

FIRST THESSALONIANS

CHAPTER ONE

The book of First Thessalonians is probably the first epistle written by the Apostle Paul. The epistle contains a great deal of important teaching and practical instruction for Christian living. It primarily is a letter of encouragement and thanksgiving for the faithfulness of the Thessalonian believers. However, it also addresses the important issues of morality and the need for Christians to work to provide for themselves. Most notably this letter teaches us about the event which will mark the end of this current dispensation of the Grace of God, the rapture of the Church, the Body of Christ.

Before beginning this study you should take time to read through First Thessalonians from beginning to end. This will help you better understand each section in the context of the entire book. While doing the study read each question carefully using the given Scripture reference to find your answer. May the Lord bless you as you study the book of First Thessalonians.

INTRODUCTION

AUTHOR: The apostle Paul

PLACE OF WRITING: Written from Corinth.

DATE OF WRITING: First Thessalonians was probably written in 50 or 51 AD while Paul was residing in Corinth for 18 months as recorded in Acts 18:11.

PURPOSE, THEME AND SUBJECT MATTER OF THE LETTER:

Thessalonica was the most prominent city in the area of northern Greece known as Macedonia. It was a bustling seaport and at the intersection of two major Roman roads. It had a population of about 200,000 at the time Paul visited it. It had a fairly large Jewish population and thus a synagogue where Paul preached for three Sabbath days (Acts 17:2).



After establishing the church in Thessalonica Paul moved on to Berea, Athens and Corinth (Acts 17-18). While in Corinth he was joined by Timothy and Silas (Acts 18:5). They returned with news from the Thessalonian church which prompted Paul to pen this letter of encouragement and instruction to them. Paul was thankful that the believers had remained faithful but apparently there were a number of issues that had arisen and Paul felt it was necessary to correct their thinking. The issue of greatest concern was that there was confusion among the believers about the nature of the coming of the Lord and the resurrection of believers that had died. Paul mentions something about the appearing of the Lord in each chapter, with the most attention to the subject given in chapters 4 and 5 in which we find a detailed description of the order of occurrences that make up the great event commonly referred to as the Rapture of the Church. It seems that some in the church felt that since the Lord could come at any moment that there was no need to work to support themselves. Paul lets them know in no uncertain terms that such a conclusion is unacceptable. Other areas of Christian behavior, such as sexual purity, are also addressed in this letter.

Please read the entire book of 1 Thessalonians. _____ Check.

Please memorize the following verse and be prepared to write it out at the end of this lesson.

“For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ”
(1 Thessalonians 5:9 – KJV)

GREETING AND THANKSGIVING

Read 1 Thessalonians Chapter 1 _____ Check

1. (v. 1) Who was together with Paul when he wrote this letter? _____

2. (v. 1) How does Paul describe the Thessalonian church? _____

3. (v. 2) What is the nature of Paul’s prayer? _____

4. (v. 3) For what three characteristics of the Thessalonians does Paul give thanks?
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____

Note: Read the following passages and look for the mention of faith, hope and love together: 1 Corinthians 13:13; Galatians 5:5-6; Colossians 1:4-5; Hebrews 6:10-12; Hebrews 10:22-24; 1 Peter 1:3-9

5. (v.4-5) What does Paul say was evidence that they were chosen (KJV elected) by God?

6. (v. 6) Whom did the Thessalonians follow? _____

7. (vss. 7-8) What was the result of the Thessalonian's faith and lifestyle? _____

8. (vs. 9b) What did the Thessalonian believers leave behind in order to follow God? _____

Note: This comment, that the Thessalonians turned from idols, is one reason why many scholars believe that there were many Gentile converts in the church. Had they been mostly Jewish converts Paul would not have mentioned them turning from idols as the Jews did not worship idols.

9. (vs. 10) For whom were the Thessalonians waiting and from where? _____

10. (vs. 10b) From what were they to be delivered? _____

Note: The "wrath" referred to in this passage is not eternal punishment in hell, but rather Paul is speaking of the time when God's wrath will be poured out on the world because of its disobedience. This wrath is the seven years of tribulation which will begin after the Church, the Body of Christ is taken out of the world. Please read Revelation 6:16-17 and Revelation 19:15. This is Paul's first reference in this epistle to the "appearing of the Lord" when we believers will be taken away to be with the Lord forever. This catching away is commonly called the "Rapture."

CHAPTER TWO

PAUL'S MINISTRY IN THESSALONICA

Read 1 Thessalonians Chapter 2 _____ Check

1. (vs. 1) How does Paul describe his visit to Thessalonica? _____

2. (vs.2) How had Paul and his companions been treated in Phillippi? _____

Note: Read Acts 16:16-40 for a description of the events Paul is referring to in verse 1.

3. (vs. 3-6a) Put into your own words the point which Paul is trying to make in these verses. _____

4. (vs. 7) How does Paul describe their attitude toward the Thessalonian believers? _____

5. (vss. 8-9) How did Paul and his companions prove that they were not seeking financial gain from the Thessalonians? _____

6. (vs. 10) What was the nature of Paul's lifestyle and testimony among the Thessalonians? _____

7. (vs. 12) How did Paul encourage the Thessalonians to live? _____

8. (vs. 13) How did the Thessalonians receive the Word of God? _____

9. (vs. 13) What does the Word of God do for those that believe? _____

Note: 1 Thessalonians 2:13 is one of the most important verses describing what the Word of God does in the life of the believer. The following quote summarizes the way the Word is used to change lives: "The Holy Spirit of God uses the Holy Word of God to produce the Holy Child of God." It is through His Word that God works in our lives to conform us to be like our Lord. See also Hebrews 4:12; 2 Timothy 3:16; Psalm 119:11 and Psalm 119:105.

10. (vs. 14) In what way were the Thessalonians like the believers in Judea? _____

11. (vs. 16) What did the Jews try to keep Paul and his companions from doing? _____

12. (vs. 16) What has come upon the Jews because of what they did to Paul? _____

Note: The Jews (the nation of Israel) in the Old Testament were God's chosen people. He had given to them many special blessings and promises. Rather than being a channel of blessing to the Gentile nations they became arrogant and kept the Word of God to themselves. The Jews resisted God's efforts to bring salvation freely to the Jew and Gentiles alike through the ministry of the Apostle Paul. Because of Israel's disobedience God set them aside and discontinued their special privileged position and established the Body of Christ as God's people for today in which there is no distinction between Jews and Gentiles. Read the following verses: (Acts 28:25-28; Romans 9:30-33). We will learn later in this study that when God takes away the Body of Christ when he appears in the clouds that Israel's special position will be restored.

13. (vs. 17-18) What was Paul's desire and who kept him from accomplishing it? _____

14. (vss. 19-20) How does Paul describe the Thessalonian believers? _____

Note: This passage and others (Philippians 4:1) demonstrate Paul's great love for the believers. He understood that the only thing that has lasting value in this world are people and the impact we can have on them for the glory of God. What he valued most of all things, next to knowing and loving the Lord Jesus Christ was the people he ministered to. Paul instructs us to follow him as he followed Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). This intense love for people is certainly one area that every believer should seek to develop in their lives.

CHAPTER THREE

TIMOTHY'S VISIT AND REPORT

Read 1 Thessalonians Chapter 3 _____ Check

1. (vs. 1) Where was Paul at the time Timothy went to visit the believers in Thessalonica? _____

2. (vs. 2) Why did Paul send Timothy to Thessalonica? _____

3. (vs. 3-4) What did Paul warn the Thessalonians of when he was with them? _____

4. (vs. 5) What was Paul so concerned about that he felt he needed to send Timothy to them? _____

5. (vs. 6) Describe Timothy's report on the condition of the Thessalonian church. _____

6. (vss. 7-10) What was Paul's response to Timothy's news? _____

7. (vs. 10) What did Paul desire after hearing this report? _____

8. (vss. 11-13) List three specific things Paul mentions in his prayer for the Thessalonians.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

9. (vs. 13) For how long would this be considered a legitimate prayer for believers? _____

CHAPTER FOUR

LIVING TO PLEASE GOD

Read 1 Thessalonians Chapter 4:1-12 _____ Check

1. (vs. 1) What instructions did Paul give to the Thessalonians? _____

2. (vs. 2) By whose authority did Paul instruct the Thessalonians? _____

3. (vs. 3) What is the will of God for believers as described in this verse? _____

4. (vs. 4) How should every believer live and behave? _____

Note: This is one of several passages in which the Lord specifically reveals His will for believers. Many times Christians worry and fret trying to discover God's will for their lives, seeking some evidence of God's leading in various situations, yet they ignore the clear teaching of the Scriptures regarding God's will. We have been given instruction regarding many of the most important decisions we have to make in life. If we are constantly seeking to follow God's revealed will in the scripture, the other aspects of life will fall into place.

5. (vs. 5) How are the heathen (Gentiles – KJV) described which explains their lustful behavior? _____

6. (vs. 6) What is the Lord's response to those that take advantage (defraud – KJV) others through sexual immorality? _____

Note: This verse is written to Christians and teaches us that God punishes disobedience in the life of the believer. The Bible clearly teaches that the eternal penalty for sin was paid when Christ died on the cross and we accept the gift of eternal life through faith. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says that "God made him that had no sin to become sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." This and many similar verses teach about our position

in Christ. We are saved, forgiven, justified and made righteous. When God looks upon us he does not see us as sinners but rather he sees the righteous perfection of Christ.

Although we are righteous positionally, we still live in our fleshly bodies and continue to sin. Despite our righteous position God does not ignore sinful behavior, thoughts and attitudes in His children. When the Bible says that he punishes those that commit sin, it is not the same as how he deals with unbelievers, but he disciplines the believer as a loving parent does with a child (Hebrews 12:7-11).

7. (vs. 7) To what kind of lifestyle did God call those that trust Him? _____

8. (vs. 8) How does Paul describe the man that rejects his teaching? _____

9. (vs. 8) What does God give us? _____

10. (vs. 9) What have we been taught by God? _____

11. (vs. 10) What does Paul encourage the Thessalonians to do? _____

Note: God repeatedly instructs us to love one another. Romans 12:10 is one of many verses that instructs us to be devoted to loving each other.

12. (vss. 11-12) Describe how Paul instructs the believers to live. _____

THE GLORIOUS APPEARING OF THE LORD

Read 1 Thessalonians Chapter 4:13-18 _____ Check

13. (vs. 13) What group of people is Paul informing the Thessalonians about? _____

Note: The phrase “those that have fallen asleep” refers to people that have died. This was apparently a figure of speech that was commonly used to refer to someone that had died (Acts 7:60; Acts 13:36; 1 Corinthians 11:30; 1 Corinthians 15:6). The word picture is drawn from the fact that a dead corpse appears as if it is asleep. Paul, is not implying however, that when a person dies that he is not conscious or in a state of suspended animation. Paul clearly teaches that when someone dies his soul and spirit live on in the presence of the Lord (Philippians 1:21-23; 2 Corinthians 5:8)

14) (vs. 13) What does Paul say about the way people without Christ grieve when people die? _____

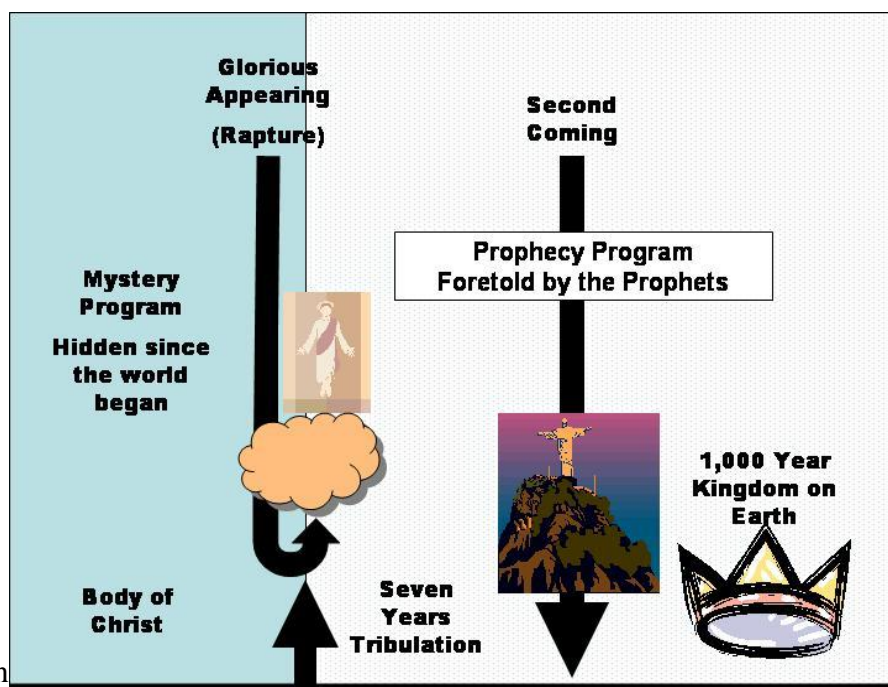
15. (vs. 14) What does Paul say that we believe? _____

16. (vs 14) What do we also believe if we believe the things mentioned in the previous question? _____

17. (vs. 15) On whose authority does Paul teach the following truths? _____

18. (vss. 16-17) In your own words explain the events that are described in these verses.

The diagram below illustrates an important distinction between two separate events that are often confused with each other as one and the same. Those two events are 1) the Glorious Appearing (or commonly called the Rapture) and 2) the Second Coming of Christ to Earth. It is very important to recognize that when the Apostle Paul wrote about the “appearing” of the Lord (Colossians 3:4; 1 Timothy 6:14; 2 Timothy 1:10; 2 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 4:8; Titus 2:13) he was referring to something completely different than the other scripture writers and the earthly teaching of the Lord himself. The references to the Lord’s return outside of the writings of Paul speak of the Lord returning to the Earth to establish a kingdom based in Jerusalem in which He will reign as king for 1,000 years (Zechariah 14:4; Zechariah 14:8-9; Acts 1:9-12; Revelation 20:1-6). When Paul speaks of the appearing he does not mention the Lord returning to the Earth, but rather the believers, alive and dead, being transformed, meeting him in the air and being with him in heaven forever. Recognizing these distinctions is one of the reasons it is important to “rightly divide the Word of truth” i.e. to recognize the dispensational differences between God’s work with Israel and the Church, the Body of Christ.



19. Does this scenario speak of the Lord Jesus Christ returning to the Earth as his second coming is described in the Old Testament (cf. Zechariah 14:4)? _____ Yes _____ No

CHAPTER FIVE

MORE INSTRUCTION ABOUT THE APPEARING OF THE LORD

Read 1 Thessalonians Chapter 5:1-11 _____ Check

1. (vss. 1-2) Does Paul say that we can know when the Lord's appearing will take place? _____ Yes _____ No

2. (vs. 3) What will people be saying just before the tribulation begins? _____

3. (vss. 4-8) How does Paul describe the difference between believers and unbelievers in these verses? _____

4. (vs. 8) How should this different perspective that believers have influence the way they live? _____

5. (vs. 9) How does Paul describe the destiny of the believers? _____

Note: When this passage speaks of "wrath" it is not speaking of unbelievers spending eternity in Hell. That is generally described as punishment (2 Thessalonians 1:9) or condemnation (Romans 8:1). The wrath of God is His vengeance poured out on the world because of sin, disobedience and wickedness. God's wrath will be poured out during the seven years of tribulation which is described as the "great day of his wrath" (Revelation 6:17). Therefore when Paul says that we are not appointed to see wrath he is teaching that members of the Body of Christ will not pass through the tribulation period. That is precisely the reason why the Rapture must take place before the tribulation begins, so that the members of the Body of Christ can be removed from the Earth when the day of God's wrath begins.

6. (vs. 10) What is the benefit of Christ's death according to this verse? _____

FINAL INSTRUCTIONS

Read 1 Thessalonians Chapter 5:12-28 _____ Check

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7. (vss. 12-13) How are the believers instructed to behave toward those that labor among them in the Lord's service? _____

8. (vs. 13b) How are believers to live with one another? _____

9. (vss.14-16) List some of the instructions Paul gives to believers in these verses.

10. (vs. 18) What does Paul specifically identify as the will of God for believers? _____

11. (vs. 19) What is Paul's command in this verse? _____

Note: Paul tells the believers many times that they are sealed with the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13; Ephesians 4:30). This means that the Spirit will never leave us. However, 1 Thessalonians 5:19 tells us that we are able to quench the Spirit. This happens when we ignore the Spirit motivating us to seek to obey God's will for our lives. We are essentially ignoring the Spirit's work in our hearts. Ephesians 4:30 also tells us we can "grieve" the Holy Spirit. This is done through our sinful behavior and thoughts. It makes God sad when we disobey Him. So while we can never lose the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we can ignore His work and we can cause him to be sad through our disobedience.

12. (vs. 20) How were believers to respond to prophecies? _____

Note: The prophecies referred to in this verse are those words which were preached and/or written by the prophets that were alive at the time Paul wrote his New Testament epistles (letters). Because the New Testament had not yet been fully revealed and written down it was necessary that certain people had the spiritual gift of prophecy in which they received direct revelation from God regarding matters of doctrine and practice in the church. This gift is said to be foundational (Ephesians 2:20). With the foundation having been laid when the New Testament was completed and the church coming to maturity in terms of doctrinal revelation (1 Corinthians 13:9-11) the gift of prophecy is no longer necessary. The application of this verse for today is that Christians should not treat the writings of God's prophets, i.e. the Scriptures, with contempt, but we should heed their words and seek to obey the commands of God that apply to us today.

13. (vs. 21) Describe how you can apply the instructions of this verse. _____

14. (vs. 22) How can you apply the simple principle of this verse in your life? _____

15. (vs. 23) What is Paul's desire for the believers as expressed in this verse? _____

16. (vs. 23) What are the three parts of the person that are listed in this verse?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

17 (vs. 24) Compare this verse with Philippians 1:6 _____

18. (vs. 25) What does Paul request the believers to do for him? _____

19. (vs. 27) What was to be done with this letter? _____

Write 1 Thessalonians 5:9 from memory on the lines below.

Use the space below for any questions or comments:

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