

# First Thessalonians

**Author:** Paul the Apostle

**Written to:** The church in Thessalonica

**Timeline:** c. 51 - 54 A.D. written from Corinth during Paul's second missionary journey (Acts 18)

**Theme:** The Return of Jesus Christ

**Purpose of writing:** Paul encouraged believers in the faith and to live a life of purity. He corrected some misconceptions of Christ's return and affirmed the hope we have in the coming of Jesus Christ.

## **Introduction:**

Paul first preached the gospel in Thessalonica on his second missionary journey. Acts 17:1-15 records the founding of the church. In the short time that Paul ministered there, he grounded them firmly in their faith. The Lord did a great work among the people and the witness of the church was known far and wide. Paul had to leave the city and was unable to return. Paul sent Timothy to find out how the church was doing (1 Thessalonians 3:6). Through this letter, he encouraged the saints in their walks with the Lord and to let them know of his love and concern for them.

As we begin our study of the book of First Thessalonians consider the following questions and write your responses:

1. Acts 17:1-9 records the founding of the church at Thessalonica by Paul during his second missionary journey. What do you learn about the citizens of Thessalonica from these verses? What do you learn about Paul? What caused him to leave Thessalonica (verse 10)?

2. A major theme of 1 Thessalonians is how the believer should live in light of Christ's return. Briefly summarize what you already know about our Lord's return for His people.
3. Paul was deeply concerned and had a tender regard for the young converts in Thessalonica (see 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8). Who was involved in your conversion? How did this person express tenderness and concern for you as a new believer?

### **Christ's Coming an Inspiration to Young Christians**

Read First Thessalonians 1:1-10

1. Paul's name was linked with his fellow laborers, Silvanus and Timothy, in verse 1. With whom are you linked in ministry? How has this person (these people) impacted your Christian walk?
2. Paul opened his epistle with the greeting *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*. Paul was speaking to believers so this did not refer primarily to the grace of salvation but rather to the grace which sustains believers on a daily basis. How is the Lord's grace sustaining you today?
3. Write out verse 5. Comment on this quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson, "What you *are*...thunders so that I cannot hear what you say." How do you *live the gospel* (having a life of integrity, holiness and devotion to the Lord) on a daily basis?

## **Christ's Coming an Inspiration to the Faithful Servant**

Read First Thessalonians 2:1-20

1. Read verse 4, concentrating on the last part. Are you more concerned with pleasing man or with pleasing God? If the former, what is one specific thing you can do this week to insure that the fear of the Lord is the greatest motivator in your life?
2. In verses 7-8 Paul described himself and his companions as *a nursing mother who cherishes her own children*; the picture is one of willing sacrifice. For whom have you sacrificed in ministry? How have you been able to keep a cheerful, willing heart while doing so?
3. Verse 13 describes the Word of God as that which *effectively works* in those who believe. Look up the word effective and write the definition. How is the Word of God effectively working in your life this week?

## **An Incentive for Christians to Love One Another**

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:1-13

1. Read verse 2. Paul's primary concern had been for the spiritual welfare of the Thessalonians. How is each of these areas of concern being addressed in your own life?
  - being established in the faith
  - being encouraged in the faith
2. In verse 8 Paul exhorted his readers to *stand fast in the Lord*. This is a military term that means to refuse to retreat in the face of enemy

attack. How do *you* stand fast in the Lord? How has the enemy attempted to discourage you when you have done so? How have you resisted him?

3. As Paul prayed for the Thessalonians in verses 11-13, he asked that the Lord would make them increase and abound in love (*agape*, unconditional love) to one another and to all. The word *all* means that this would include those who are *unlovely*. Take an inventory of your words, thoughts and behavior during the last week. In what ways have you expressed *agape* love? How have you failed to do so?

## **Christ's Coming a Comfort to the Bereaved**

Read First Thessalonians 4:1-18

1. Read verses 3-8. *Sanctification* means to be pure, holy, or set apart. In this section of Scripture, the specific focus is that of being set apart from sexual immorality. Read 1 Corinthians 10:12. What are you doing to protect your life from sexual immorality? Be specific.
2. The word for *brotherly love* in verse 9 is *philadelphia* and it means *fraternal affection, kindness and love of the brethren*. Consider *philadelphia* love. Take an inventory of your words, thoughts and behavior during the last week. In what ways have you expressed *philadelphia* love?
3. Paul's first words in verse 13 are, *But I do not want you to be ignorant*. Read verses 13-18 and summarize what you learn. Note: this describes what is often called the *rapture of the church*. How can you use this knowledge to comfort others?

## **Christ's Coming a Challenge to Holy Living**

Read First Thessalonians 5:1-28

1. Summarize what you learn about the Day of the Lord, which immediately follows the Rapture of the Church, from verses 1-3. (You may want to read Matthew 24:1-51 for more detail.) A thief in the night comes unexpectedly and brings loss to those whose homes he invades. Those who are caught unaware by the Day of the Lord may suffer the ultimate loss. The Day of the Lord referred to here speaks of a period of time when the Lord's wrath and judgment will be poured out onto a rebellious world. At that time He will unveil His character—mighty, powerful, and holy, thus terrifying to His enemies. Note: As Christians, we are not appointed to wrath (verse 9) and will not experience this judgment. Paul does address believers, however, in verse 4-11. Make a note of his instruction to the brethren.
  
2. Verses 12-13 exhort the brethren concerning those who *labor among them and are over them in the Lord*. Who are these people in your life? What is one thing you can do this week to *esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake*?
  
3. The epistle ends with several exhortations in verses 14-22. List one way you can do each of the following:
  - warn those who are unruly
  
  - comfort the fainthearted
  
  - uphold the weak
  
  - be patient with others
  
  - not render evil for evil

- pursue what is good both for you and for all
- rejoice always
- pray without ceasing
- give thanks in everything
- not quench the Holy Spirit
- treat all things
- hold fast to what is good
- abstain from every form of evil

## **Summary**

As you conclude your study of the book of First Thessalonians consider the following questions and write your answers:

- 1.** What is the most significant thing that you have learned from your study about the Lord, His character, or His attributes? How does this encourage you? Take a few moments to thank and praise the Lord for the things that you learned about Him.
  
- 2.** What is the most important lesson or new insight that you have learned from your study of this book? How can you apply this lesson in your life this week?