

Paul's 1st Letter to the Thessalonians

1 Thessalonians 1:1-3

Commentary to Recommend

The Letters to the Thessalonians (Pillar New Testament Commentary), by Gene L. Green, 2002, published by Eerdmans, clothbound, 400 pages. (Amazon, \$30.33)

Historical Setting

- Paul is writing this letter to the Thessalonians during his 2nd missionary journey around AD 49-51.
- Paul and Silas came to Thessalonica after being in Philippi. After much unrest in Thessalonica they came to Berea and then Athens and then they finally came to Corinth

(*Acts 17*. While in Athens Paul sent for Timothy and Silas to join him there. Paul then sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to check on the believers there. In the mean time Paul went to Corinth to await news from Timothy (*Acts 18:1-5*, *1 Thess 3:1-5*))

- Paul wrote his to the Thessalonian believers from Corinth.

Understanding Apostles

Those Chosen by Jesus (Big A)

Paul was chosen by Jesus to be an apostle with a unique mission and authority.

Acts 9:15-16, *2 Cor 12:12*, *2 Peter 3:15-16*, *1 Thess 5:27*

Representatives of the Churches (small a)

Paul, Silas and Timothy were apostles in the sense that they were representatives of a church.

Acts 13:1-3, *Acts 15:36-41*, *Acts 16:1-5*, *2 Cor 8:23*

The Church

- The gathering of the people of Israel is called an ekklesia or assembly. *Acts 7:38*
- A local gathering of the family of believers is called a church.

Understanding the Role of the Son

- Jesus is fully God. *John 20:28*
- Jesus is also the Redeemer who would represent man. As the man Christ Jesus he rose from the dead and is now the Lord of heaven and earth. *Matthew 28:18-20*

Grace and Peace

Grace

All that we have in the Lord as believers is a gift from God. *Ephesians 2:8-10*

Peace

The cross of Jesus satisfied the wrath of the Father on our behalf. Therefore we will for all eternity have peace with God. *Romans 5:1*

Praying for Other Believers

Giving Thanks

Work Produced by Faith

Saving faith always produces a changed life. *Romans 1:5*

Labor Prompted by Love

Biblical love always results in doing. *1 John 4:19-21*

Endurance Inspired by Hope

Biblical hope is the confidence that we will receive what Jesus has promised. This hope will cause the believer to keep on living for the Lord until death or the 2nd Coming. *2 Cor 3:12*

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1 Thessalonians 1:4-10

Understanding Election

His Decision

Election of Israel

Deuteronomy 7:7-8

- Israel was chosen out of all the nations on the earth to be a unbelieving picture of the people of God.
- The choice of Israel by God gave them a very special status that the other nations did not have with God. *Romans 9:1-5*

Election of Believers

Romans 9:16-21

- The determined historical destinies of two groups of people, the descendants of Jacob and the descendants of Esau function as a picture of the choice of who is going to be saved.
Malachi 1:2-3
- Election to salvation is not based on anything good or bad that someone might do.
Romans 9:10-13
- There is no such thing as “eternal justification.” An elect or chosen person was guaranteed to be justified at a certain moment in time but until then he was under the wrath of God.
Romans 5:6-11
- Election to salvation is the guarantee that not only will those chosen be justified but that they will also be sanctified. *Ephesians 1:4-6*

Who is Loved by God?

Discriminating Love

God loves Everyone (Limited Love)

- God does show love to all in some sense. *Matthew 5:43-48*,
- God's love for all is limited in the sense that it does not include personal salvation.
Romans 9:13, Romans 2:4, Acts 14:17
- God's love for all is limited in the sense that it does not last for all eternity.
Matthew 25:46, Jude 1:7

God loves Believers (Unlimited Love)

- The love of our Lord for the believer can never be lost. *Romans 8:35-39*
- Everything that the believer experiences are orchestrated by his love for us. *Romans 8:28*
- Believers are commanded to give thanks for everything since everything is orchestrated by the love of our Father. *Ephesians 5:20, 1 Thessalonians 5:18*

Evidence of Membership in the New Covenant

Hebrews 8:8-12

Membership in the Old Covenant

- Abrahamic Covenant introduced the rite of circumcision. *Genesis 17, Romans 4:11*
- Israelite males were circumcised on the 8th day as a sign that Israel was the special people of God. *Leviticus 12:3, Ephesians 2:11*

Membership in the New Covenant

Christ has circumcised real believers. This is another way of saying that they have received the gift of faith and have a new heart. *Colossians 2:11-12, Romans 2:28-29*

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1 Thessalonians 2:1-16

Role of Suffering

1 Thessalonians 2:1-2

- Opposition to the gospel and suffering for the gospel are not signs that things are going badly. *James 1:2*
- Much of Paul's missionary efforts was accompanied by opposition and suffering.
Acts 16 Paul and Silas in prison in Philippi
Acts 17 Paul and Silas in Thessalonica
Acts 17 Paul and Silas in Berea

It is All about Motive

1 Thessalonians 2:3-6a

Definition of Motive

Why we do what we do

Biblical Motive

Doing what we do for the purpose of honoring the God of heaven and earth. *1 Corinthians 10:31*
Z

Ungodly Motive: People-Pleasing

Our goal is to make others like us. *Proverbs 28:23*

Ungodly Motive: Greed

Our goal is to gain material wealth. *1 Timothy 3:3*

Ungodly Motive: Self-Glory

Our goal is to make ourselves look good. *Philippians 2:3*

Necessity of Relationships

1 Thessalonians 2:6b-12

Paul did not want to be a Burden

Paul did not want to be a financial burden to the believers in Thessalonica. His love for the believers constantly motivated him. *2 Corinthians 11:7-12*

Paul's Fatherly Care

Paul's ministry to the believers in Thessalonica was always relational. He was a people lover. He was other-person centered.

Word of God

1 Thessalonians 2:13

- Paul's teaching was the Word of God. *2 Peter 3:15-16*
- The evidence of a new heart is that you have a desire to obey God's word. *Titus 2:11-12*

Judgment on the Jews

1 Thessalonians 2:14-16

- Jews who reject Jesus no longer to called the people of God. *Romans 2:28-29*
- During the New Covenant era only a few Jews, a remnant, will be saved. *Romans 11:5*
- The most violent enemies of believers in the early church are the Jews. *Revelation 2:8-11*

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1 Thessalonians 2:13-3:13

Historical Context

Acts 17:1-10, 18:1-11

- Paul and Silas had to leave the new believers in Thessalonica before they were grounded in the faith.
- When Paul and Silas left Thessalonica they came to Berea and a number of the Bereans came to faith. But once again Jews from Thessalonica followed them to Berea and caused an uproar so that Paul and Silas had to once again leave quickly and proceed to Athens.
- After Athens Paul went to Corinth while he awaited the arrival of Timothy to tell him how the Thessalonian believers were doing in the faith.

“Satan stopped us”

1 Thessalonians 2:17-18

- We do not know how Paul came to the conclusion that the difficulties that he was encountering were interpreted as Satan hindering him.
- Paul did interpret the thorn in his flesh as work of a messenger of Satan.
2 Corinthians 12:1-10
- We are clearly told that there is an evil realm, the realm of Satan and his demons, that affects us negatively in our Christian life. *Ephesians 6:10-12*

“you are our glory and joy”

1 Thessalonians 2:19-20

Evidence of a new heart is seen in the apostle Paul as he finds his joy in the changed lives of other believers.

Difficulties are part of the Normal Christian life

1 Thessalonians 3:1-5

Our Difficulties

- Each life of the believer is preprogrammed with a certain amount of difficulties that are essential for our sanctification. *Romans 8:28*

Difficulties of other Believers

- The difficulties of other believers will never be too much for them. They also are experiencing that which is essential for their sanctification. *Romans 8:28*

Promised yet Praying

1 Thessalonians 3:6-10

Living with the Tension

- Prayer and the Sovereign Will are a tension that believers must learn to live with.
- We are not allowed to ignore either our responsibility to pray or the predestined plan of God.

Prayer: love for one another

Saying either “love as Jesus loved” or “love your neighbor as yourself” can summarize the Law of Christ. *John 13:34-35, James 2:8*

Prayer: asking for help

Asking in prayer acknowledges our dependence on our Lord. It is also the Father’s way to grant us what we need. *James 4:2b*

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1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

Filling of the Spirit

1 Thessalonians 4:1, 9-10

Filling as an Experience

The Holy Spirit can fill the believer in the sense that he gives the believer a unique experience. The believer cannot control this concept of Filling. *Acts 4:31, Acts 2:1-4*

Filling as a Way of Life

The most common understanding in Scripture of the Filling of the Spirit is that it is a description of a believer who is living for his Lord. *Ephesians 5:18, Acts 6:4-6*

Believers have the “Anointing” of the Spirit

The word “anointing” refers to the work of the Spirit in the life of the believer that guarantees that every believer will bear fruit. *1 John 2:27, Romans 8:12-14*

Paul Speaks for God

1 Thessalonians 4:2

Scripture is God’s Word

- Jesus is the Word of God. His role is to reveal God. *John 1:1-18*
- Scripture is the Word of God. It records all that God wants us to know this side of heaven. *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

Paul’s Words are God’s Word

- Peter describes Paul’s letters as Scripture, the Word of God. *2 Peter 3:15-16*
- Paul understood that he spoke with the authority of Jesus. *1 Corinthians 7:10,12*

Understanding the Will of God

1 Thessalonians 4:3

Sovereign Will

God's predetermined plan that includes all things. This plan was not made as a result of what would happen in the future. *Ephesians 1:11, Acts 4:27-28, Romans 9:10-13*

Moral Will

What the Bible says that we must do or not do. *Acts 20:27, 1 Thessalonians 5:18*

Command to be Holy

1 Thessalonians 4:4-8

Sexual Holiness

Believers must treat other believers in a God honoring manner in the sexual realm. Marriage is the God given outlet to satisfy our sexual desires. *1 Corinthians 7:1-3*

Warning!

To sexually take advantage of another person is sin with the consequence of our Father's discipline. *Hebrews 12:7-11*

What should the Christian life look like?

1 Thessalonians 4:11-12

Good Citizens

Believers are to fit to our culture yet without biblical compromise. *Acts 4:18-20*

Provide for yourself and do not be Burden on others

Believers are to earn their living to provide for themselves and to care for others in need. *Ephesians 4:28, 1 Timothy 5:8*

Win Respect of Unbeliever

Our testimony to the unbelieving world is very important to our Lord. *1 Timothy 3:7*

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1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Theological Controversy

Was Jesus coming back soon?

Last Days

- The use of "last days" refers to the New Covenant era that begins at Pentecost and ends at the 2nd Coming. *Hebrews 1:1-2*
- The evil that will take place in the "last days" is described as something that Timothy must currently be on guard against. *2 Timothy 3:1-9*
- The idea that the Lord was coming in the lifetime of the disciples has no basis in Scripture. All that is clear is that we do live in the last days and that Jesus is going to return.

Sorting Out the 2nd Coming

- Some believers among the church at Thessalonica were concerned that the believers who have died before the 2nd Coming will in some sense miss out on the benefits of the 2nd Coming.
- The fact that the 2nd Coming has not yet taken place should not unsettle the believer. Our God's sense of timing is perfect. Jesus will return when the last of the elect comes to faith. *2 Peter 3:1-9, Romans 11:25-27*

The Resurrected Body

Eternal State

What kind of body will we have?

1 Corinthians 15:35-53

- Believers will have a perfect body that is suitable for an eternal existence with the Lord of glory.
- The new heavens and earth will be a perfect place with no sin or tears. *Revelation 21:1-4*

What happens at the 2nd Coming?

1 Corinthians 15:20-28, 54-58

- Sin is the breaking of God's law. *1 John 3:4*
- In the unbeliever's life God's law results in an increase of sin due to the bad heart of the unbeliever. *Romans 7:5, Romans 5:20*
- Death is the result of sin. *Genesis 2:15-17, Romans 6:23*
- At the 2nd Coming death and sin are no more.

Sorting out the Rapture

Everyone Believes in the Rapture

- The concept of a rapture that takes place at the beginning of the 7-year tribulation is a theological necessity of Dispensationalism, but it is not taught in Scripture. *Revelation 4:1-2*
- The biblical concept of the rapture is that when Jesus returns all believers, both dead and alive, will get a resurrected body and will be with him forever in the eternal physical state. *2 Peter 3:10-13*

Encourage Each Other

Eternal Perspective

Those who are in the Lord have the promise of an eternal existence with our Lord whom we love in a perfect land that will not end. This knowledge is to enable the believer to view our current circumstances through the lens of eternity. *2 Corinthians 4:16-18*

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1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Time of the 2nd Coming

1 Thessalonians 5:1-3

Not One Question but Two

Matthew 24:1-3

- Jesus calls attention to the temple buildings to his disciples.
- The disciples then asked Jesus a question about when this will happen and they tied the 2nd Coming to the destruction of the temple in AD 70.
- My understanding is that Matthew 24 contains the answers to both the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 and the 2nd Coming of Jesus Christ.
- In Matthew 24 there does not seem to be a natural transition between the destruction of Jerusalem and the 2nd Coming. One seems to be the picture of the other.

Signs of AD 70

Matthew 24:1-3, 15-22, 32-35

- The destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans was a slow affair that could be seen coming from quite a distance.
- Believers are warned to flee to the mountains. The fact that this might take place on the Sabbath day would seem to indicate that this is referring to the time of AD 70.
- The signs of AD 70 are obvious and the believers are warned to pay attention to them.

Signs of the 2nd Coming

Matthew 24:4-14, 23-31, 36-44

- Unlike AD 70 the 2nd Coming will come as a “thief in the night.”
- When Jesus returns it will come at a time when life is going on as usual.
- The one sign that must take place before the 2nd Coming is the coming of the “man of lawlessness” or the “antichrist.” *2 Thessalonians 2:1-12, 1 John 2:18-19, 4:1-3*
- Unlike AD 70 there are no obvious signs of the 2nd Coming.

Living in the Light of His Coming

1 Thessalonians 5:4-10

Living in the Darkness

Believers are warned that they must not live in the darkness, which is another way of saying that their lives must not be characterized by sin. If this happens then it means that they are not believers and that only the wrath of God awaits them. *Romans 8:12-14*

Living in the Light

Believers are to invest their lives for the Lord so that they are looking forward to and ready for the 2nd Coming. *Romans 8:12-14*

2nd Coming Warnings

Matthew 25

#1 *The Parable of the Ten Virgins*

#2 *The Parable of the Talents*

#3 *The Sheep and the Goats*

Encourage One Another

1 Thessalonians 5:1

The 2nd Coming gives the believer an eternal perspective and motivation for godly living.

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1 Thessalonians 5:12-14

Bits and Bobs from the Apostle Paul

Part 1

Respecting our Leaders

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13a

- The assumption is that the leaders are biblically qualified. *1 Timothy 3, Titus 1*
- Leaders are to be believers that can be imitated. *Hebrews 13:7*

- Obedience to leaders is not an option. This also assumes that leaders do not seek obedience when they have no authority to demand obedience. *Hebrews 13:17, Matthew 20:25-28*
- If you cannot respect your leaders then you are in the wrong church.

Live in Peace with Each Other

1 Thessalonians 5:13b

- Every believer has a new heart. *Romans 6:17-18*
- With the new heart every conflict between believers is resolvable. *1 John 4:19-21*
- Church discipline addresses a refusal by a professed believer to live in peace other believers. *Matthew 18:15-17*

Warn the Idle

1 Thessalonians 5:14a

The issue of idleness will be address when we come to *2 Thessalonians 3:6-15, 1 Timothy 5:8*

Encourage the Timid

1 Thessalonians 5:14b

- The concept can be described as disheartened (NIV), and fainthearted (ESV). It carries with it the idea of discouragement and fearfulness.
- We encourage one another by reminding each other of what is biblically true. *Hebrews 3:13*
- One of the gifts of the Spirit is the gift of encouragement. *Romans 12:8*
- One of the roles of church leaders is to encourage the family of believers by sound doctrine. *Titus 1:9*

Help the Weak

1 Thessalonians 5:14c

- A weak believer is someone who is easily overcome by difficulties.
- Stronger believers must never use their maturity to look down on the weak believers. *Romans 15:1, Romans 14:1. 1 Corinthians 8:9*
- The weaker believers are an indispensable part of the family of believers. *1 Corinthians 12:22*

Be Patient with Everyone

1 Thessalonians 5:14d

- Patience brings with it the idea of submitting to the Father's timetable. This is especially true with regard to the spiritual growth of others. *Colossians 3:12-14*
- Since believers are to be other-person centered the Holy Spirit is working in the believer to make him patient with others for this is what love dictates. *Galatians 5:23*

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1 Thessalonians 5:15-28

Bits and Bobs from the Apostle Paul

Part 2

Do Not Pay Back Wrong for Wrong

1 Thessalonians 5:15a

Under Mosaic Law

- Under the Mosaic Law the Israelites were not prohibited from taking revenge on their enemies. *Numbers 35:6-28*
- In the imprecatory psalms God is called upon to bring judgment on Israel's enemies. *Psalms 10:15, Psalm 69:22-28*

Under Law of Christ

- For the believer everything that he experiences is something that is for his good. *Romans 8:28*
- In the New Covenant era believers are not allowed to use physical force to defeat those who oppress us. We are not even allowed to pray that God would punish them. *Romans 12:17-21*

Be Kind to Each Other

1 Thessalonians 5:15b

- Under the Law of Christ believers are called to care for all those that our Lord brings into our lives. *James 2:8*
- The evidence that we belong to the Lord is seen in how we love one another. *1 John 3:10*
- A believer caring for other believers is a priority in the believer's life. *Galatians 6:10*
- Luke

Be Joyful Always

1 Thessalonians 5:16

- Joy cannot be defined as a feeling since we cannot control our feelings.
- Joy is defined as believing what God says about all that we experience in walk with the Lord. *Romans 8:28*
- There is never anything that the believer experiences that cannot be a source of joy.

Pray Continually

1 Thessalonians 5:17

- This passage does not mean that believers are to literally pray non-stop.
- Most likely this passage refers to the truth that believers must pray about all things. *Philippians 4:4-7*
- This passage also refers to the need to persevere in prayer. *Luke 18:1-8*
- The believer must always be in a attitude of prayer throughout the day.

Give Thanks in All Circumstances

1 Thessalonians 5:18

- Everything that the believer experiences have been choreographed by his heavenly father for his good. *Romans 8:28*
- To refuse to give thanks is to embrace unbelief and to refuse to do the will of God.
- One must give thanks in our hearts in order to truly give thanks.

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1 Thessalonians 5:19-28

Bits and Bobs from the Apostle Paul

Part 3

Handling NT Prophecy

1 Thessalonians 5:19-22

Old Covenant Era Prophecy Testing

Deuteronomy 13:1-5, Deuteronomy 18:14-22

- The prophet had to give a short-term prophecy to validate that he was truly a prophet.
- The content of the prophecy must not contradict what God has previously given.

New Covenant Era Prophecy Testing

1 Corinthians 14:29, 1 John 4:1-3

- The teaching on the testing of claimed prophecy of NT prophets is not crystal clear in the New Covenant era.
- There may have been a gift of the Spirit that enabled an individual believer to distinguish between true and false prophecy. *1 Corinthians 12:10*

NT Prophecy

- NT prophecy was a normal part of the early church. *1 Corinthians 14:39*
- It is proper to desire the gift of prophecy but the Holy Spirit sovereignly gives to whomever he wants to have it. *1 Corinthians 12:11*
- The role of NT prophecy would seem to be foundation building in the New Covenant era and therefore uniquely a part of the “grand opening” of the New Covenant era. *Ephesians 2:20*

Quenching the Spirit

- Jeremiah describes the impulse to speak to others what God has spoken to him as “his word is in my heart like a fire.” *Jeremiah 20:9*
- To quench the Spirit is to disregard the word of God given through NT prophets.

Closing Benediction

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

God of Peace

- This phrase is another way of saying that our God saves. Salvation at its core is the resolving everything that a holy God has against us. *Romans 5:1*
- This phrase also means that if we have received full forgiveness of our sins then we will also receive the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. *Hebrew 10:14*
- Believers are responsible to seek to be blameless with regard to the conduct of their lives. *1 Thessalonians 4:3*
- The phrase “spirit, soul and body” is another way of saying that we should love him with our whole person.
- Spirit and soul are used interchangeably and do not refer to different parts of our being. *Matthew 22:37, Luke 1:46-47, Matthew 11:29, Revelation 20:4*

Final Words

1 Thessalonians 5:25-28

- Paul’s request for prayer reveals that prayer does bring things to pass.
- The “holy kiss” was a cultural way of showing affection for others.
- Paul’s letter is Scripture and therefore has authority for all the believers.
- The grace of our Lord Jesus refers to our complete salvation that Jesus purchased for us.

