to visit the Thessalonian Church, but circumstances over which he had no control.

Satan is real, he is the god of this world [age] allowed by the Eternal God for a purpose, [2 Corinthians 4:3-4]. Also notice that Jesus Christ did **not** tell Satan that the world was **not** his to give, [Matthew 4:8-9].

**Resisting Satan’s influence brings us closer to the Eternal God, [James 4:7]. To resist Satan helps us to grow spiritually, [1 Peter 5:6-9].**

Paul detected this subtle agency of Satan behind the politarch’s action in expecting bail from Jason and the other Christians, binding them over to prevent Paul, the alleged cause of the disturbance, from coming back to Thessalonica, [Acts 17:1-9].

**1 Thessalonians 2:19-20** [NIV] *“For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy.”*

If Paul’s converts do him credit, he will face with joy the review of his service to Jesus Christ at His Second Coming.

**1 Thessalonians 3:1-5** [NIV] *“So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God’s fellow-worker in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, so that no-one would be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them. In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know. For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter might have tempted you and our efforts might have been useless.”*

Because Paul could not return to Thessalonica he sent Timothy as his representative to encourage them in their faith in the face of persecution and other troubles.

**Some think that troubles are always caused by sin or a lack of faith, yet trials are a part of God’s plan for all believers.**

Experiencing problems and persecutions can build character, [James 1:2-4];

Perseverance, [Romans 5:3-5];

And develops sensitivity towards others who also face trouble, [2 Corinthians 1:3-7].

Problems are unavoidable for God’s people, in fact your troubles may be a sign of effective Christian living, [Hebrews 12:4-11].

**1 Thessalonians 3:6-10** [NIV] *“But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you. Therefore, brothers, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord. How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.”*

In this passage of scripture we see essential qualities of a Christian leader.

**Affection** – It will always remain true that we can never influence people or win them for Jesus Christ unless we like them.

**Anxiety** – We have to remain anxious as to how our love and compassion for a person is helping them make changes for good in their lives, and are strengthened to face problems and persecution.

**Help** – When Paul sent Timothy to Thessalonica it was not merely to inspect the church but to help them.

It should be the great aim of every parent, teacher or preacher, not so much to criticise and condemn those in their charge for their faults and mistakes but always to help them reform their lives.

**Joy** – Paul expressed his joy that his converts were standing fast.

There is no joy like that of a parent who can point to a child who has done well, or a teacher who sees spiritual growth in those they are instructing.

**Prayer** – Paul prayed for the converts in Thessalonica, taking their needs to God’s mercy seat, and that they may mature spiritually.

**When we can serve people no other way, when we are like Paul separated from them, there is one thing we can still do, we can pray for them.**

**1 Thessalonians 3:11-13** [NIV] *“Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. 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.”*

Paul wanted to return to Thessalonica but we have no record of him being able to do this, but when he was travelling through Asia on his third journey, he was joined by Aristarchus and Secundus who were both from Thessalonica, [Acts 20:4-5].

**In this passage of scripture Paul’s mind is best seen, for Paul everything was of God.**

Paul prays to God to open up a way for him whereby he may return to Thessalonica.

It is to God that Paul turned to for guidance in the ordinary day-to-day problems of life.

**One of the great mistakes of life is to turn to God only in the great moments and overpowering emergencies and crises.**

**No person can ever meet God without God first being in them, for it is the active presence of the Holy Spirit, who is God, within us that can prepare us to meet God, Jesus Christ, on the day of our judgement, [2 Corinthians 5:10-12].**

To more fully understand the above statement I suggest that you study the articles on the Holy Spirit on this website listed under the main heading ‘Holy Spirit.’

**1 Thessalonians 4:1-8** [NIV] *“Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should **avoid sexual immorality**; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honourable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter no-one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit.”*

**One thing that sanctifies [sets apart for a special task] a Christian is avoiding sexual immorality.**

Sexual standards were very low in the Roman Empire and in many societies today they are not any higher.

**The temptation to engage in sexual intercourse outside the marriage of a man and a woman has always been a powerful tool in Satan's hands to destroy humanity.**

**Giving in to this temptation can have disastrous results. Sexual sins always hurt someone; individuals, families, businesses, church fellowships.**

**Besides the physical consequences there are also moral and spiritual consequences.**

**1 Corinthians 6:9-10** [NIV] *“Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the **sexually immoral** nor idolaters nor **adulterers** nor **male prostitutes** nor **homosexual offenders** nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”*

In a permissive society it is easy for Christians to overlook or tolerate some forms of immoral behaviour; drastic action needs to be taken.

**1 Corinthians 6:18-20** [NIV] *“**Flee from sexual immorality.** All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body.”*

**Paul reminds us that our physical bodies belong to God, purged by Jesus Christ's spilt blood, [Acts 20:28] and part of first act as a new Christian is to surrender our bodies to God to use how He sees fit.**

**Romans 12:1** [NIV] *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship.”*

The Greek word translated “bodies” is “soma” meaning our whole life, physical body, mind and human spirit, [Job 32:8; Proverbs 20:27; 1 Corinthians 2:11]. Only then can the Holy Spirit begin to re-educate us, [Romans 12:2].

The eventual goal for purity is found in the words of Jesus Christ as recorded by His apostle John.

**Revelation 19:6-9** [NIV] *“Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: ‘Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and **his bride has made herself ready.** Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.’ (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) Then the angel said to me, ‘Write: “Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!”’ And he added, ‘These are the true words of God.’”*

Note Jesus Christ's bride, the saints, [that is all true Christians] “has made herself ready.”

**It is during this physical life, and especially through physical marriage, that Christians can be prepared to be Christ's bride.**

**1 Thessalonians 4:9-12** [NIV] *“Now about **brotherly love** we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more. Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, **to mind your own business and to work with your hands**, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.”*

“*Brotherly love,*” translated from the Greek “*philadelphia,*” meaning kindness towards fellow Christians, **not** referring to any sexual content, but a concern for their welfare, both physical and spiritual.

**The importance of our being a good example to all who are not yet Christians by our daily life, working so as not be dependent on anyone.**

**1 Thessalonians 4:13-18** [NIV] *“Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord for ever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.”*

Some elderly Christians had died and their future was a concern, out of brotherly love, of those who were still alive.

**Paul wanted the Thessalonians to realise that death was not the end of our life story, all because of the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ and His resurrection that freed us from the power of physical death.**

**Hebrews 2:14-15** [NIV] *“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”*

**Satan can use the power of death to enslave us to his way of life that will end in eternal death.**

**Jesus Christ’s resurrection broke that power Satan has over us by giving us hope beyond physical death.**

**Such knowledge is a powerful way to encourage all Christians to remain faithful to their Saviour and Master, Jesus Christ.**

**1 Thessalonians 5:1-11** [NIV] *“Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, ‘Peace and safety’, destruction will come on them suddenly, as labour pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. 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. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.”*

“*Times and dates*” refer to the knowledge of the events that will lead up to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

**Efforts to determine the date of Jesus Christ’s Second Coming is foolish.**

Do not be misled by anyone who claims to know, even believers will be surprised, for Jesus Christ’s return will be sudden and unexpected.

**What Paul tells us is to be ready at any time.**

Putting on the protective armour that God provides every true Christian, [**verse 8**].

For more about the Christian's armour, read **Ephesians 6:13-17**.

It is very natural that New Testament writers to all intents and purposes identify the "*Day of the Lord*" in the Old Testament to that of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

To a Jew all time was divided into two ages: the present age, which was wholly bad, and a golden age of God. In between there was the "*Day of the Lord*," a day that would be like the birth pains of a new world.

It would be a day when one world would be shattered and another was born, [**Isaiah 22:5; Isaiah 13:9; Zephaniah 1:14-16; Amos 5:18; Jeremiah 30:7; Malachi 4:1; Joel 2:31**].

The main characteristics of that day would be sudden and unexpected and would involve a cosmic upheaval, and a time of judgement.

**Very naturally people were anxious to know when that day would be.**

Jesus Christ had bluntly and definitely said that no human knew when that day would be, even He did not know, only God the Father, [**Mark 13:32; Acts 1:7; Matthew 24:36**].

**1 Thessalonians 5:12-13** [NIV] "*Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.*"

Paul comes to the end of this letter with a list of good attitudes of mind for all Christians.

**Respect to all spiritual leaders who are true to God's Word, the Christian Bible, and guided by the Holy Spirit.**

**1 John 4:1-3** [NIV] "*Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognise the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.*"

**Some spiritual leaders are influenced by Satan and give deceiving words that are often "half-truths" that look and sound good to a person who is not led by the Holy Spirit, [John 16:13; 2 Corinthians 11:14-15].**

**1 Thessalonians 5:14-15** [NIV] "*And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.*"

**An idle mind can easily open itself up to the influence of Satan and his false teachers.**

Be patient with all for we all are at different levels of spiritual maturity.

Kindness must flow through the whole Christian fellowship and out to those who are not yet called to receive salvation from death, by faith in what Jesus Christ has done for them.

**1 Thessalonians 5:16-18** [NIV] "*Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*"

**Joy is one of the "fruits" of an active indwelling of the Holy Spirit, [Galatians 5:22-25].**

**It is possible to be in a prayerful attitude at all times, even silent prayers are heard by the Eternal God, [Psalms 139:1-4].**

Paul is not teaching that we should thank God **for** everything that happens to us [verse 18] but **in** everything.

Evil does **not** come from God, [James 1:13-15] only good things come from God, [James 1:17-18].

**But when evil strikes we can still be thankful for God's presence and for the good He will accomplish through the distress.**

**1 Thessalonians 5:19-22** [NIV] *“Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil.”*

All of these are linked to our having an active presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

“*Prophecies*” [Greek “*prōphētēs*” meaning an inspired speaker], through whom the Holy Spirit is guiding us into the truth, [John 16:13]. Such teachers should **not** be treated with contempt.

**But note we need to test all that is said against scripture, that is inspired by the Holy Spirit, [1 Corinthians 2:9-11; 2 Peter 1:20-21].**

We avoid evil by avoiding tempting situations and concentrating on obeying God.

**1 Thessalonians 5:23-24** [NIV] *“May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.”*

The whole of human life is included in these verses.

“*Spirit*” – Greek “*pneuma*” refers to the “*human spirit*,” [Job 32:8; Proverbs 20:27; 1 Corinthians 2:11].

“*Soul*” – Greek “*psuchē*” meaning breath of life which is in humans and animals alike.

“*Body*” – Greek “*soma*” meaning the whole instrument of life, the complete human being.

**The influence of Jesus Christ must be on every aspect of our lives.**

The first letter of Paul to the Thessalonian Church, if applied, can help us to assist fellow Christians to mature spiritually.