

1 THESSALONIANS 1:1 - 4:7

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It has been a number of years since we last studied this book ... about 12/13/14 years ago.

Fairly short ... 5 Chapters in Book 1 and 3 chapters in Book 2.

Why study these letters to the Thessalonians?

1. All scripture is profitable
2. The Key theme is about the return of Christ ... very soon.
3. Warnings of sexual immorality

All 3 are very relevant to us.

I and II Thessalonians are probably the first of Paul's letters that we know about ... written about 51/52 AD. Barely 20 years after Christ's death ... burial and resurrection.

Thessalonica ... was a decent size city ... ca.200,000 people. A seaport ... on one of the major routes across the Roman Empire ... very cosmopolitan ... lots of pagan temples ... lots of immorality.

First ... let's look at Paul's first visit and the experiences he underwent there.

Acts 17:1-15 (NKJV)

1 Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews.

2 Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, (the Old Testament)

3 explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ." (*Messiah*)

4 And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas.

5 But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.

6 But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, "These who have turned the world upside down have come here too.

7 Jason has harboured them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king—Jesus."

8 And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things.

9 So when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.

10 Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews.

11 These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. (*To the Law and to The Testimony*)

12 Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men.

13 But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, they came there also and stirred up the crowds.

14 Then immediately the brethren sent Paul away, to go to the sea; but both Silas and Timothy remained there.

15 So those who conducted Paul brought him to Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him with all speed, they departed.

Paul was probably only there about 3 weeks preaching in the synagogue ... but maybe 2 or 3 months with the brethren ... but he did then leave abruptly. The message was perhaps incomplete ... hence letter(s). The visit was around 49 AD. His first letter was probably about 51-52 AD.

1 Thessalonians 1:1 (NKJV)

1 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. *(No mention of the Trinity? The obvious answer is: there is no Trinity!)*

1 Thessalonians 1:2-7 (NKJV)

2 We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers,

3 **remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father,**

4 knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God.

5 **For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit** and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.

6 **And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction,** with joy of the Holy Spirit,

7 so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.

1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 (NKJV)

9 For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how **you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,**
10 and to wait for His Son from heaven, *(all through this and the next letter ... the key theme is the return of Jesus Christ)* whom He raised from the dead, **even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.**

There are at least 2 ways to look at the "wrath to come".

- Wrath ... perhaps ultimate consequence of sin
- But in the context of I and II Thessalonians ... believers to be delivered from God's end-time judgment on the wicked and/or ... world

The theme of Jesus' return is throughout I and II Thessalonians. It was continually on their mind. It's great news if you are a believer ... if you aren't ... it's not!

They were very aware. How about us? Are we conscious of Jesus return? On our minds? Real? Are we looking forward to it? Or?

And ... if we want to escape the "wrath to come" ... we need to heed the warnings. Be alert!!

1 Thessalonians 2:1-5 (NKJV)

1 For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain.

2 But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict.

3 For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit.

4 But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts.

5 For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness—God is witness.

Paul is straight and true. God has entrusted us with this message. Paul was not covetous ... greedy ... or motivated by money. But ... a lot of church ministers are. Compare:

Acts 20:17-19, 25-37 (NKJV)

17 From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church.

18 And when they had come to him, he said to them: "You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you,

19 serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews;

25 "And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more.

26 Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men.

27 For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.

28 Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

29 For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.

30 Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.

31 Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

32 "So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

33 **I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel.**

34 **Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me.** *(In other words ... Paul worked his own passage. He didn't make demands for money from other people)*

35 **I have shown you in every way, by labouring like this, that you must support the weak.** *(Not the weak support you ... not the poor in the church support the big fat minister!!)* And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' "

36 And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all.

37 Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him,

And:

1 Peter 5:1-4 (NKJV)

1 The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed:

2 **Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly;** *(just like Paul said ... not for money)*

3 nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock;

4 and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

Back to Thessalonians.

Paul could have sought support ... there were people willing to partner with him ... occasionally he was assisted ... but typically he avoided taking money. He wanted to not appear covetous.

Compare that with today: TV evangelists ... with Rolls Royces ... aeroplanes ... ranches ... covered in bling ... demanding 1st/2nd/3rd tithes. In Dave Pack's case: the doctrine of "common" ... send him all of your money ... it isn't yours ... it is his.

It is possible that some were criticising the Apostle Paul ... unfairly ... and his defence was clear.

1 Thessalonians 2:6-12 (NKJV)

6 Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.

7 But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children.

8 So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.

9 For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for labouring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God.

10 You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe;

11 as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children,

12 that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

So ... Paul set a great example of working. Paul was a tent-maker. He supported himself. He avoided the appearance of taking advantage. Compare:

2 Thessalonians 3:6-10 (NKJV)

6 But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us.

7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you;

8 nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you,

9 not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.

10 For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.

There are indications that some were so expectant of Jesus' return ... they'd given up work and long-term plans? A parasite living off others. The church should not be supporting people who are unwilling to work.

1 Thessalonians 2:13-16 (NKJV)

13 For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

14 For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Jews,

15 who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men,

16 forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.

Paul is not happy with what is happening to the Jewish people. The wrath upon the Jews had already begun (some record 30,000 killed at Passover in 48 AD) ... so the wrath was starting. But the major fulfilment was in 70 AD when the temple was destroyed by General Titus. According to Josephus ... 1.1 million were slaughtered. That's wrath falling on the Jews.

Titus refused to accept any wreath of victory after the destruction of Jerusalem. "There is no merit in vanquishing people forsaken by their own God". Almost the end of the Jews in Palestine up until about 1948.

God's people suffered much persecution in those days. "Christians" today ... in the Middle East ... across Africa ... especially Islamic countries ... people who face real persecution. People who have turned away from Islam and Allah and have accepted Jesus Christ. Jailed ... churches burned ... people slaughtered ... for their "Christian" beliefs. The Center For The Study of Global Christianity estimates that 100,000 Christians are killed every year ... that's 11 every hour (so ... about 12 killed during this Bible Study). That is persecution!!

And we complain: someone's upset because you don't send them a christmas card ... or your room booking at the Feast is cancelled! And we call that persecution?!! That's a minor inconvenience!

1 Thessalonians 2:17-20 (NKJV)

17 But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavoured more eagerly to see your face with great desire.

18 **Therefore we wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but Satan hindered us.** (*Satan can hinder ... e.g. Thorn in the Flesh. Satan appointed a messenger to harass Paul. In many*

areas God has handed over the responsibility to us. We shouldn't give place to the devil. Satan has a certain amount of flexibility today)

19 **For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?**

20 For you are our glory and joy.

"At His coming". This is the key theme in the letters to the Thessalonians. It is on their minds. They probably all thought it was very soon.

Coming = Greek: Parousia. Arrival ... in Papyri of the day ... the technical meaning was "arrival of a king or ruler". Mentioned 24 times in the New Testament ... 7 in the letter to the Thessalonians (6 times about the coming of Jesus and 1 time about the coming of the lawless one).

1 Thessalonians 3:1-5 (NKJV)

1 Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone,

2 and **sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow labourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith,**

3 **that no one should be shaken by these afflictions;** for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this.

4 **For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know.**

5 For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain.

Tribulation is part of the territory. Compare:

Acts 14:19-22 (NKJV)

19 Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.

20 However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city. And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.

21 And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch,

22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."

This is what happens to us to varying degrees. And when it happens ... we shouldn't be thinking that we have done something terribly wrong.

There is a bit of a link here. There are millions of born-again believers ... who believe they will be secretly raptured before the Great Tribulation ... will not see serious persecution. When they are not raptured ... they will look around at the persecution and horrendous events ... they won't be mentally prepared ... they may lose all faith. "Why has God deserted me?"

Rapture-believers use I Thessalonians 4 as the key to their secret rapture. We will get to that later.

1 Thessalonians 3:6-13 (NKJV)

6 But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you—

7 therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith.

8 For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord.

9 For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God,

10 night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?

11 Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you.

12 And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you,

13 **so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.** (*Parousia ... the arrival ... even in 50 AD this is still the key theme*)

1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 (NKJV)

1 **Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God;**

2 for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

3 **For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality;**

4 **that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honour,**

5 **not in passion of lust,** like the Gentiles who do not know God;

6 **that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter,** because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified.

7 **For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness.**

There were a couple of problems that Paul had to deal with here in Thessalonica. We are to live pleasing to God. Not just doing the minimum. Avoid the most serious sins ... otherwise ... carry on like everybody else around you. No! Living in a way that is pleasing to God. Actively choose the lifestyle that pleases God. Compare:

Colossians 1:9-10 (NKJV)

9 For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;
10 that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

Live in a way that is fully pleasing to God.

And:

1 John 3:21-22 (NKJV)

21 Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.

22 And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.

Going back to Thessalonians.

How's your lifestyle? In particular here ... Paul singles out sexual immorality. Be sanctified (set apart ... separate from. Don't go with the crowd!) ... Be Holy. Be pure! It was a big problem then ... and today!!! It is unacceptable to God. (There was a poll in the US recently ... only 3% of people getting married for the first time are virgins). The standards are pretty much the same today as they were in Thessalonica.