

# THE THESSALONIAN LETTERS

*A SMALL GROUP  
BIBLE STUDY*

**LEADERS GUIDE**

PAUL'S SECOND MISSION



Facilitators,

As prep for the study it is recommended that you read both letters in the NIV and at least one other scriptural translation of the bible. Not a paraphrased Bible. In addition, read Acts 17, Colossians 1 and Philippians 4. For the purpose of the study the *NIV is most highly recommended* and was the primary version used in the development of this study. As you open each session you may ask for volunteers to read the material for the session. In the Q&A sections it is recommended you establish a pattern of rotating around the room to answer questions. Try to get everyone involved, but of course stress that anyone at anytime can pass if they wish.

The red print does not appear in the STUDENT GUIDE handbooks.

Watch the clock each study session should last 1 to 1 1/2 hour. Be sure to reserve time for the business of Small Group Study, i.e. prayer needs and fellowship.

It would be a good idea to follow all reading of scripture with a short benediction. Make every attempt to reinforce the Sanctity of the scripture. For example; “This is the word of God, given so we may gain wisdom.”

# SESSION 1

## THE POWER OF THE THESSALONIAN LETTERS

### BACKGROUND

Session 1 should be conducted as an open forum with four individual readings. This will be the longest session of the entire study. There is no Q&A section associated with session 1. Follow each reading section with an open forum discussion. The readings are:

GOD'S PLAN FOR PAUL.  
THE DAWN OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.  
MACEDONIA'S FIRST SCRIPTURE  
PAUL IN THESSALONICA

After reading a section ask the question "What did you find interesting in this commentary?"

#### OPEN WITH A PRAYER

#### FIRST READING.

#### GOD'S PLAN FOR PAUL

Paul was specifically picked out of all the people alive in the first century to carry the Gospel to world by way of the Gentiles. So, then why did God allow Paul's life to be so tough? Everywhere Paul went there were troublemakers. Paul was beaten, stoned, prosecuted and run out of town. At one point he may have been stoned to death, had an out of body experience and then was raised from the dead.

Then one day while studying, it struck me, **God had a plan!** Paul was God's messenger of the new covenant. This new covenant and the Gospel that defined it was the most radical thing to hit the universe since ADAM. Whether it be a closed-minded culture like Thessalonica or an open-minded culture such as Berea this new Gospel was sure to generate controversy. A pattern seems to have developed which points to an extremely clever motive for a repeating scenario. Clearly evident is this scenario in Paul's first and second mission trips. Paul boldly enters the community and assertively broadcasts this new Gospel. Paul preaches and teaches vigorously and becomes the focal point of extreme feelings, good and bad. When things get to the breaking point Paul leaves, or is driven out of town. The object of all the hate and discontent is gone and the community calms down. And here is the beauty of the plan. Paul always leaves behind trusted disciples of Christ to continue teaching, instructing and guiding the new Church of Christ. In Philippi Luke stayed behind. Silas and Timothy stayed behind in Berea. In other cases, unnamed "Brothers" stayed behind.

These trusted ‘Brothers in the faith’ could then continue in a much calmer environment. The focal point of the opposition, Paul, has been run out of town. All the malcontents were satisfied in the fact that they ran the bad guy out of town. In most cases the malcontents were more concerned about the community Paul had gone to next and were oblivious to what was continuing to thrive and grow in their own community (Acts 17:13-14). Being the focal point of persecution, I believe, was the true thorn in Paul’s side.

### **OPEN FORUM (5 TO 10 MINUTES)**

**Ask “Where is Macedonia and Achaia”? Use the cover map or provide a more detailed map.**

### **SECOND READING.**

#### **THE DAWN OF THE NEW TESTAMENT**

Imagine for a moment. You are a first century Thessalonian. The year is 51 ad. You have grown up in a society that worshiped many idols and unknown gods. Most of these gods do not like you, but they control vital areas of your life. You are required to commit some very gross acts to please them. If they are not pleased, the men will be sterile the women will be barren, warring tribes will conquer you and the crops will not grow.

Then, a few months ago, a man called Paul and some of his associates came to visit you. They brought a revolution, no, a revelation. They brought the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In the wink of an eye, your spirit was melded with the Holy Spirit of the one true God. You have found a peace in life you could never have imagined. You have found the true God is a God of love.

Now it has been some time since Paul and company departed. Your life has continued in the walk with Christ. But, questions have been raised. Some of what you were taught has left you with confusion. You are surrounded by images of the false gods and those who promote them and all you have is the memory of what Paul taught you. Fear not, God is in control. God has set a blaze of concern in the heart of Paul. Just in time (That is Gods time) Paul sends Timothy and then a letter. The words and ideas of this letter reflect a love and caring that could only come from a loving and caring God. You have your first “Written Word”. You copy this letter and circulate it to all the Churches in Macedonia.

Everyone who reads this letter is strengthened and inspired by its love, caring and truth.

This letter to the Thessalonians was part of the dawning of the NEW TESTAMENT. This letter will be followed by many more letters of love, hope and joy. This New Testament will grow into a complete definition of God's love for His Creation.

Just for a moment let's look at some numbers. It is estimated that the world population in 51ad was close to 180 million. (The Romans were zealous bean counters and left good records behind.) It is estimated that there were 970 thousand Gentile Christians in communities around the Mediterranean Sea. Living mostly in Judea, Galilee and Syria were 30 thousand Jewish Christians.

**OPEN FORUM (5 TO 10 MINUTES)**

### THIRD READING.

#### MACEDONIA'S FIRST SCRIPTURE

There is another observation we need to consider as we explore first and second Thessalonians. The Thessalonians letters were the first scripture the Macedonian Gentiles had for guidance. (*The letter of James had been written by this time but was considered to be a letter to the Jews. Galatians was written earlier but there is no evidence it was circulated outside of Galatia in the first century.*) With the arrival of the Thessalonian letters, for the first time the *ekklesia* (fellowship or Church) did not have to rely on a memory of Paul's words. They had it in writing. Also keep in mind how significant a written letter was in the first century. Paper and ink were expensive. There was no post office or letter carriers. We need to recognize the impact of a written letter in the first century. For someone to be out the expense and the effort to write and deliver a letter would definitely lend credibility to their intent, sincerity and purpose.

As Paul planted churches and moved on, the new Christians quite often would debate what Paul and the brothers had taught them.

Understandably individuals had different recollections of Paul's words. These differences were the reason Paul wrote first and second Thessalonians (51AD). When Paul sent these two letters to Thessalonica he instructed the reading of the letters throughout Macedonia (Thessalonica, Berea, Apollonia, Amphipolis, Neapolis and Philippi). These early Gentile believers would have treasured these letters. There is evidence that these letters of Paul were copied and circulated among the first and second century churches. We must remember Paul has been spreading the Word of Christ for about twelve years by the time he reaches Thessalonica. He has seen every kind of resistance and spiritual conflict to his gospel. His teachings would have been very detailed, clear and concise. We need to look at these two letters as follow up or clarifications of teachings already presented and not as an all-inclusive teaching. Not until Romans does Paul attempt to put together a comprehensive *guide to being a Christian*.

The first of the Gospels, Luke, would not be written for another 8 years (59AD). Between A.D. 48 and A.D. 57 Paul had written what I feel is the core of Christian belief; Galatians, 1&2 Thessalonians, 1&2 Corinthians and Romans. If you study these six letters in that order you will see a progressive refinement and definition of the Gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ. The progression, I believe, reaches perfection in Romans.

OPEN FORUM (5 TO 10 MINUTES)

FOURTH READING.

## **PAUL IN THESSALONICA**

When you read Paul's letters to the Thessalonians you find it obvious that Paul had deep feelings for the Thessalonian Christians. I pondered this one morning as I studied and wondered why and how this happened.

It is clear from the passion and emotion Paul puts in 1 and 2 Thessalonians, he has deep and strong feelings for this church. Paul's love for the Thessalonians was agape love. Agape love is defined as selfless, sacrificial, unconditional love, the highest of the four types of love in the Bible. It is a spiritually binding love.

For the mortal human agape love is the Everest of emotional bindings, it is slow to grow and requires passing through all of the lower forms of love and affection.

Here is where the conflict in my mind erupts. Some church tradition says that Paul was in Thessalonica for only two to three weeks. I accept that Paul was the most spiritually gifted common man who ever lived. But! He was still human and mortal. His mind and heart were still controlled by human nature. To get to the emotional level he was with the Thessalonians meant, he would have to know them deeply. He would have to understand, individually and personally, who they were and how they got to that point in their lives. It seems unlikely this could happen in two to three weeks.

So, let us examine the evidence of a two to three-week tenure in Thessalonica. There is the,,, well of course it says,,,,, then again there was,,,??? Bottom line there is no evidence of two or three-week mission in Thessalonica. There is one obscure statement, Acts 17:2 “*As his custom was, Paul went to the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the scriptures...*” This is where the casual observer of the scriptures may leap upon the three-week view.

True this could suggest a time span of three weeks, but some celebration weeks have 4 and 5 Sabbath days. Let's take the Passover celebration. Each of the six days before the day of Passover is a Sabbath. The feast of tabernacles has 3 Sabbaths, Festival of Weeks has 2. The day before and the day of any ritual day of sacrifice are Sabbath days. So, three Sabbath days equals three weeks holds little water.

Now let's look at who in Thessalonica he was writing to. Scripture says (Acts 17:4) a large number of Greek men and women and a few Jews heard and believed Paul's Gospel. Where did this large number of Greek men and women come from? It is safe to say they did not hear Paul speak at the synagogue on the Sabbath. They would not have been allowed into the synagogue on a **Sabbath** day. No, I believe he did what he did everywhere else his mission took him. He went first to the Jew, *on three sabbath days*, then he went to the Gentiles and built an ekklesia (Church).

If you look closely at what Paul has to say in the two letters you will find it is all about the new covenant with Christ, nothing of Jewish tradition.

An interesting clue is found in Philippians. In Philippians 4:14-16 Paul gives thanks to the Philippian church for their support throughout his mission work. In particular he notes that they sent him aid while he was in Thessalonica, “again, and again”. In the original Greek style of writing the “again” would mean at least twice the second “again” would indicate at least 3 times and perhaps 4 times. When you consider that it was a young man’s 12 to 14 day walk from the town of Philippi to Thessalonica. Then consider the time restraints of travel and communication of that age. Using the minimum of 3 occurrences of aid from Philippi, I would put Paul’s tenure in Thessalonica at minimum, 3 months. Time line studies would allow for as much as 9 months. The scholars that study New Testament history and time lines give the length of Paul’s second missionary journey from 2 years 9 months to 3 years 6 months. That is in the time frame of 49AD to 52AD.

The time line discrepancies alone allow for as long as a 9 month stay in Thessalonica. The study of the aid sent from Philippi suggests a minimum of 3 months. At 3 months I could understand the level of connection between Paul and the Thessalonians.

Ray C. Stedman in his commentary “1 Thessalonians: [Hope for a Hopeless World](#)” [December 3 1967] makes the statement; “There is some evidence that Paul’s stay in Thessalonica may have been as long as three months.”

**OPEN FORUM (5 TO 10 MINUTES)**

**PRAYER NEEDS AND PRAISE**

**CLOSING PRAYER, Give thanks for the word of God and the freedom to gather and study.**

# SESSION 2

## FIRST THESSALONIANS

### CHAPTER 1

#### OPEN WITH A PRAYER

#### FIRST READING

About half way through Paul's second missionary journey he established a church in Thessalonica. Acts 17:1-10 relates the events of Paul's visit to Thessalonica. The Thessalonians were quickly recognized as a dedicated, Christ centered fellowship. Paul, Silas and Timothy leave Thessalonica and went to Berea. After establishing a church in Berea Silas and Timothy remain there and Paul continues on to Athens. In the course of time Paul asked Silas and Timothy to join him in Athens. As soon as they arrived in Athens Timothy was sent on a short mission to observe and guide the fellowship at Thessalonica. Timothy returned to Paul from the factfinding trip with an overwhelmingly optimistic report with just a few issues that needed to be addressed. Paul's response to Timothy's report is a letter we call First Thessalonians.

The NIV translation is recommended for any in-depth study of scripture.

SECOND READING

READ ACTS 17:1-10 *benediction*

THIRD READING

Paul starts his letter in the typical Greek protocol, from, to and salutation.

Note the use of Grace and Peace in the opening. The common opening of the time would have been Mercy and Peace. Scholars are convinced that the early Christians would have seen something incredibly more important than a rehash of Jewish ideas in this greeting.

In chapter one verses 2 through 10 Paul takes on the persona of the coach before the big game. He pumps them up telling them they are always on his mind and in his prayers. Note the special treatment he gives faith, love and hope. Only here and in Col 1:4-5 are they presented in this order. The normal order is faith, hope and love. I believed Paul is making a statement of the progression of salvation; With faith through God's love we gain the hope of salvation.

In our translation of v4 we see the phrase ‘brothers and sisters’ or ‘brothers’ depending upon what translation you are reading. The word Paul used and we translate as ‘Brothers and Sisters’ has a much deeper meaning. The word he used was *adelphoi*. This word refers to all members of a fellowship (ekklesia) regardless of age, gender, class or race and implies an **equal** value to **all** members of the group.

In all his teaching and in this letter (v5), Paul continues to plant the seed that the power of the Gospel comes from the Holy Spirit. This seed will be nurtured in the following letters and mature in Romans. This power from the Holy Spirit is what enables them to live the life of faith and love demonstrated by Paul and the brothers while they were with them. Keep in mind what Paul means when he speaks of “his” Gospel. His Gospel is the narrative of Christ’s **mission** on earth, Christ’s **love** for all creation and finally his **sacrifice** for the salvation of all mankind.

Furthermore (v7-8) through the power of the Holy Spirit, in such a short time, the Thessalonian *ekklesia* has become a model to all believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The time from when Paul first entered Thessalonica to when he wrote 1 Thessalonians is believed to be from 9 to 11 months. Yet in this short time the Thessalonians have become a model of Faith, Love and Hope.

*As a side note the original Greek text for v2-10 is the longest single sentence in the New Testament.*

FOURTH READING

***READ FIRST THESSALONIANS CHAPTER 1***

**benediction**

## SESSION 2 CHAPTER 1, Q & A

1, What hidden meaning to Christians does the use of Grace and Peace relate to?

By Grace we are saved and are heirs of the glory of heaven. A new age in the relationship with our Creator has begun, the age of GRACE.

2, What is it that tells others we are in Christ? (v3)

Work by faith. Labor by love. Endurance by hope. It is by a reflection of all three attitudes that we are recognized as true, complete and dedicated Christians. Stress the idea that it takes all three to make a true follower of Christ.

3, What is the source of the power of the Gospel?

The Holy Spirit.

4, What facts convinced Paul that the Thessalonians' faith was genuine?

Because they welcomed, accepted and lived by the Word. The Word, the Gospel, of which the source and truth is God. Only genuine faith could cause them to remain true through persecution.

5, Why does Paul put so much emphasis here on the Holy Spirit? (v4-7)

Paul does not want to become the center or person of worship. He is making it clear that all power is from God and comes to us through the Holy Spirit.

6, What do you imagine were the constrictions and afflictions the Thessalonians were suffering? Can you relate them to today's culture?

6a The Thessalonians lived in a culture of many not so pleasant gods. These gods had to be gratified or crops would not grow and people would be fruitless. The political leaders demanded to be worshiped as gods.

6b We live in a culture that rewards pride and promotes unbiblical life styles.

7, Have you known a person whose Christian life you could imitate? Has this person effected change in your life? Have you thanked that person?

Open discussion, be sure to cover, have you thanked that person.

8, What was Paul's, Silas' and Timothy's role in the Thessalonian conversion?

Paul and the brothers merely presented the truth (gospel). The Holy Spirit effected the conversion.

9, What in this chapter do you find to be an encouragement to you?

Open discussion, try to get everyone's thoughts.

**OPEN FORUM (5 TO 10 MINUTES)**

**PRAYER NEEDS AND PRAISE**

**CLOSING PRAYER, give thanks that we live in the age of GRACE.**

# SESSION 3

## 1 THESSALONIANS 2:

Open with a prayer

### First reading

In chapter 2 Paul encourages the Thessalonians to carefully and honestly call to mind the behavior and methods of Paul and his companions while they were with them. Most commentaries treat 2:1 to 12 as some sort of rebuttal of charges brought against Paul and the brothers. I do not read that into Paul's words nor can I find any real support for that idea. My inner voice tells me this is a lesson in discernment. By this time in his second mission journey Paul is well aware of the False Apostles who shadowed him. Here Paul is simply instructing them, recall to who's glory did he preach. To who's comfort did he attend. To whom was he a burden. He wants them to compare his and his companion's behavior with those who will come. Paul has already confirmed the power of the Holy Spirit they possess (1:5-7). Now he is encouraging them to tap into that power of the Holy Spirit to stay in the true word.

The next section of chapter 2, verses 13 to 16, is a powerful amalgamation of prayer, validation and condemnation. Paul thanks God for their conversion and continuing faith. Then he flows smoothly into the validation of his gospel as the word of God not the word of Paul. Then he presents a scathing inditement of the Judaizers who intent to force the law upon them. Paul then softens the mood and closes chapter 2 with words of hope, love and Joy. For Paul, evangelism was always delightful and exciting. Here he tells us why talking about Christ was such a positive experience for him.

**Second reading.**

Read 1 Thessalonians chapter 2

**benediction**

## SESSION 3 CHAPTER 2

Q & A

1, Why did Paul continue to preach in the face of such strong opposition?

Paul was convinced beyond a shadow of doubt that his message was true and from Christ. He had such a strong presence of the Holy Spirit he could not do otherwise.

2, Why did Paul want the Thessalonians to recall that he did not use flattery or trickery to gain acceptance?

Here Paul is planting the seed of discernment. Remember our conduct and weigh it against the false teachers.

3, Why did Paul work to support himself?

Here Paul is clarifying his motivation. He is working for Jesus the Christ. His goal is to bring to them an eternal relationship with God. He was not evangelizing to earn wealth.

4, What does this teach you about proper and improper motivation for witnessing to others?

Witnessing should always be a “work” of love for your fellow mankind as a result of Christ’s love for you. It is never driven by denominational or eldership pride.

5, Paul claims to have been “holy, righteous and blameless” (v10). If this is important, how can imperfect people dare to do evangelism?

Only by the GRACE of God and the POWER of the Holy Spirit. This is an important concept, try to stimulate considerable discussion. In the proper situation anyone can be an evangelist.

8, What difficulties did the Thessalonians face in sharing their faith with their neighbors.

The Thessalonians lived in a culture with cruel and harsh leaders and even harsher gods. Anything that caused a disturbance in society was considered a threat.

9, What difficulties do you find in evangelism

Open discussion. Try making a list of difficulties and various means of overcoming these difficulties. Allow 10 to 15 minutes for this.

OPEN FORUM (5 TO 10 MINUTES)

PRAYER NEEDS AND PRAISE

CLOSING PRAYER Pray for the power and strength to resist the temptations of culture.

SESSION 4  
1 THESSALONIANS 3

**OPEN WITH A PRAYER**

**FIRST READING**

Building on the closing statements of the previous chapter, chapter 3 is a ‘why and what’ declaration. Why did he send Timothy and what did he have to say on his return?

Why? Paul was deeply concerned about their spiritual strength in the face of strong persecution and temptations (v. 1-5).

What? Paul is overjoyed with the report on Timothy’s return. He expresses his feelings as if he had attained new life. In verses 9 to 11 is his prayer of thanks and hope. Then in two verses, 12 and 13 he closes chapter 3 with one of the simplest, kindest and loving prayers.

Throughout this entire chapter Paul chooses his words very carefully. He clearly intends to project joy and strength. He wants the readers of this letter to feel good about their spiritual accomplishments.

**SECOND READING**

*A chapter of love, fear and a warning*

Read Chapter 2:17 through 3:13 **benediction**

## Session 4, chapter 3

### Q &A

1, Open discussion: This chapter is very easy to contemporize. Imagine for a moment, or recall, the parent, friend or pastor that was the tool that brought you to Christ has just sent you a letter with the thought and ideas of chapter 3. How would you react?

Make this an exercise of directly applying the thoughts and message of a scripture directly to life today. Try to get everyone to participate.

2, Where do you find indications of Paul's feelings for the Thessalonians?

2:17-19, 3:1, 3:5, 3:8, 3:10 and 3:11-13 The point being this is a chapter expressing love and caring.

3, What was the root of Paul's fears that caused him to send Timothy to Thessalonica? Can you relate those fears to today's culture?

This a two-part question be sure to give ample discussion to both parts.

4, Why do you suppose Paul would warn of persecutions they were destined to suffer?

Paul does not want the Thessalonians to get the idea that Christ and the Holy Spirit is a defense against life's threats. This is not a "life will be wonderful" Gospel. It is an "eternity will be fantastic" Gospel.

## Q &A

Continued

5, What steps can you take to face the trials and persecutions of our culture.

Read and STUDY the scriptures. Fellowship with RIGHT THINKING Christians (*you may want to elaborate this one*). Be an active member of your church. Recall often the events that brought you to Christ.

6, Why would God destine Christians for trials? (3:3)

God uses these trials to accomplish his purposes in us. Suffering for our faith builds character and develops faith. Trials teach what cannot be learned in study.

7, Why was Timothy's report on the condition of the Thessalonian Church so overwhelming to Paul?

There is evidence that Paul felt strong opposition and threats in pagan idol worshiping culture of Athens. The good news from Thessalonica would have been uplifting and reassuring to Paul.

8, What does Paul desire for the Thessalonians?

He wants to return to teach and lead them. He wants the Lord to increase and guide their love. He wants their hearts to be strengthened.

## **Q &A**

**Continued**

9, How can we (as an individual or as a group member) help love to increase within our family, church or small group?

Open discussion, try to get everyone involved. If a chalk board or white board is available try to initiate spontaneous suggestions. Write them down and then go back and discuss each one.

**OPEN FORUM (5 TO 10 MINUTES)**

**PRAYER NEEDS AND PRAISE**

**CLOSING PRAYER** Pray for people who are feeling unloved. Pray for your ability to express love.

SESSION 5  
1 THESSALONIANS 4:1-12

**OPEN WITH A PRAYER**  
**FIRST READING**

Now Paul appears to be getting into the feedback from Timothy's fact-finding trip. We do not have a copy of Timothy's trip report. However, we can conclude from Paul's comments and from our knowledge of the culture of Thessalonica most of what it would have said. Pride and personal glory were a primary goal in the culture. The culture was driven by belief in many, many gods. One of the most prominent was a god that promoted lustful pleasure. Paul puts this on the top of the list of unacceptable behaviors (v. 1-8). He makes it clear that a rejection of God's call for us to live "holy and honorable" lives is a rejection of the Holy Spirit (v. 8). This is the very first New Testament scriptural reference to a sin against the holy spirit. We know from later scripture, that blaspheming the Holy Spirit is the unpardonable sin.

As Paul so often does, he follows rather stern statements with a bit of caring, support and instruction.

He commends them for their loving relationships and encourages them to be even more diligent in these relationships. Do not be recalcitrant, mind your own business and be fruitful. Remember you claim to be a **Christian** and the world is watching.

## SECOND READING

Read 1Thes. 4:1-12 **benediction**

### Q & A SESSION 5

#### 1 THESSALONIANS 4:1-12

1-a. What habits of life are pleasing to God?

A complete understanding of the difference between acts issues and faith issues is the key point we want to make here. On a board or easel make a list of habits for discussion (You may want to make a list before the session). Make the point that there are acts issues and faith issues. Make sure some faith issues are on the list. Separate the faith issues and stress that Paul is writing about acts of life and not faith in belief. After discussing the difference in faith and acts issues try to add to the list.

1-b, Discussion; How can we develop habits that please God?

Go over the list of habits and discuss ways of developing or improving these actions.

2, Why, after commending the Thessalonians on their Christian life styles does Paul ask them to do more?

The Christian life style is not something you achieve. It is something you practice. The Christian life style is a day by day, minute by minute conscience effort to live to please god.

3, Name some ways you can develop better God pleasing habits.

Suggest a self-examination, meditation protocol. See EVENT POSTMORTUM in the appendix.

4, EXERCISE; Paul concentrated on sexual behavior when he wrote to the Thessalonians. What would he concentrate on if writing to our culture?

Make a list of all the ideas, then do an exercise to prioritize the list. If it does not come up ask: What about reforming scripture to fit current cultural behaviors? Should our lives be molded to scripture or scripture molded to our life style?

5, EXERCISE; Reread 1 Thessalonians 4:8. Then read Mark 3:29. Do you see a connection between these two scriptures?

The purpose of this exercise is to make definite connections between these scriptures. First Thessalonians was written more than 10 years before Mark. Question; Do you think Mark has refined Paul's assertion? Go back over the list in exercise 4. Can you see blasphemy in the list?

OPEN FORUM (5 TO 10 MINUTES)

PRAYER NEEDS AND PRAISE

CLOSING PRAYER Pray for the wisdom and discernment to live in the word and not the world.

## SESSION 6

### 1 THESSALONIANS 4:13 through 5:28.

**OPEN WITH A PRAYER**

#### **FIRST READING**

These verses contained the earliest (51AD) recorded quotes of Christ's comments on the resurrection in the end times (4:15). It will not be until 71AD that Matthew, in chapter 24, will quote Christ on end times resurrection and John's gospel in 6:35-40 in 80AD. Paul's letters will have already been in circulation for 20-plus years.

It is believed that Timothy brought back word from the Thessalonians of concern for status of believers who have died. It is a puzzle to me, that for the last two thousand years alleged scholars have debated the timing and occurrences of the end times.

Paul clearly states;

- 1, By witness, Jesus died, rose from the dead and ascended into Heaven.
- 2, By word of Jesus, He will return with the dead in Christ.
- 3, By word of Jesus, the dead in Christ will not be preceded by those living in Christ.
- 4, By word of Jesus, He will return with the dead in Christ and the those living in Christ will be "caught up" to the clouds.

**5** By word of Jesus, we will dwell with the lord forever.

These are the truths we have. There will be further clarifications in second Thessalonians and other scripture.

We can speculate about will I have wings; will I play a harp sitting on a cloud, will the streets really be paved with gold or will the house the Lord provides for me have a pool? Is this really **wise**?

There are those who sternly claim that the word rapture never appears in the bible. Did you know that the phrase CAUGHT UP in the Old Latin is raptura (N) or raptus (V)? From about 320AD to the mid 1300's all Bibles used in the Western Church were written in Latin. So, rapture certainly is in the Bible. It just does not appear in the English translation of CAUGHT UP.

Paul moves on to other concerns. Timothy must have observed or was informed about improper regards toward the leaders of the fellowship. Paul cleverly asserts that care and correction is the assigned and accepted ordinance of the leaders and all should respect their tasking. “Live in peace with each other” is followed (v5:14 – 22) with a point by point discussion of the proper do’s and don’ts of a Christian fellowship.

Paul has now set the templet for most of his following letters. He finishes with prayer for the recipients of the letter, a request for prayer himself and fellow workers in Christ and a benediction.

*“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.”*

## SESSION 6

### SECOND READING.

Read 4:13 through 5:28 **benediction**

## SESSION 6 Q & A

1, What is the anchor faith statement of followers of Christ?

That Jesus the son of God died and rose again.

2, What are the 5 basic promises of the end times?

1, The Lord will return.

2, The archangel will call.

3, The dead in Christ will rise.

4, Those living in Christ will join the risen.

5, The risen and the raptured will dwell with the Lord forever

3, What is the key difference between those living in darkness and those living in the light?

Those living in the light have the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

4, What is the promise of the baptism of the Holy Spirit?

“For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

5, Discussion: Why does Paul so strongly state that knowing the time of the end times is unimportant to Christian believers?

We do not need to seek or predict the day of the Lord because the baptism of the Holy Spirit has fully prepared us for that day. No matter when it comes, we are prepared.

6, In his final instructions Paul outlines 7 principles of fellowship that have become the basis of most Christian fellowship doctrine. List these principles.

- 1, Honor fellowship leaders.
- 2, Live in peace with one another.
- 3, Admonish misbehavers.
- 4, Encourage the disheartened.
- 5, Help the weak.
- 6, Be patient with everyone.
- 7, Avoid revenge.

7, Discussion: What are verses 5:19 – 22 telling us?

This is an explanation of spiritual doctrine, or discernment.

- 1, Do not reject the Spirit.
- 2, Hold no contempt for prophecies.
- 3, Test all Prophecies.
- 4, Reject evil.

Separate the chaff from the seed and plant the seed in your life.

8, Discussion: Almost as an after thought Paul inserts an instruction, verse 27. What is the significance of this statement?

Paul in this simple statement offers this letter as a creed for all churches for all time to come.

OPEN FORUM (5 TO 10 MINUTES)

PRAYER NEEDS AND PRAISE

CLOSING PRAYER Give thanks for the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

# **SESSION 7 THE SECOND LETTER**

## **OPEN WITH A PRAYER**

### **FIRST READING**

No one knows how Paul received a later report on the Thessalonian Church but, Paul concluded a second letter to Thessalonica was needed. The primary issue was confusion about the second coming of Christ. There were misleading prophecy or other statements falsely attributed to Paul and his companions. Some secondary issues which were side effects of the confusion of the second coming also needed to be addressed. The precise timing of the second letter is not clearly defined in scripture or church tradition. The consensus of opinion is that it followed the first letter by several months. It should be noted that Paul continues his loving, kind and fatherly approach in this letter to the friends in Christ at Thessalonica.

If you are, or have ever been, stressed by the moral decay of our culture then second Thessalonians was written for you. In a society that focuses on pleasure and property it reminds us of our true goal. Paul wrote this letter to the Christians facing persecution and temptations of a degenerate society. Can you relate to that?

This letter, 2 Thessalonians, parallels the first letter's three main topics, Suffering, end times and works. Paul wrote this letter to correct some improper reaction to the first letter and dispel some ideas promoted by some false teachings. There are those who say the second letter is Paul back peddling and changing his gospel. In my mind this a totally ridiculous idea. In the first letter Paul focuses on the promise, to those of faith, in the end times and the glory they will be part of. In the second letter Paul addresses what will happen to Satan, his agents and those without faith.

## 2 THESSALONIANS 1

Paul opens chapter one in typical form with *to, from* and *a blessing*. He goes on to acclaim their faith and love. He then uses these facts to support the reality of Holy Spirit in their lives. In the face of extraordinary hardships and persecution their faith and love continue to stand firm. Only the strength that comes with the Holy Spirit can explain this phenomenon.

Chapter 1 closes with a declaration of two constant prayers on Paul's lips. He prays for their walk with Christ and for the Churches' evangelical mission to promote the word of Christ.

SECOND READING ; read 2 Thessalonians 1  
**benediction**

SESSION 7 DISCUSSIONS AND Q & A.

2 Thessalonians chapter 1

1, The phrase "brothers and sisters" is translated from the Greek work adelphoi. What is its true meaning?

**The word adelphoi means all members of the group have equal citizenship, value and importance within the body.**

2a, What is promised to those who would trouble the followers of Christ?

**Trouble and punished for disbelief and disobedience.**

2b, What is promised to those who follow Christ?

**Relief.**

2c, When will this promise be fulfilled?

When Jesus returns. Encourage discussion, there is no promise of an easy time in this life.

3, Should people be punished just because they do not know God?

**DISCUSSION:** This statement is a throwback to old testament style writing. All through old and new testament times all people were aware of the one true God. Some chose to follow false gods. They refused to “know” the true Almighty Creator. If we replace *do not know* with *do not have a relationship with* it is more understandable in our culture.

**OPEN FORUM (5 TO 10 MINUTES)**

**PRAYER NEEDS AND PRAISE**

**CLOSING PRAYER** Pray for the strength to resist and the discernment to recognize the deception of Satan.

## SESSION 8, 2 THESSALONIANS 2

### OPEN WITH A PRAYER

### FIRST READING

It will be very beneficial for you to clear your mind before you read verses 1 to 12. Try to forget you have ever read Daniel and Revelations. The NIV translation is the closest literal word for word translation. Once again, I would not recommend a paraphrased bible for any in-depth study of scripture.

These twelve verses explain the actions of a lawless person who comes with a secret agenda. He will be a clandestine servant of Satan and will bring about the end time confrontation with Christ. Many rather “unique” ideas and messages have been attributed to these words. The truth of what Paul is saying is; he will be cunning, it will be bad, if you are not prepared you will suffer spiritual and literal death.

In verse 5 Paul reflects back and indicates that he taught in detail about this subject when he was with them. He asks them to remember what he taught them.

Verses 6 and 7 are a bit cryptic. There are many views on who is holding back the lawless one. When we consider that the holding back has been going on for 2000 years then we must reason that the Holy Spirit must be involved.

Let us explore for a moment the Holy Spirit's interaction with mankind throughout history. All through the old testament it is written of instances of God's Holy Spirit interacting with mankind. These interactions have always been situational. A situation arises where man needs the intervention of the Holy Spirit and He obliges, interacts and then returns to the Father. There was no continual, committed presence of the Holy Spirit. All of that changed on the day of the "feast of weeks" (Pentecost) following the crucifixion of Christ. On that day the Holy Spirit came to dwell on earth in the *ekklesia*, in the very being of each believer. Think of that, the Spirit **in you** is holding back the lawless one. **YOU** by your faith, are holding back the lawless one. When the "Church" is raptured the one holding back the lawless one will be removed. Thus, setting loose the lawless one to fulfill the end time prophesy.

We of the NEW COVENANT are so much more blessed than those of the law of Moses. Take some time just to ponder this.....

**SECOND READING;**

**READ 2 THESSALONIANS CHAPTER 2**

**benediction**

**2 THESSALONIANS CHAPTER 2**

**DISCUSSIONS AND Q & A**

1, Is Paul instructing us to ignore prophecy in V2:2?

Paul uses the term “a prophecy”, remember not all prophecy spoken comes from the holy spirit. Review 1 THES 5:19-22.

2, Describe the “day of the Lord”.

The evil one will achieve governing control of the earth. All righteousness and devotion to God will be brutally persecuted.

3, What must occur before the day of the Lord?

The rapture. The Holy Spirit must be taken from the earth. Encourage discussion on why the day of the Lord cannot come while the Church of the Christ is on earth.

4, Who is the lawless one?

The lawless one is not Satan. He or She will be a common mortal human who Satan will enslave to do his bidding. Satan will give this person supernatural power.

5, What is the prime tool of evil?

Deception. Satan cannot harm you directly. He does however have the power to deceive you into harming yourself. He will do all he can to cause you to reject Christ.

6, What is the mission of evil?

The mission of evil is to destroy mankind's relationship with Christ.

7a, What is needed for Christians to avoid being deceived?

We need spiritual maturity, insight and wisdom in order to discern truth.

7b, How do we achieve this?

It can only be achieved by living in the word, prayer and fellowship in the body of Christ.

OPEN FORUM (5 TO 10 MINUTES)

PRAYER NEEDS AND PRAISE

CLOSING PRAYER Give thanks for the presence of the Holy spirit in our lives.

## 2 THESSALONIANS 3 OPEN WITH A PRAYER FIRST READING

Paul is coming to a close in this letter. At the time he is writing this letter he is experiencing some difficulties in Corinth and asks for prayer support from the Thessalonian fellowship.

Then, almost as an afterthought, Paul brings up another issue. Remember, paper and ink are expensive so Paul will not wad up the paper and start again. Somehow it had come to his attention that there were some disorderly lazy people who were taking advantage of the fellowship. These people were leaching on the benevolence of the ekklesia. Paul issues a stern rebuke of this practice. He goes on to instruct the faithful to “take special note of him.” Make it clear to the disorderly that their behavior is improper. But Paul reminds them to admonish with love.

Again, almost as an afterthought, right in the middle of his closing benediction Paul makes a parenthetical statement. **HEY, LOOK AT MY WRITING AND SIGNATURE!** Know that it is I, Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles who writes this letter. It was alluded to earlier that false information was presented as coming from Paul.

## SECOND READING

### READ 2 THESSALONIANS 3 **benediction**

## 2 THESSALONIANS CHAPTER 3

### DISCUSSIONS AND Q & A

1, Define evil.

**Evil is the result of a determined will set against God.**

2, How does the Lord protect us from the evil one?

**Jesus died for our salvation. Jesus has sent us the Holy Spirit to guide us and offer us wisdom. We have been given the body of Christ in the fellowship of the Church and we have the WORD.**

3, What was Paul's words for anyone who misused the benevolence of the fellowship.

**If you don't work, you don't eat. They should be lovingly admonished but excluded from fellowship.**

4, **STUDY REVIEW:** List 3 key concepts you gained from this study.

Encourage members to explain their choice of key concepts.

### **OPEN FORUM & REVIEW**

**(15 TO 30 MINUTES)**

Ask if there are any open question over any subject in any of the prior sessions.

### **PRAYER NEEDS AND PRAISE**

**CLOSING PRAYER** Pray for people who are feeling unloved. Pray for your ability to express love.

# SUMMATION

Knowing the background and understanding the culture of the time adds tremendously to the understanding of the writings of Paul. Not until I looked at and understood the time and the people of that time did I realize the power and importance of the Thessalonian letters to the Christians of the first century. Paul will go on to write many more letters which will make up a majority of the New Testament.

These are the letters of Paul and the order they were written:

GALATIANS	49AD
1 & 2 THESSALONIANS	51AD
1 CORINTHIANS	55AD
2 CORINTHIANS	56AD
ROMANS	57AD
EPHESIANS	60AD
PHILIPPIANS	61AD
PHILEMON	61AD
COLOSSIANS	62AD
1 TIMOTHY	63AD
TITUS	64AD
2 TIMOTHY	67AD

## APENDIX

### EVENT POSTMORTEM

How we handle tragic events in our lives is a reflection of the maturity of our faith. How we handle glorious events in our lives is a reflection of the maturity of our faith. When the event has passed and the dust has settled, we should do an *event postmortem*.

How do we do an event postmortem?

We put on your most humble robe. We invite the Lord into your heart. We ask ourselves:

How did I react?

How should I have reacted?

How could the outcome have changed if I had acted differently?

Did I go to the Lord for guidance and comfort?

When we do a postmortem of our actions, we are able to derive the maximum learning from our past. When we are learning we are maturing.

Make an effort to develop the habit of *event postmortem*. Once a week or better yet daily, sit down with a piece of paper and make two lists. One of good and one of not so good events since your last postmortem. Then ask the 4 questions listed above. It is important to make the effort of writing it down. This could be an added dimension to your daily journaling. In difficult situations seek out a trusted Christian mentor. Always seek the council of Christ through the Holy Spirit.