

1st Thessalonians Chapter 1

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Historical Background (Acts 17v1-10)

The local church at Thessalonica was established during Paul's 2nd missionary journey, the Spirit of God having called Paul and his coworkers over to Macedonia (Acts 16), and directed them to preach the gospel in this large metropolis.

They reasoned with the Jews from the scriptures concerning the truth of Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah of OT prophecy, and the need for His suffering, death & resurrection (Acts 17v2-3).

The preaching involved "***much contention***" (1st Thess 2v2), but was marked also by persistence, loving persuasion and tender compassion (see 1st Thess 2vs7,9).

Some of the Jews believed this message, and Gentiles were also saved (see 1st Thess 1v9).

The preaching had a big impact on the city, they had "***turned the world upside down***" (Acts 17v6).

There was much opposition from unbelieving Jews, resulting in believers being brought before the city magistrates, accused of insurrection to Rome & Caesar (Acts 17v7).

The truth of the Lord Jesus as King, and His coming "***kingdom and glory***" (1st Thess 2v12) must have been proclaimed.

After a brief time in Thessalonica, probably just a few months, they were forced to leave because of the opposition.

Paul travels on to Athens, then Corinth, and he wants to return to Thessalonica, "***but Satan hindered us***" (1st Thess 2v18), so he sends Timothy back to report on their spiritual state.

When Timothy returns with a good report (see 1st Thess 3v6), Paul immediately writes this 1st epistle from Corinth, his 1st church letter, approx. AD 50-51, probably less than 1 year after his visit there.

1st Thessalonians is written to establish the Thessalonian believers in their faith, to encourage them in the face of the opposition, to exhort them in their walk for God (see 1st Thess 2v12, 4v1), and to enlighten them concerning the Lord's coming again.

1st Thessalonians Outline

Ch1: Personal to the Thessalonians, relative to their **past conversion** to God.

Ch2: Personal to the apostle Paul; his **past conduct** when he was amongst them.

Ch3: Personal to the apostle Paul; his **present conduct**, and sending Timothy to them.

Ch4v1-12: Practical & moral teaching, relative to their **present sanctification**.

Ch4v13-18: Doctrinal teaching on the Lord's coming for the Church, **reunion & rapture**

Ch5v1-11: Doctrinal teaching on the coming **day of the Lord & His revelation in power**.

Ch5v12-28: Practical exhortations relative to their continued **spiritual preservation**.

The Truth of the Lord's Coming Again In 1st Thessalonians

All believers throughout the Church age are to live in anticipation of Christ's imminent return.

Ch1v10: His coming again in view of **our deliverance** from a coming day of tribulation wrath.

Ch2v19: His coming again in view of **our presentation** before the Lord Jesus Christ.

Ch3v13: His coming again in view of **our manifestation**, sharing in the manifestation of Christ's glory.

Ch4v15: His coming again in view of **our reunion & rapture**, when we will meet Him in the air.

Ch5v23: His coming again for **our present sanctification & preservation**.

v1: SALUTATIONS

Paul graciously links himself with Silas & Timothy, those he laboured with in the evangelisation of Thessalonica. He makes no mention of his apostleship.

A local "**church** (Gk *ecclesia*) **of the Thessalonians**", a called out gathering of believers, had been established in Thessalonica.

They were a church which is "**in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ**", a title used only in writing to the Thessalonians, that establishes the absolute deity & equality of the Lord Jesus with the Father.

They were a church in union with divine Persons, sharing together in the realm of spiritual & divine life.

A church "**in God the Father**" would mean much to believers converted from heathenism & idolatry.

A church "**in the Lord Jesus Christ**" would mean much to converted Jews, who now acknowledged Jesus Christ as Lord & Messiah, and that He did proceed forth as the Son of God from God the Father.

A church which is "**in God the Father**" would speak of divine fatherly care, love & resource.

With this tremendous privilege, comfort & blessing comes commensurate responsibility; as part of a divine community, divine standards & appropriate character must be displayed (see ch4v1-12).

A church "**in the Lord Jesus Christ**" will be submitting to His Lordship and the apostolic teachings.

Paul extends to them grace & peace from this same divine resource.

v2: THANKSGIVINGS

The theme of Paul's thanksgivings to God for them (see 1 Thess 1v2, 2v13, 3v9, 2 Thess 1v3, 2v13).

Here Paul emphasises the selfless constancy of their thanksgivings for these believers.

v3: CHRISTIAN VIRTUES

Paul could give thanks to God for their spiritual state; specifically these 3 cardinal Christian graces, showing how they were model examples of believers in the Lord Jesus (see ch1v7).

JB Lightfoot - "**faith rests on the past, love works in the present, hope looks to the future**".

Their "**work of faith**" as to their past time of conversion (see ch1v9-10), and their steadfast continuance despite the "**much affliction**" (ch1v6), such that their "**faith to God-ward is spread abroad**" (ch1v8).

Their present "**labour of love**"; willing to expend all their energy to the point of exhaustion, motivated by love for Christ & His love for them.

Their future "**patience of hope**", a spirit of endurance, in view of the coming again of the Lord Jesus (ch1v10).

v4: SOVEREIGN CHOICE

“Knowing, brethren beloved by God, your election” (RV, JND, Newberry); God’s sovereign electing choice of believers is an expression of His great heart of love (see also 2nd Thess 2v13).

By His rich grace, God chose a people to be like His own well beloved Son.

All that Paul had observed of the Thessalonians displayed the truth that they were God’s elect.

v5-8: CENTRALITY OF THE WORD OF GOD

v5: The Word of God brought TO them in power

The character of the gospel preaching in Thessalonica; it was communicated ***“in word”***, a message based wholly upon the Word of God (see Acts 17v2-3), with its inherent ***“power”*** (see Rom 1v16; 2nd Cor 4v7).

The divine source of the power is ***“in the Holy Ghost”***; all service needs to be rendered with prayerful dependence upon the convicting power of the Spirit of God.

They preached also ***“in much assurance”***, i.e. with full conviction of the truth of the message, and that the seed of God’s Word was falling upon good ground and producing lasting fruit despite the persecution.

Their manner of lives commended the message they preached, giving a moral authority to their preaching.

The Thessalonians could see the selflessness of the servants, enduring so much for their sakes (see ch2v1-12).

v6: The Word of God received BY them with conviction

The Thessalonians became imitators of the servants, and followers of the Lord Jesus, ***“having received the word in much affliction”***, but also with inward ***“joy of the Holy Ghost”*** in the face of all the opposition.

Paul & Silas at Philippi (Acts 16) are obvious examples of that Holy Spirit joy in the midst of much affliction.

v7: The Word of God expressed IN them effectually

The Thessalonian believers were themselves worthy to be imitated, becoming ***“ensamples (models, JND) to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia”***; they were a model church to be followed.

The Word of God was effectual in their ongoing spiritual development (see also 1st Thess 2v13).

v8: The Word of God sounded forth FROM them in effective testimony

Paul commends their evangelical outreach; how that they ***“sounded out the word of the Lord”***.

It was like the blowing of a trumpet, giving a clear & loud proclamation which reverberated further afield.

Their faith toward God was so ***“spread abroad”***; they were not inconspicuous in turning in faith to God.

Paul did not feel the need to publicise this, ***“so that we need not to speak anything”***, because it was known.

v9: TURNING TO GOD

They had positively & actively ***“turned to God”***, as a decisive act of their own free will, i.e. human responsibility.

They ***“turned to God from (APO, away from) idols”***, forsaking the dead & lifeless heathen idols, ***“to serve the living and true God”***, and to worship Him, i.e. the grand purpose for the lives of believers in the Lord Jesus.

Abram did not turn away from the heathen idols of ancient Mesopotamia, and then find God; it was ***“the God of glory”*** (Acts 7v2) that 1st appeared to him, and caused him to recognise the falseness of the pagan gods.

The attractiveness of God’s Son had caused the Thessalonians to positively turn to the living and true God.

Their positive turning to God (v9) was the evidence of their **“work of faith”** (v3).

Their active service, **“to serve** (as bondservants) **the living and true God”** (v9), was their **“labour of love”** (v3).

Their patient waiting for the coming of God’s Son from heaven (v10) was their **“patience of hope”** (v3).

v10: WAITING FOR DELIVERANCE

“And to wait for His Son from (EK, out from) heaven, whom He raised from (EK, out from) the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from (APO, away from) the wrath to come”.

The same energy with which they served the living and true God (v9), was also being channelled into patiently waiting for Him as **“our Deliverer from the coming wrath”** (JND).

The Christian serves dutifully and watches daily, both in anticipation and eager expectation of the Lord’s imminent coming again.

We wait with patient endurance for God’s Son to come out from heaven, a resurrected Man who is on the other side of death, whom God raised out from among the dead, even the historical Man **“Jesus”** who first came to this world, was rejected by men, and was put to death.

The emphasis in this reference to the Lord’s coming is with respect to our deliverance altogether away from coming wrath. The Lord Jesus will come again for His Church, to rapture His Church home to heaven, before the day of coming tribulation wrath, when God’s righteous wrath and indignation falls upon this sinful world. Relative to our deliverance at the Rapture of the Church, the wrath is still future, it is **“the wrath to come”**, and not wrath that has already fallen upon the earth when the Church is raptured.

This truth provides an important contrast between the Church, which will be delivered altogether away from wrath, and the nation of Israel which will be saved out of the midst of the tribulation wrath.

Jeremiah 30v7 **“Alas for that day is great, so that none is like it: It is even the time of Jacob's trouble** (i.e. Israel’s trouble, not the Church’s trouble), **but he** (the Jew) **shall be saved out of it”.**

Paul further emphasises this contrast between Israel and the Church in this epistle. In ch2v16 **“For the wrath is come upon them** (the Jews) **to the uttermost”**; but ch5v9 **“For God has not appointed us** (the Church) **to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ”.**

The Tribulation wrath is the 70th week of that prophetic calendar outlined in Daniel 9, **“determined upon thy people”** (v24), i.e. Daniel's people, i.e. the nation of Israel, not the Church.

Romans 5v9 **“Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from (APO, away from) wrath through Him”.** As those who have been justified on the basis of the shedding of His precious blood, how **“much more”** certain and assured we can be of being saved from wrath through Himself.

Also no thought of a partial rapture of the Church when the Lord comes to the air, leaving behind some Church saints to go through the Tribulation; hence 1st Thess 4v18 **“Wherefore comfort one another with these words”.**