



“Darkness and Light”

WEEK ONE: Introduction

DAY ONE

1. Paul’s initial visit to Thessalonica is detailed in Acts 17:1-9. Outline the events that took place during this visit.

As he normally did when he visited a city with a synagogue (Philippi, it appears, didn’t have one because Paul began his work at a river), Paul began his work in Thessalonica in the synagogue. The fact that the city had a synagogue is significant, because it meant that there were people in the city who already held the Scriptures to be authoritative and who knew of and (perhaps) trusted in the God of Israel. All that was left (at least in theory) was for the dots to be connected.

The synagogue in Thessalonica would have been comprised of both Jewish and Gentile people. Paul went into the synagogue and “on three Sabbath days” used the Scriptures to reason with those in attendance. During these three days, Paul focused on “the Christ” (i.e., the Messiah) and the need for him “to suffer and to rise from the dead”. The Jews probably argued with Paul, but he was a formidable opponent. He had been trained by one of the foremost Jews—Gamaliel—in the interpretation of Scripture. He was a Pharisee—a member of the most respected group of leaders among the Jewish people (Pharisee, to the Jewish people of that time, was a positive term). And since he was a Christian and filled with the Holy Spirit, he was able to read and understand the Scriptures in a way his opponents simply could not match.

Once he had proved that the Christ had to suffer, die, and rise from the dead, Paul proclaimed that a man named Jesus had done these things about 20 years earlier, and was, therefore, the Christ. It seems that quite a few people were convinced by Paul’s words and believed: “some” Jews, “a great many of the devout Greeks”, and “not a few of the leading women”. These people were the beginning of the church in Thessalonica.

The Jews were jealous of the attention Paul (actually Christ) had gained in Paul’s three weeks of preaching. Because of this, they rounded up people of “the rabble” and formed a mob. The mob led to an uproar which led to the city authorities getting involved. The brothers and sisters in the church recognized the danger Paul was in and sent Paul and Silas off to Berea.

2. Thessalonica was a large city located in a province called Macedonia. Where is Macedonia located? (Use the maps tracing Paul’s missionary journeys located in the back of your Bible)

Macedonia is a province in a large peninsula situated between Italy to the west and Asia (modern day Turkey) to the east. The Aegean Sea forms its eastern border. Macedonia is north of the province of Achaia.

3. Why did Paul and his companions travel to Macedonia? *Acts 16:6-10*

It wasn't Paul's original intention to travel to Macedonia. He wanted to minister in Asia and Bithynia, but the Holy Spirit wouldn't allow him to minister in either place (at least at that time). Finally, Paul had a vision of a man from Macedonia telling him to come to Macedonia and help them. Thus, Paul traveled to Macedonia because "God had called [Paul and his team] to preach the gospel to them" (Acts 6:10). It was, evidently, time for the gospel to pass from Asia into Europe.

4. Why do you think Paul was called to Macedonia in this particular way? What might this say about God's plans for Paul versus Paul's plans for Paul?

I think Paul needed to see a vision regarding Macedonia because he wouldn't have naturally considered going there—at least for some time. There was, after all, still a great deal of work to be done in Asia. God, in his wisdom, knew that Asia had received the help it needed (for the time being at least) and that Macedonia was ready for the gospel.

5. How should your answer to question four impact the way you live your life?

I must be sensitive to the Holy Spirit and go where he directs me to go and do what he directs me to do. I do not know all things. I need to consider that he may direct me in what is not the most logical direction.

DAY TWO

6. Describe Paul's hasty departure from Thessalonica. *Acts 17:5-10*

The church, realizing the danger Paul and his companions were in, sent them off to Berea under cover of darkness. With the events of Thessalonica fresh in their minds, it is amazing that Paul and his companions began their ministry in Berea in the synagogue. Paul would not let fear of the Jews and what they might do keep him from preaching the gospel. This must be one reason why Paul asked the churches to pray that he would be bold (see, for instance, Ephesians 6:20). It should be noted that the preaching in Berea stirred up trouble for Paul again.

7. What potential problems might arise in a church that would lose its leader so early in its existence?

It could lead to many problems. For instance, who taught these new believers? There is great potential for false teaching to propagate in an environment like this. This false teaching can lead people in all sorts of disastrous directions. Beyond this, who led the fledgling church? Even if Paul had appointed elders in the church while he was there, these men had not been believers for very long. The potential for such leaders to lead the people astray is great (even if such misleading is innocent!).

8. Do you see any benefits to a church losing its leader so early in its existence? If so, what are they?

One benefit is that the church would be forced to learn—very early on—to rely on the Holy Spirit. This would naturally lead to a deep and vibrant prayer life within the church.

DAY THREE

9. Paul eventually returned to Thessalonica during his third missionary journey. Why did he wait so long to return to this young church? *1 Thessalonians 2:17-18*

Paul wanted to return to the church—many times—but Satan “hindered” him.

10. What does this tell you about the work of Satan?

Satan hates the church because he hates Jesus. He will do anything to see the church destroyed. An obvious place for Satan to target in order to destroy the church is the leadership of a church. He knows that God has given leaders to the church so that it might grow to maturity (see Ephesians 4:11-16). If he is able to keep leaders from the church he is able to stunt its growth.

11. What does this tell you about the work of God? Why would he allow this to happen? What benefit, if any, would this bring to the church?

Everything God does is for his own glory. That is, the actions God takes always result in his greatness being displayed. Therefore, God allows Satan to tamper with the church because it increases his (God’s) glory. For instance, God allowed Satan to keep Paul from the church in Thessalonica. While Paul’s absence from the church undoubtedly brought a level of hardship to the church, it definitely increased God’s glory. It did this because Satan’s hindrance of Paul caused Paul to write two letters to the church in Thessalonica. These letters became part of the New Testament. Thus, Satan’s actions to hurt this one church in the first century have resulted in countless churches being greatly helped over the last 20 centuries. God’s name has been exalted and lifted up by millions of saints because of the truths found in these letters. This is surely not what Satan intended! Thus, God demonstrates his greatness and the victory of Christ by using Satan’s ploys against him.

12. Do you think Satan is doing the same thing today? Why is God, if he is in control, allowing this to happen?

He is absolutely doing the same thing today. Of course, we are not always able to see the results as clearly as we can see them in the case of the Thessalonian church, however, we can rest assured that Satan never wins. Short-term victories on his part always result in long-term victories on God’s part. God is in control and he is allowing Satan a limited scope of activity because it increases his glory.

13. What did Paul do to strengthen the church during the long period when he wasn’t able to return to the church himself? *1 Thessalonians 3:1-5*

He sent Timothy to “establish and exhort” the Thessalonians in their faith. He also wanted Timothy to report back to him about the conditions he found in the church.

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14. 1 and 2 Thessalonians were written during the period when Paul was not able to visit the church. What sorts of topics might you expect Paul to address in letters written under these circumstances?

I would expect him to reiterate the basics of the gospels (i.e., the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus). I would expect him to talk about how a Christian ought to live in light of the gospel. In other words, what does a Christian live like? I would expect him to talk about how the church should function (in regard to leadership, spiritual gifts, the preaching of the Word, baptism, the Lord's Supper, etc.). I would expect him to talk about the coming of Jesus and the resurrection of the dead. It is interesting that some of these subjects are not covered at all in these two letters.

15. Two Thessalonian Christians—Aristarchus and Secundus—accompanied Paul on his third missionary journey (see Acts 20:1-6). Aristarchus also accompanied Paul on his voyage to Rome (see Acts 27:2). He eventually was imprisoned with him (see Colossians 4:10). What does this tell you about the church in Thessalonica and Paul's relationship with the church?

This clearly wasn't just a baby church that was always on the receiving end of help. The fact that believers from this church accompanied Paul indicates that believers were growing to maturity in the church. The fact that the church was willing to send these mature believers to help others indicates that they had a global perspective and a healthy understanding of their place in the body of Christ.

DAY FOUR

16. Read 1 Thessalonians, preferably in one sitting. Don't take any notes as you read, just take the time to slowly read the chapters. When you are finished, write any thoughts these chapters leave you with in the space below.

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DAY FIVE

17. Read 2 Thessalonians, preferably in one sitting. Don't take any notes as you read, just take the time to slowly read the chapters. When you are finished, write any thoughts these chapters leave you with in the space below.

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DAY SIX

18. Read the study notes and then complete the following sentence. This week, the Holy Spirit has taught me ...

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“Darkness and Light”
WEEK TWO: 1 Thessalonians 1

DAY ONE

1 Thessalonians 1

1 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,

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

Grace to you and peace.

2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, 3 remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. 4 For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. 6 And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. 8 For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. 9 For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

DAY TWO

1. In 1 Thessalonians 1:1 Paul does not mention that he is an apostle. In which of his letters (the letters in the New Testament from Romans through Philemon) do you find him including this fact?

Paul includes this fact in Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus.

2. Why do you think he might leave this important detail out of this letter? In other words, what might his omission of this fact say about his relationship with those to whom he was sending the letter?

Paul did not need to include this fact in this letter. The word’s absence seems to indicate that he had a very good relationship with the Thessalonians. At times, a father needs to remind his children that he is their father. This is usually when they are not listening or they need some sort

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Prayer was a huge part of Paul’s life. If you spent a day with him, you would have spent part of that day praying.

Verse 3 explains how the prayers in verse 2 took place. The apostolic team was replaying the great things that had happened among the Thessalonians back to God.

These are significant verses. Verse 5 explains how Paul and his companions knew that God had chosen the Thessalonians. This is worth careful thought and shouldn’t be passed over quickly.

Paul and his companions served in such a way that they could tell people to imitate their life and manner of work. Could I tell people to imitate my life and manner of work?

The coming of Jesus from heaven and the deliverance he brings to his followers from God’s coming wrath is a major theme of this letter. God’s wrath is a major theme of the OT prophets. It is also the first major topic Paul addresses in his letter to the Romans. Without an understanding of God’s wrath it is impossible to understand salvation. Even the word “salvation” implies wrath, for the word implies that we are being saved from something. That something is God’s wrath.

of correction. At other times, however, children do not need this reminder. The Thessalonians seem to have not needed to be reminded about Paul's position. They trusted him and were eager to do as he said. He didn't need to "pull rank" on them.

3. What do verses 2 and 3 tell you about how Paul and his companions spent their time together? What do they tell you about the importance of prayer in Paul's life?

They pray together ... a lot. This is noteworthy in and of itself. But it should be noted that Paul and his companions had other churches beyond the church in Thessalonica about which they also prayed. Paul was a busy man. Busier than most of us. The fact that he and his companions were praying "constantly" demonstrates the great importance he placed on prayer. He truly believed that prayer changes things.

4. If someone were to write about the importance of prayer in your life, what would they, based on your life, be able to write?

This is an important question and should not be passed over lightly.

5. In verse 3, Paul indicates that he and his companions brought up three specific things when they prayed to God regarding the church of the Thessalonians. What were those three things?

1. Their "work of faith"
2. Their "labor of love"
3. Their "steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ"

6. What do you think each of these three things mean? (Use the study notes in your Bible or another translation to provide help.)

I think the NIV is helpful here. It reads, "your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ".

1. The work of the Thessalonians was, as the NIV indicates, produced by their faith in Christ. This is significant. People don't do good works for God from themselves, as if they have the capacity for good work in themselves. Rather, their faith is what produces the good work. See Ephesians 2:10.
2. The labor was, as the NIV renders this verse, "prompted by love". Love (for Christ and for people) moved the Thessalonians to labor so that the church might grow in maturity and in size.
3. The church was enduring because their eyes were set on Jesus and the deliverance he had brought to them (from their sins) and that he would bring to them.

DAY THREE

7. In verse 4, Paul makes two statements about God's relationship with the Thessalonian church. What are they?

1. They were loved by God.

2. They were chosen by God.

8. If you are a Christian, do you know these things to be true about yourself?

This is important. Many Christians will say that God loves because they know that it is the right answer. But they do not truly believe that he loves them. Rather, they see God as primarily disappointed with them. Many don't think of God as choosing them. Rather, they think of themselves as choosing God. It is important that we don't put our choosing of God before his choosing of us.

9. Read verse 4 and the first half of verse 5 carefully. How did Paul and his companions know that God chosen the Thessalonians (to become followers of Jesus)?

They knew that God had chosen them because of the way in which the gospel came to them. The notes on 23 and 24 should prove helpful here.

10. When did God choose the Thessalonian believers? *Ephesians 1:4*

He chose them "in him before the foundation of the world".

11. Why did he choose them? *Ephesians 1:4, Romans 8:28-30*

He chose them that they might be "be holy and blameless before him". He chose them that they might be "conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers". Ultimately, the choosing of the Thessalonians results in "the praise of his glorious grace" (Ephesians 1:6).

This is a rather crude example, but perhaps it will help. People sometimes choose a puppy *before* it has even been conceived. They know, for instance, that two champion black labs will be bred together and they select the pick of the litter before it has been born! That dog is predestined, at least in the mind of the purchaser, to be a great hunting dog. Everything in that dog's life, even from before it is born, is aimed toward that goal. In the same way, God chooses people—from before the foundation of the earth—that they might be conformed to the image of Jesus. Obviously, the analogy breaks down rather quickly because humans don't know the future and they can't guarantee results. But God does know the future and he can guarantee results.

12. What do verses like these tell you about God's role in salvation?

Paul places great emphasis on God's choosing of people. God, rather than man, is the one behind salvation. If he didn't initiate salvation, we could not be saved. See John 6:37-45.

13. In Acts 13:48, Luke (the author of Acts) describes the circumstances surrounding the Gentiles in Antioch in Pisidia becoming followers of Jesus. Which Gentiles, according to Luke, became followers of Jesus?

Luke says that "as many as were appointed to eternal life believed". It is important to note that Luke emphasizes God's calling of people ("as many as were appointed to eternal life") and the people's response to that calling ("believed").

14. How would a lack of understanding regarding this important truth change one's understanding of how a person becomes a follower of Jesus?

If we believe that we initiate our relationship with God, we have, by necessity, an impoverished (and unbiblical) view of salvation. This has a number of negative consequences. Among them are the following:

1. If we don't understand this truth, we will not know or understand the love that God expresses to his people in choosing them.
2. If we don't understand this truth, we will not know or understand the depth of our own depravity; depravity so deep it would prevent anyone from seeking God apart from his intervention.
3. If we don't understand this truth, we will not thank God for choosing us.
4. If we don't understand this truth, we will emphasize our role in choosing God, which could lead to pride in our actions.
5. If we don't understand this truth, we will misinterpret many passages in the Bible (both in the OT and NT). This is far more common than we might think. For instance, I was recently given a book in which the author states that God chose Israel because "they followed God, they obeyed His Law, they did not intermarry, and the Savior of mankind would descend through Israel". This is simply not true. They did not, for the most part, follow God. They did not obey his laws. They did intermarry. God did not choose them because of their behavior. Rather, he chose them because he wanted to choose them. The reasons for choosing them were found within himself, not within the Israelites.

DAY FOUR

15. What did the believers in Thessalonica do after they accepted the gospel? 1

Thessalonians 1:6-7

They became imitators of Jesus and of Paul, Silas, and Timothy. They received the word "in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit". In the same way that Paul and his companions were examples to the Thessalonians, the Thessalonians became examples "to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia". It's worth asking whether I could be called an imitator of Jesus or of those who brought the gospel to me.

16. Notice the strange combination of the words "affliction" and "joy" in verse 6. How, based on this verse, could the Christians in Thessalonica have experienced joy in the midst of this great affliction?

The joy comes from the Holy Spirit. He brings joy to people in any circumstance. In fact, affliction might have heightened the Thessalonian Christians' awareness of this joy, because lesser joys had been stripped away by their affliction.

17. Has this been your experience? Please explain your answer.

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18. What promises do you find in the New Testament regarding afflictions?

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1 Thessalonians 3:1-3

We are destined for afflictions.

2 Timothy 3:12

This is a very strong verse: "... all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted ...".

John 15:18-21

Jesus said, "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you." The "if" in this verse is not meant to be saying that the world may or may not hate you. The world will hate the Christian for it hated Christ. He said, "If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you." This persecution is inevitable because the world does not know the Father.

John 16:33

Jesus said, "In this world you will have tribulation." We should expect trouble. The next phrase should, however, keep the Christian from despondency: "But take heart; I have overcome the world".

Other verses to consider include 2 Corinthians 11:16-33 and Philippians 4:10-20.

19. What promises do you find in the New Testament regarding joy?

John 15:11

Jesus said, "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full". In spite of our afflictions, we are not to be joyless people. Rather, we are to be filled with Christ's own joy.

John 16:20-24

While Jesus' death brought sorrow to the disciples, the resurrection brought joy to them that no one could take away. That joy should be part of every Christian's life today. Answered prayer results in fullness of joy.

20. How did the believers in Thessalonica become an example to the believers in Macedonia and Achaia? 1 Thessalonians 1:7-10

The Thessalonians were an example to their neighboring Christians in the manner in which they: (1.) received Paul and his team, (2.) turned to God from idols so that they might serve God, and (3.) were waiting for Jesus to return.

DAY FIVE

21. In verse 10, Paul refers to Jesus as the one "who delivers us from the wrath to come". Paul is referring to God's wrath that will be poured out at the end of the age. How is this wrath described in Romans 2:1-11?

The wrath described in these verses is “the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed”. This is the time when God will “render to each one according to his works”. In other words, God will judge people at this time according to what they have done. “There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil”. God’s wrath is a topic of massive importance. Some would say that God is not a God of wrath. This is not true. We must understand that God poured out his wrath on his Son so that he might be the Savior of all who believe in him and that he might deliver them from God’s wrath. He is pouring out his wrath on people today (see Romans 1:18-32), and he will pour out his wrath on a future day (Romans 2).

22. Why is God justified in pouring out his wrath on mankind? *Romans 3:10-20*

God is justified in pouring out his wrath on mankind because all people (apart from Christ and those in him) are under sin. People are not righteous in their character and they are not righteous in their behavior. God is just. He will give to people exactly what they deserve.

23. How does Jesus deliver the Christian from the wrath to come? *Romans 3:21-26*

Spend some time on these verses. Make sure those going through the study understand the meaning and implications of them. They are of the utmost importance. God “put forward” Jesus as a “propitiation” (some translations will read something like, “a sacrifice of atonement”). A propitiation is a sacrifice that turns aside God’s wrath. In other words, God poured out his wrath for my sins on Jesus. Isaiah 53 describes Jesus’ actions in the following way: “Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities, upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:4-6 ESV).

Since God’s wrath has already been poured out on Jesus in regard to my sin, I do not have to wait in fear that he will, once again, pour his wrath out on me because of my sin on the “day of wrath”. For me, that day of wrath has already come. It came when God poured out his wrath on Jesus. This truth may be seen in Romans 5:9: “Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God” (ESV).

24. What confidence can the Christian have that he or she will be delivered from God’s wrath? *1 Thessalonians 1:10, Romans 8:1-4*

The Christian can have the utmost confidence that he or she will be delivered because of the promises written in God’s word. God has promised that Jesus “delivers us from the wrath to come”. He has promised that there is no condemnation for the Christian. God has done what the Christian could never do. By sending Jesus “in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit”.

DAY SIX

25. Read the study notes and then complete the following sentence. This week the Holy Spirit has taught me ...

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ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

The subject of God's wrath is worth careful study. It is a major theme of Romans 1-3. Much of OT prophecy centers on God's coming wrath. Christians who are ignorant of this important topic will be shallow in their understanding of many important truths. The gospel cannot be rightly understood apart from an understanding of God's wrath.

This is the start of Paul's "apology". Here he defends the manner in which he and his team worked among the Thessalonians. He also provides a reason why they left.

Paul is referring to the events recorded in Acts 16:11-40.

Paul's preaching in Thessalonica focussed on Jesus' death and resurrection and the implications of these events.

God called Paul to preach. This fact gave Paul great confidence.

This should be our aim. We should speak in such a way that we might please God.

Paul was always careful that his manner of working wouldn't lead to people thinking ill of the gospel. By working for his own food he effectively cut off those who would say that he was preaching in order to bring benefit to himself. His manner of life proved that this was not the case.

This is something we should exhort and encourage and charge our brothers and sisters to do.

Do we actually believe this is true? Do we believe that God's word is at work in the believers? If we believe it is true, we will use the word constantly.

Paul knew God's word was at work in the believers because they were imitators of the churches in Judea.

This introduces an important theme in this letter: the coming of Jesus.

"Darkness and Light"
WEEK THREE: 1 Thessalonians 2

DAY ONE
1 Thessalonians 2

1 For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. **2** But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict. **3** For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, **4** but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. **5** For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness. **6** Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. **7** But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. **8** So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

9 For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. **10** You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. **11** For you know how, like a father with his children, **12** we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

13 And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. **14** For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, **15** who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind **16** by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved—so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But God's wrath has come upon them at last!

17 But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, **18** because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us. **19** For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? **20** For you are our glory and joy.

DAY TWO

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8

1. In 1 Thessalonians 2, Paul presents an extended apology (defense) regarding the manner in which his team preached the gospel in Thessalonica. Why might such an apology be valuable to the saints in Thessalonica?

Paul, Silas, and Timothy were forced to leave Thessalonica far earlier than they had planned (this happened to Paul frequently). The saints might have wondered why they hadn't returned to see them yet. Didn't Paul and his team love them? Had they forgotten all about them? In addition, this provided the believers with a response to those non-believers who might say that Paul and his team were no different from any other religious quacks or charlatans.

2. What value is there to saints today in reading an apology like this?

It reveals things that otherwise we would not know. For instance, it reveals to us how Paul and his team worked when they were preaching the gospel. It demonstrates the depth of love Paul had for those with whom he worked. It demonstrates the lengths to which he and his team would go in order to preach the gospel. It sets a standard for those who would preach the gospel today. Am I willing to serve others in this way? Am I this careful in the way I minister? This apology provides us with a pattern to follow when we preach the gospel.

3. How does Paul describe the manner in which he, Silas, and Timothy worked in Thessalonica in verses 1-8?

They boldly preached "in the midst of much conflict". They didn't use flattery in their preaching, they weren't greedy, and they didn't seek glory for themselves. Rather, they were gentle. They treated the Thessalonians "like a nursing mother taking care of her own children". The apostle and his team didn't just preach the gospel. They were "affectionately desirous" of the believers and shared their lives with them. I take this to mean that Paul, Silas, and Timothy truly treated the new believers in Thessalonica like family. They weren't, in any sense, professionally detached from the new believers in Thessalonians.

4. What was the motivation behind the team's work in Thessalonica?

Their motivation was, primarily, "to please God" (see verse 4). Secondly, they shared their lives with the Thessalonians because, as Paul says, "you had become very dear to us".

5. What does Paul mean by the statement, "we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves" (verse 8)?

See answer #3 above.

6. Is it possible to truly preach the gospel without, at the same time, sharing yourself? Why or why not?

No. I think this is very significant for every gospel worker. We cannot be people who are "professionally distant" from those to whom we minister. The gospel and our lives go out

together. Preaching and teaching and prayer springs from an engaged heart. None of these things thrive in the “soil” of detachment.

DAY THREE

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:9-12

7. Why do you think it was important that Paul and his companions worked while they were sharing the gospel in Thessalonica? Aside from providing for their own needs, what might this have accomplished?

It cut off any potential arguments people might have had that Paul and his team were working for their own benefit. It also set an example for the believers to follow.

8. In verse 7, Paul compares their labor in Thessalonica to that of a nursing mother. To what does he compare it in verse 11?

He compares it to the way a father relates to his own children.

9. Read verse 12 carefully. Describe the way Paul and his team worked with the individuals in Thessalonica.

The phrase “each one of you” is significant. Not only did Paul and his team preach to groups of people, they also spent time with each individual. Like good shepherds, they cared for the flock as a whole and as individuals.

10. What application can Christian leaders today take from these verses in regard to how the gospel should be proclaimed?

We must give ourselves to those to whom we minister. They must see our lives. They must know that we love them. We must seek to spend time with people individually as well as with the corporate whole.

DAY FOUR

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16

11. How does Paul describe the word of God in verse 13?

He describes it “not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, **which is at work in you believers**”.

12. Do you hear and respond to the word as if this was actually true?

?????

13. How were the believers in Thessalonica similar to “the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea” (in this verse, Judea is probably referring not only to the area in and around Jerusalem but also to all of Israel)?

They “suffered the same things from [their] own countrymen as [the believers in Judea] did from the Jews”.

14. According to verses 15 and 16, what actions did the Jews take against the gospel?

They “killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets”. Beyond this, they “drove [Paul and his team] out, and displease God and oppose all mankind”.

15. In what way did the Jews in Judea “oppose all mankind”?

Jesus is the only hope for mankind. Apart from him, mankind remains under the wrath of God. Any opposition to Jesus, then, is opposition to mankind.

16. What was the result of their opposition of God and the gospel?

Paul says that “God’s wrath has come upon them at last!”

DAY FIVE

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20

17. What reason does Paul give for his extended absence from Thessalonica?

He says that he wanted to return, “but Satan hindered us”.

18. What does this tell you about the work of Satan?

He hates the work of the gospel and will do all that he can to hinder that work.

19. What does this tell you about the work of God in the world?

He, surprisingly, permits Satan to hinder preachers. Satan is not free to do anything he wants (for he is under God’s authority), but we must understand that God allows him to do some damage (just ask Job about that). We must know that this, ultimately, works for the glory of God and the strengthening of the church. For instance, we would not have this letter if Satan hadn’t hindered Paul from returning to Thessalonica. Thus, while Paul’s absence temporarily hurt the saints in Thessalonica, it has helped millions of saints because of this letter.

20. In what way were the Thessalonians the “hope or joy or crown of boasting before [the] Lord Jesus” of Paul and his team?

This verse demonstrates that Paul was working with an expectation that he would be repaid for all of his efforts. He fully expected to be rewarded by Jesus. He knew that the Thessalonians were part of the “fruit” for which he would be rewarded. He looked forward to the day of his reward and the commendation he would receive at that time.

21. When will the Thessalonians be the “hope or joy or crown of boasting” of Paul and his team? What does this tell you about that event?

Paul indicates that they would be these things at Jesus’ coming. When Jesus returns, our works will be displayed before him. At that time, we will be rewarded for what we have done. This is not to say, of course, that there is no reward which we receive now. But we must know that we really are laying up treasures in heaven. God will not forget anything we have done for him. All will be rewarded.

DAY SIX

22. Read the study notes and then complete the following sentence. This week the Holy Spirit has taught me ...

?????



“Darkness and Light”
WEEK FOUR: 1 Thessalonians 3

DAY ONE
1 Thessalonians 3

Paul wasn't detached from those to whom he ministered. He couldn't bear being apart from them.

Paul had a team of people at his disposal whom he sent when he could not travel to a certain place. Being one of Paul's messengers would have been a very difficult task.

I wonder how often this is a part of the message that we preach? We would be better served, I suggest, if we followed Paul in telling our people this.

Paul's life was intimately wrapped up with those to whom he ministered. His joy was tied to their spiritual health.

May we pray as Paul prayed!

This "so that" indicates that the completion of verse 13 hinges on the completion of verses 11 and 12.

Notice, as with the end of chapter two, Paul focuses on the coming of Jesus. This is a major theme in 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

1 Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, **2** and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith, **3** that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. **4** For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know. **5** For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain.

6 But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you— **7** for this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith. **8** For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord. **9** For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, **10** as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?

11 Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, **12** and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, **13** so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

DAY TWO
Read 1 Thessalonians 3:1-5

1. What two things was Timothy to do when, after being sent by Paul, he arrived in Thessalonica?

He was to (1.) establish them in their faith and (2.) exhort them in their faith.

2. What did Paul fear might happen to the saints in Thessalonica if Timothy didn't do these two things?

He was afraid that they might “be moved by these afflictions”. Paul feared that they would be moved from the faith.

3. How do you think Timothy was to do this? See also Paul’s commands to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:11-16, 1 Timothy 5:17, and 2 Timothy 3:14-4:2

Paul does not say how Timothy was to do this in 1 Thessalonians, however, based on other commands to Timothy, it is clear how he wanted him to do this. Timothy was to use the word of God as the basis for preaching and teaching and exhorting and commanding and reproving the people. This alone would lead to their maturity. He was to be careful not to neglect the word.

4. Based on these verses, what level of influence and authority should the word of God have in the local church?

It should have the highest level of influence and authority within the church. The importance of God’s word cannot be overstated. It must be revered as the word of God (it is true) and used as the word of God (in teaching, reproving, correcting and training).

5. How can the church structure itself so that this becomes a reality?

This is worthy of careful thought. While local churches will differ in terms of style, they must not differ in regard to the careful attention they fix upon God’s word. Do people in our churches, based on how we preach, recognize the importance of God’s word? Does our preaching demonstrate our fidelity to God’s word? Are people led, encouraged, corrected, taught, etc., etc., etc., based on God’s word?

6. Does the word of God have this level of influence and authority in your life? How can you structure your life so that this becomes a reality?

This—as with the word of God’s use within the church—is worth a great deal of thought. I am amazed at the number of Christians who do not spend time in God’s word on a consistent basis. It is not that these believers have no time for God’s word. We all have time for those things that we prioritize. For instance, I somehow always find time to eat. Even when I’m extremely busy, I still eat three meals a day. Eating is a priority and I find a way to fit it into my schedule. The same should be said about spending time in God’s word.

DAY THREE

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:1-5

7. Paul was concerned that the saints in Thessalonica might be “moved by these afflictions”. Describe the afflictions the Thessalonian church was facing. 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16

Their own countrymen were persecuting them. This persecution was, it appears, quite severe.

8. Why wasn’t Paul surprised that the church was suffering affliction?

He says that “we are destined for this”.

9. Based on the following verses, provide several reasons why the church should expect that it will suffer affliction. *John 15:18-25*

1. The world hated Jesus before it hated us.
2. We are not of this world, but have been chosen out of the world, therefore the world hates us.
3. Servants are not above their masters. If the world persecuted Jesus it will also persecute us.
4. We will be persecuted because those persecuting us do not know the Father.
5. We will be persecuted so that God's word might be fulfilled (see John 15:25).

10. Paul and his companions “kept telling” the saints in Thessalonica that they would “suffer affliction”. What value would there be in constantly reminding the saints of this?

See also John 16:1-4

If people know the hardships they will face ahead of time, they will not be surprised when they finally come. The people in Thessalonica were prepared by Paul for the persecution that they faced during his absence, they didn't, thanks in part to this preparation, fall away.

11. Are you ever reminded of this fact? What would change in your life if those preaching to you “kept telling” you that you would suffer affliction?

?????

12. What are the long-term implications of preaching the gospel and avoiding the message of the affliction that accompanies it?

If people do not hear about any suffering or affliction, they will flinch (or worse) when they experience it. Jesus told his disciples ahead of time so that they would not fall away. If he had not done this, they would have, presumably, fallen away.

13. What application can Christian leaders today take from these verses in regard to how the gospel should be proclaimed in the church?

We must not be afraid to tell people the hard truth. We do no favors to people when we withhold important facts from them (like the fact that they will, as followers of Christ, be persecuted).

DAY FOUR

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:6-10

14. What did Timothy find when he came to Thessalonica?

He brought Paul and Silas “good news of [their] faith and love”. He told them that they remembered Paul and his team kindly and that they longed to see them. They were “standing fast in the Lord”.

15. To what do you attribute their spiritual health?

The gospel, we must know, was truly planted in their hearts. The Holy Spirit was living within them. He was leading and guiding them. In addition to this, we know that Paul and his companions were constantly praying for the saints in Thessalonica. Their health, in part, was in

answer to these prayers. Ultimately, we must insist that their spiritual health was due to God's grace alone. They were healthy because he caused them to be healthy.

16. How did the news of the Thessalonians' spiritual condition affect Paul and his companions?

It comforted them. They were greatly concerned that the saints were not standing fast in their faith. But the news did more than just comfort them. It also brought them great joy.

17. Describe the bond between Paul and his companions and the Thessalonians. What does this tell you about the work of the gospel?

Paul and his companions loved the Thessalonians. They were so intimately connected to them that their joy rested, in part, on the spiritual health of the Thessalonians. This bond should not surprise us. As we saw in 1 Thessalonians 2, the work of the gospel involves people and cannot be separated from intimacy with people.

18. What did Paul and his companions do in response to the news that Timothy brought from Thessalonica?

They thanked God—"For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God". More than that, they prayed all the more earnestly that they might see the saints in person "and supply what [was] lacking in [their] faith".

DAY FIVE

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13

19. Verses 11 through 13 are a blessing. What does Paul ask God to do?

He asks God to: (1.) "direct our way to you" and (2.) "make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all".

20. Read verse 13 carefully. Why does Paul want God to do the things outlined in verses 11 and 12?

He has in mind their meeting with the Lord at his coming! Paul sees his coming to them and their increasing in love as important prerequisites to God establishing their hearts blameless in holiness before God at the coming of Jesus.

21. Do you live with this event in mind? Based on Paul's words in these verses, are you ready for this event?

?????

DAY SIX

22. Read the study notes and then complete the following sentence. This week the Holy Spirit has taught me ...

?????



“Darkness and Light”
WEEK FIVE: 1 Thessalonians 4

DAY ONE

1 Thessalonians 4

1 Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us **how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more.** **2** For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. **3** For this is the will of God, **your sanctification:** that you abstain from sexual immorality; **4** that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, **5** not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; **6** that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. **7** For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. **8** Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you. **9** Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, **10** for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, **11** and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, **12** so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one. **13** But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about **those who are asleep,** that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. **14** For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. **15** For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. **16** For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. **17** Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. **18** Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Faith in Christ involves much more than just belief. True faith includes action. We “walk” out our faith.

How do you encourage saints who are doing well? You encourage them to “do so more and more”. See also verse 10.

The words following the colon here (verses 4–8) provide the readers with a good definition of sanctification.

Those believers who have died.

Jesus’ resurrection is tied to the resurrection of the believer. See 1 Corinthians 15.

The “rapture” of the saints is often portrayed as a secret event. Paul’s words here do not leave one with the impression that this event will be secret. We should always be open to reevaluating our beliefs based on the Scriptures.

This is the great news of this passage. Don’t miss this!

Paul’s words here are meant to be used for encouragement. Far too often, however, they are just used as fodder for arguments about different end-time scenarios. We need to make sure we don’t miss the reason why these things were written.

DAY TWO
Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

1. These verses concern “how you ought to walk and to please God”. How, based on verses 1-8, is the Christian to do this?

First of all, it is important to note that Paul is not telling them to do something that they were not doing. Rather, he indicates that the Thessalonians were already doing what he was about to tell

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them to do. His encouragement was that they would do it more and more. The actions Paul tells the Thessalonians to take (or not take) all relate to sexual immorality. The believers are to “abstain from sexual immorality”. Each person must “know how to control his own body in holiness and honor”. They must not behave with the “passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God”. They must not wrong their brothers in how they behave in regard to sexual immorality. They must not disregard God in this matter.

2. In verse 6 Paul says that God is “an avenger in all these things”. What does this mean? See also Hebrews 12:14-17 and 13:4

It means that God will pay back all those who wrong their brothers in this way. This is a terrible warning. The book of Hebrews is clear, without holiness “no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14 ESV). “God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous” (Hebrews 13:4 ESV).

3. How do you think the Christian is able to live a self-controlled life? 1 Thessalonians 4:4, 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, Galatians 5:16-24

Ultimately, we must insist that self-effort will not enable a person to lead a self-controlled life. God is the one who enables us to live a self-controlled life. He sanctifies us (that is, he makes us progressively holier in our conduct). Paul says, in words that should encourage all the saints, “He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it”. Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit. That is, it is something that comes with being a follower of Jesus. True followers of Christ will exhibit self-control because the one who lives within them (the Holy Spirit) will produce this fruit within them.

4. Based on these verses, what would you say to a person who claims to be a Christian but is living in sexual immorality and refuses to repent?

I would tell him, (1.) “Your actions call the reality of your faith into question,” (in other words, what makes you think that you’re truly saved?) and (2.) “Watch out because God will judge you and pay you back for any wrong that you do in his area. He will not ignore your actions.”

DAY THREE

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

5. Four specific instructions are found in verses 9-12. What are they?

1. Love one another.
2. Aspire to live quietly.
3. Mind your own affairs.
4. Work with your hands.

6. On which of these four, if any, do you need to focus?

?????

7. Verse 9 indicates that God taught the saints in Thessalonica to love one another. How do you think he did this?

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He did this through the Holy Spirit who lived within them. The Holy Spirit taught them to love one another. But he did more than just teach them, as if everything relied on the Thessalonians after that point. He also moved them to love one another and enabled them to do what he was moving them to do! None of this is said in 1 Thessalonians. However, I know this is the case because that is exactly what God promises to do with all believers in the New Covenant. This is all a fulfillment of the promise we see in Ezekiel 36:27: “I will put my Spirit with you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules” (ESV).

8. In verse 12, Paul gives the believers two reasons to “work with your hands”. What are they?

1. So that they “may walk properly before outsiders”.
2. So that they may “be dependent on no one”.

9. In what ways do you think our obedience or disobedience to this command impacts the success of our preaching and the growth of the church?

It greatly impacts the success of preaching and the growth of the church. People see our lives and they (sometimes) despise what they see. We need to have lives that are worthy of commendation and imitation.

DAY FOUR

1 Thessalonians 4:13-14

10. Verses 13 and 14 concern Christians who have died. How does Paul describe them in these verses?

He calls them “those who are asleep”. This is not the only place this phrase appears. Luke, the author of Acts, says that Stephen “fell asleep” when he died (Acts 7:60 ESV).

11. Why would he describe them in this way?

This phrase has an element of hope in it. The word “dead” has a note of finality to it. But when a Christian is spoken of as asleep, the implication is that one day he will be awake. Paul’s use of this phrase (and we must believe that it was commonly used in the early church) demonstrates his hope of the resurrection.

12. It appears that the Thessalonian Christians were confused regarding the destiny of Christians who had died. What was this causing them to do? 1 Thessalonians 4:13

They were grieving “as others do who have no hope”.

13. How does Paul prove that Christians who have died will be resurrected? 1

Thessalonians 4:14-15

He ties the resurrection of the Christian to the resurrection of Christ—the first (Jesus’ resurrection) proves the second (the believer’s resurrection). Since Jesus died and rose again, Paul knows that “through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep”.

14. What do the following verses teach about the resurrection of the dead? To whose resurrection is the believer's resurrection tied? What confidence should this give to the believer?

Romans 8:11

In this verse, Paul focuses on the Holy Spirit: "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you." The believer's resurrection is guaranteed because of the Spirit's presence in his or her life.

1 Corinthians 6:14

"And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power." Again, the resurrection of the Lord and the resurrection of the believer are spoken of at the same time.

1 Corinthians 15:12-28

This is the most extensive passage regarding the resurrection of the believer's body. Paul emphatically states that if Christians aren't raised from the dead, then not even Christ was raised from the dead. Again, we see that his resurrection proves the reality of our resurrection.

2 Corinthians 4:14

"... knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence." Again, the resurrection of the believer is tied to the resurrection of Jesus.

All of these passages should give us great confidence in our future resurrection (if we are believers). I can die (or fall asleep!) with confidence, knowing that my resurrection is tied to my Savior's resurrection. Since he has been raised, I surely will be raised!

DAY FIVE

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18

15. Outline the order of events that will happen at the coming of the Lord.

1. "The Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God."
2. "And the dead in Christ will rise first."
3. "Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air ..."
4. "... and so we will always be with the Lord."

16. How would this news have comforted the believers in Thessalonica?

They were grieving about their fellow Christians who had died. They thought, it seems, that, because they had died, these believers would miss out on the blessings associated with the coming of Jesus. Now they knew that the believers who had died would not miss out on any blessings! Death would not keep them from participating in the events that would take place on that great day.

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17. Jesus spoke about his coming and about the resurrection of the dead in great detail. What did he say about these events?

Matthew 25:31 - He said that he (he is called the Son of Man here, alluding to Daniel 7:13) “will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other”. The angels, it appears, are the “means” by which the saints will be gathered to Christ. Notice, as with 1 Thessalonians 4, a trumpet call is referred to here.

Mark 13:26-27 - These verses are similar to Matthew 25:31. The “Son of Man” will come “in clouds with great power and glory. And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven”.

John 5:25-29 - Jesus describes here the time when “all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment”. This passage, unlike the other two, indicates that Jesus’ word will result in the resurrection of the wicked as well.

18. According to verse 18, why did Paul write these words regarding the order of the events taking place at the coming of Jesus? Do you use these words in this way?

He wrote these words so that the saints might “encourage one another” with them. The encouragement comes because death is not a great blow to the Christian. Dead saints will be raised. They will not miss out on the blessings of Jesus’ return. As I mention in the notes, it is critical that these verses are used for the purpose for which Paul wrote them. Rarely have I seen them used this way. Normally, people use them to argue about the timing of the rapture. There should be, obviously, debate about matters like Jesus’ return. However, this debate should not cause us to miss the purpose of passages like this.

DAY SIX

19. Read the study notes and then complete the following sentence. This week the Holy Spirit has taught me ...

?????



“Darkness and Light”
WEEK SIX: 1 Thessalonians 5

DAY ONE

1 Thessalonians 5

The “times and the seasons” of the coming of the Lord (or, as it’s called here, “the day of the Lord”). This is a term of massive importance. See pp. 61–64 in the study notes.

The day of the Lord is a day of God’s wrath on the wicked. It will not bring wrath to the righteous, but salvation.

Ultimately, God is the one who makes us holy. See 1 Thessalonians 3:13. How does the Christian know he or she will be sanctified? Because God is faithful!

Notice how important it was to Paul that this letter be read before the church. The church **needed** to hear this letter.

1 Now concerning **the times and the seasons**, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. **2** For you yourselves are fully aware that **the day of the Lord** will come like a thief in the night. **3** While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. **4** But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. **5** For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. **6** So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. **7** For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. **8** But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. **9** For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, **10** who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. **11** Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing. **12** We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, **13** and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. **14** And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. **15** See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. **16** Rejoice always, **17** pray without ceasing, **18** give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. **19** Do not quench the Spirit. **20** Do not despise prophecies, **21** but test everything; hold fast what is good. **22** Abstain from every form of evil. **23** Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and **may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.** **24** He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it. **25** Brothers, pray for us. **26** Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. **27** I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers. **28** The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

DAY TWO
Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-2

1. It appears that Paul begins chapter five by answering a question the Thessalonians had asked him. What, based on verses 1 and 2, do you think they asked him?

They wanted to know the time of Jesus' coming.

2. How do the following verses describe the day of the Lord?

This is an important question. It gives people needed background to "the day of the Lord". The Jews were looking forward to this as a day of deliverance. As we learn here, this day was not one that people should have been eager to see arrive. For most, this day would bring nothing but trouble. The day of the Lord is spoken of in several ways in Scripture. As is noted in on page 63 and following, the day of the Lord can be spoken of as future, but it can also be spoken of as past.

Isaiah 2:11-17

On the day of the Lord, God will cut down all that is proud and lifted up. Everything that exalts itself will be brought low on this day. "[T]he Lord alone will be exalted in that day."

Isaiah 13:6-13

The thought of the coming of the day of the Lord should cause people to wail. It brings destruction from God. It will be a day of terror and anguish. People will be unable to defend themselves against the things that will happen on this day—"all hands will be feeble". This day is a cruel day, a day of wrath and destruction. Verse 10 seems to be a "stock" phrase used to describe this day (see Joel 2:10 and 31). This is a day when God will "punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity". Again, we see that this is a day when the proud will be laid low. Destruction will be so widespread that people will "more rare than fine gold".

Joel 1:15

The day of the Lord is a day of destruction from the Almighty. When Joel writes, "Alas for the day!" he is saying, with as much force as possible, "I can barely speak of the day—it will be terrible beyond description."

Joel 2:1-11

The day of the Lord is "a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness!". The coming events should cause all the people to tremble and to sound the alarms. Notice the description of the earth quaking in verse 10. This appears in Isaiah 13:10, Acts 2:19-20, and Revelation 6:12-14 and is a standard way of describing this event.

Joel 2:28-32

This is a highly significant passage. Peter quotes this passage in Acts 2—the day when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the church. Here, we see that the pouring out of the Holy Spirit is associated with the day of the Lord. This day, then, isn't solely negative. It is negative for those who do not love and trust in Jesus. Again, notice the references to the sun, moon, etc..

Amos 5:18-20

The Jews were desiring the day to come, but they should not have desired it. It would not be a day of light for them, but a day of darkness. Deliverance would not come for them on this day

Malachi 4:1-6

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Here, as with Joel 2, we see the positive and negative sides of this day. For the “arrogant and all evildoers”, the day would burn them into stubble. Nothing would be left of them. But for “those who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall”. Malachi also says that Elijah will come before the day of the Lord. Jesus proclaimed that John the Baptist fulfilled this prophecy.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-3

The day of the Lord (the final manifestation of it) will be preceded by an event called “the rebellion” and by the revelation of “the man of lawlessness”.

Revelation 6:12-17

Here, as in other passages, we see references to the sun turning black, etc.. John describes the terror experienced by the “kings” and the great ones” of the earth. But this terror isn’t just experienced by them. It comes upon “everyone, slave and free”. This is the day of “the wrath of the Lamb”. The people summarize this event quite well: “for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?”

3. Review the verses above and complete the following sentence: *The day of the Lord ...*

Again, carefully read the study notes on pages 61 through 64.

4. What does Paul mean when he says that “the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night”?

Thieves don’t announce their coming. They come when people aren’t expecting them. In the same way, this day will not be expected (at least by the world). The saints, however, should not be surprised by the coming of this day.

5. Paul borrowed his “thief in the night” imagery from Jesus. What was Jesus teaching his disciples through his use of this analogy?

Matthew 24:42-44

He was saying, in as clear a way as possible, that he would come when we would not expect him but that we must be ready for him. If we are to be ready for him, we must stay ready for his coming at all times.

Luke 12:35-40

Believers are to “be awake” when Jesus comes. We are to be “dressed for action and keep [our] lamps burning”. We are to “be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks”.

DAY THREE

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:3-11

6. If the day of the Lord is coming like “a thief in the night”, why does Paul say that it won’t surprise the Christian?

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This day shouldn't surprise Christians, because "we are all children of light, children of the day". We have been warned ahead of time to keep watch. We know that it is coming.

7. How will this day come upon those who are not Christians?

It will come on them suddenly. They will be thinking of "peace and security" when the exact opposite will overtake them. They will have no idea that God's destruction is about to engulf them. This happened many times in the Old Testament. The people did not listen to the prophets as they warned them to repent and flee from God's wrath. The people were living in luxury and self-indulgence. Destruction overtook them when they least expected it.

8. Paul tells the believer to "keep awake and be sober". How do you think believers can do this?

We do this by reading and obeying God's word. We do this by listening to the Holy Spirit. We do this by fleeing from sin. We do this by fellowshiping with the church. We do this by respecting those in authority over us.

9. Outline Jesus' warning to his disciples in Matthew 24:42-44. Based on verses 45-51, how do you think the disciples were to do this?

The warning was "stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming". In verse 44 we learn that "stay awake" is equivalent to "be ready". Verses 45 through 51 show that the "faithful and wise servant" is the one who does what the master has told him to do. When the master (Jesus) comes back, he expects to find us to be doing those things we've been told to do. This would include making disciples.

10. In 1 Thessalonians 5:8, Paul compares faith, love, and hope to pieces of armor. To what pieces does he compare them? Why do you think he uses these specific comparisons?

He compares faith and love to a breastplate and the hope of salvation to a helmet. A breastplate protects your heart. Faith and love also protect your heart. They are essential to walking with a pure and protected heart. A helmet protects your mind. The hope of salvation (in this context, this is the hope of salvation that will come to me by Christ's coming) is like a helmet, because my expectation of Christ's sure return and the deliverance he will bring to me at that time keeps me from falling into despair at the troubles I am presently facing.

11. What hope can the believer draw from verses 9 and 10? How should an understanding of these verses shape your understanding of the day of the Lord?

Jesus' death means that I will not face God's wrath. Jesus took God's wrath for me when he died on the cross. My destiny is to "obtain salvation through out Lord Jesus Christ". His death means that I will live with him. This is true whether I am dead or alive. Nothing can keep me from God's love to me in Jesus Christ (see Romans 8:31-39).

12. What were the Thessalonian believers to do with Paul's teaching in these verses? Why did he tell them these things? 1 Thessalonians 5:11

They were to “encourage one another and build one another up” with these words. The coming day of the Lord shouldn’t have frightened the saints. Rather, it should have strengthened them. Their deliverance had come (via Christ’s death and resurrection) and it was coming (via his second coming). In other words, they were to wear their hope in Christ as a helmet and they were to help other Christians wear this helmet as well!

DAY FOUR

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22

13. These verses contain a number of instructions to the Thessalonians. Which of these instructions is most applicable to your life at this moment?

?????

14. What can you do to see a change in this area?

?????

DAY FIVE

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:23-28

15. In verses 23 and 24 Paul asks God to do two things for the church. What are they?

1. May he “sanctify you completely”.

2. May “your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”.

16. Why does Paul believe that these two things will happen?

He knows that they will happen because God is faithful: “he will surely do it”.

17. In verse 23, Paul asks God to sanctify the saints. In 1 Thessalonians 4:2-7, the responsibility for a person’s sanctification seems to rest on that particular person. How do you reconcile these two different approaches to a person’s sanctification? See, also, *Hebrews 10:10 and 10:14*

They are both true. Ultimately, only God can do the work in us that leads to our sanctification, however, this does not mean that we are not involved in the process. As the study notes read on pages 67, “God does the work in me so that I might live in a holy way. Or, to put it another way, the fact that a Christian is able to be self-controlled is evidence that God is working in that person”. These are very comforting verses. my sanctification doesn’t rest on my efforts alone. Rather, God, the faithful one, has sanctified me and is sanctifying me. It’s a *little* like a professor saying to her nervous students, “Don’t worry, I will get you ready for the final exam.” The students still have to take the final—if they didn’t they would fail, but the professor is taking the responsibility for the student’s performance on herself. She will get them where they need to be.

18. Why is it important that the Christian be found “blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”? *Matthew 10:22, Matthew 24:13, Colossians 1:21-23, 1 Timothy 6:13-14*

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It's important because the Scriptures offer no hope to those who are not walking in holiness. These verses deserve careful consideration. Matthew 10:22 and 24:13 indicate that "the one who endures to the end will be saved". The implication is that those who do not endure have no such hope. We must endure in our faith to the end. To state it a different way, we need to believe and to keep believing. Colossians 1:21-23, after presenting the goal that we might be presented "holy and blameless and above reproach before him", includes the following ominous warning: "if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard". The word "if" here is significant. The implication is that those who do not continue in the faith, those who are not stable and steadfast, and those who do shift from the hope of the gospel have no hope of being presented "holy and blameless and above reproach before him". Paul's command to Timothy is that he "keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ". Timothy is not told what would happen to him if he was not free from reproach or if he didn't keep the commandment unstained.

These verses, taken together, clearly demonstrate that we must be found blameless at the coming of Jesus.

19. Based on these verses, how would you respond to the person who says, "I accepted Jesus when I was eight (or whatever age). I'm safe. It doesn't matter how I live now"?

Only a fool would say this—unfortunately, many people believe it to be true. The New Testament doesn't teach a "workless" or a "sanctification-free" salvation. It doesn't teach a faith that, once accepted, can be ignored for 10, 15, or 20 years. True faith is accompanied by fruit. If there is no fruit, that is evidence that there is no faith. Followers of Jesus must endure to the end. Those who do not endure are offered no sure hope of salvation.

DAY SIX

20. Read the study notes and then complete the following sentence. This week the Holy Spirit has taught me ...

?????



“Darkness and Light”
WEEK SEVEN: 2 Thessalonians 1

DAY ONE

2 Thessalonians 1

1 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,

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

2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

3 We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. **4** Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring.

5 This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering— **6** since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, **7** and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels **8** in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. **9** They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, **10** when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed. **11** To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, **12** so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

This should be said of all churches. It should be noted that this growth in faith and love was taking place in a time of great persecution.

No one is getting away with anything. On that day all will be made right. Persecutors will be afflicted by God. He considers it just to repay them. The persecuted will be given relief.

This is the kind of destruction that never ends. It goes on and on and on.

On that day the saints will marvel at Jesus. His greatness will be all that is on anyone's mind.

This is all about the glory of Jesus.

DAY TWO

Read 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4

1. How does Paul describe the *spiritual* condition of the Thessalonian church in verses 1-4?

Their faith was growing abundantly and their love for one another was increasing. These things should go hand in hand. It would be strange to see someone's faith in God grow and, at the same time, his love for his fellow believers diminish.

2. Why would Paul say that “We ought always to give thanks to God” regarding these things?

Paul's words indicate that God is behind the growth of faith and love in the Thessalonian church. It was right to thank him because he was the one who caused both of these things to be.

3. How does Paul describe the *physical* condition of the church at this time?

They were being persecuted and were enduring afflictions. The specific nature of these persecutions is not detailed here. It's worth noting that Paul describes the persecutions as "all your persecutions", thus, it appears that suffering persecution had not happened to them just once, but was happening with some frequency—it was a constant reality. While God was bringing them through these persecutions, we must understand that the church was truly suffering in the midst of these persecutions (see v. 5).

4. How could a church be thriving spiritually when it was suffering physically? Why, specifically, might this be the case?

Persecution serves to strengthen the church by removing the believers' love of the world and by causing the believers to lean more heavily on the Lord and on each other. It also causes believers to long for the day of Christ's coming and for the final coming of his kingdom with much greater fervency.

5. Why do you think Paul and his companions boasted about the Thessalonian church to other churches? What would this have accomplished?

Paul was giving the other churches a standard to imitate. The other churches now knew, based on the experiences of the Thessalonian church, that it was possible to endure great hardship.

6. In verses 5-11, Paul turns his attention (again) to the coming of Jesus. How might this future event apply to the current conditions of the Thessalonians?

Paul says that God will do two things when Jesus comes: (1.) he will "repay with affliction those who afflict you", and (2.) he will "grant relief to you who are afflicted".

DAY THREE

Read 2 Thessalonians 1:5-11

7. What will happen to/for the believer "when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven"?

God will grant relief to the saints on that day. This does not, of course, mean that he doesn't grant believers relief today. He obviously does this on a regular basis. However, on that day, believers will be granted permanent relief. Jesus will be "glorified in his saints" and "marveled at among all who have believed".

8. What should a believer do with this information? See also 1 Thessalonians 4:18

We should be looking forward to his coming! This must not be just a private thing that we delight thinking about. Rather, we should use these truths to encourage one another.

9. Why will this happen to/for the believer? 2 Thessalonians 1:10

This will happen so that Christ may be glorified and that we may marvel at him!

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DAY FOUR

Read 2 Thessalonians 1:5-11

10. What will happen to/for the nonbeliever “when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven”?

Those who afflict believers will themselves be repaid with affliction. Their affliction will be terrible beyond description. The Lord Jesus will, with his mighty angels, inflict “vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might”.

11. Verse 9 refers to “the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might”. Paul is clearly talking about hell here. What do the following verses teach about hell?

Matthew 8:11-12

Jesus did not teach that everyone would enter the kingdom of heaven. The wicked “will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth”.

Matthew 13:41-42

All “causes of sin and all lawbreakers” will be thrown “into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth”.

Matthew 24:48-51

Wicked servants, according to Christ, will be surprised at the coming of the master. The master will “cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth”.

Matthew 25:30

Worthless servants (in this case, a servant who is slothful and buries the talent that was given to him by his master) will be cast “into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth”.

NOTE: It is clear that the phrase “weeping and gnashing of teeth” is a stock phrase used by Jesus when describing the punishment to come upon the wicked. We shouldn’t let the frequency with which we hear this phrase lull us into missing its meaning. Jesus is describing a place so bad that people will, like madmen, be driven to grind their teeth as they are bawling in pain/hatred/anger/regret/remorse/bitterness, etc., etc., etc.. There will be no other outlet for their rage/hatred/fear/bitterness/sorrow etc., etc., etc.. I have never gnashed my teeth in my life. I have never been in a circumstance that was so bad that it would cause me to do so. It is hard to imagine the awful nature of “the outer darkness”.

Matthew 25:45-46

Here, Jesus contrasts eternal punishment with eternal life. This is significant, for it demonstrates that “punishment” will have the same duration as “life”. Both of them will be eternal.

Mark 9:43-48

Here, Jesus refers to hell. He describes hell as “the unquenchable fire”. He says that in hell “their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched”. Jesus is quoting from Isaiah 66:24 here: “And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh”. This quote refers to the city dump. The image Jesus is painting here is worse than any of us can fathom. Imagine a dump filled with dead bodies and maggots and feces and fire and rats and you’re starting to get a picture of how Jesus wanted us to think about hell. Rest assured, hell will be worse than the worst you can imagine it to be, not better.

Luke 13:24-28

Again, Jesus speaks of a place of “weeping and gnashing of teeth”. He says that many people will seek to enter “the narrow door” but “will not be able”. He talks of people standing outside and knocking and the Lord refusing to let them in. He indicates that those on the outside will “see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God” while they themselves have been left out.

Revelation 14:9-11

This passage speaks of the terrible and unending punishment awaiting the one who “worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand”. The punishment is described as follows: “he also will drink the wine of God’s wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name”.

Revelation 20:14-15

These verses describe “the lake of fire”. This is described as “the second death”. This death, however, isn’t simply the end of a person’s life. It goes on eternally. Those whose names are “not found written in the book of life” are “thrown into the lake of fire”.

12. What should a believer do with this information? *See also Acts 10:42*

We must tell others because this is all true. Hell is real, and the ungodly will one day be thrown into it. Ultimately, we must tell others about this coming day because we have been commanded to do so. People need to know that the judgment is real. According to Peter, the message of the coming judgment is so important that Jesus **commanded** his disciples “to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead”. Additionally, we should fear hell and live in such a way that we will not end up in that place. Jesus wanted the reality of hell to be

in the back of his followers' minds. He wanted them to know what happens to unfaithful servants.

DAY FIVE

13. Review Paul's words regarding the coming of Jesus in 1 Thessalonians 3:12-13, 4:13-18, 5:1-11, 5:23-24, and 2 Thessalonians 1:5-12. What, specifically, will happen on this day?

Jesus will come "with all his saints". He will "descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord". At the same time, destruction will come upon the wicked. This will take place at a time when people do not expect it. People will be saying, "There is peace and security", but the day of God's wrath will come on them like "a thief in the night". While this day will surprise those who are "of the darkness", it should not surprise those who "belong to the day". The saints must be aware of the condition of their hearts. Two different times (in 1 Thessalonians 3:12-13 and in 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24) Paul speaks of the saints being "blameless" at the coming of Jesus. This day will bring comfort to the saints and affliction to those who have persecuted the saints. Their punishment will be "eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might". However, on that day, Jesus will "be glorified in his saints, and marveled at among all who have believed".

DAY SIX

14. Read the study notes and then complete the following sentence. This week the Holy Spirit has taught me ...

?????

It appears that the saints in Thessalonica had been told by someone that the day of the Lord had already come. Paul proves that it had not come by outlining specific events that must take place before that day.

Obviously, mankind has always been in rebellion against God. This will be the rebellion of rebellions—a mass turning from God.

Referred to as the antichrist in 1 John 2:18.

It is interesting that Paul was with the Thessalonians for only a few weeks yet he taught them about the antichrist. Clearly, this was an important topic to him. It makes me think about what I would teach if I was only with a group of people for a few weeks. Would this have been one of the subjects.

The identity of the restrainer is much debated (see the notes for possibilities). No matter who it is, this restrainer will restrain the man of lawlessness until he is removed. Before that time, the man of lawlessness cannot be revealed.

Jesus and the man of lawlessness are not locked in a terrible combat of equals. He will be killed with ease.

This is worthy of some thought. God sends them a strong delusion! He is behind the appearance of the antichrist! Why is he behind his appearing? It is "so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness". This should bring comfort to the saints. The coming of the antichrist is not Satan's day of victory. God is thoroughly in control of all that will happen.

Think about this and how it brings encouragement.

This is why God chose you.



HANDS to the PLOW MINISTRIES

“Darkness and Light”

WEEK EIGHT: 2 Thessalonians 2

DAY ONE

2 Thessalonians 2

1 Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, 2 not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. 3 Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, 4 who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. 5 Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? 6 And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. 7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. 9 The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, 10 and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 11 Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, 12 in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

13 But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. 14 To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 15 So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.

16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, 17 comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.

DAY TWO

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

1. Something took place in the church in Thessalonica that prompted Paul to return, once again, to the topic of the coming of Jesus. What was it?

It appears that the church had been told that the day of the Lord had already come. Paul doesn't indicate exactly how the church had received this report. It may have come through "a spirit" (probably a false word of prophecy), "a spoken word", or by a letter "seeming to be from us". However the false teaching might have come to the church, Paul was concerned enough about it to return to the topic of the day of the Lord again. It is a blessing that this false teaching came to the church, because if it had not, Paul may not have covered this material in this letter and churches today would not have these important teachings about this event.

2. Why would this "something" have alarmed the church? In other words, what would this "something", if true, have meant for the Thessalonians? Review 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, 5:1-11, and 2 Thessalonians 1:5-12

If the day of the Lord had come, the church would have been thrown into despair. This despair would have been for many reasons. First of all, they would have despaired because they had missed the day of the Lord; it had come and they were still stuck in Thessalonica. They were not with the Lord as Paul had promised. They would have despaired because the hope Paul had given them that their beloved believers who had died would rise again was false. They would despair because the comfort and relief they were to receive at the coming of Christ was not coming. They would have despaired because the gospel they had believed was false. This false teaching—however it came—would have called into question the entire gospel that had been preached to them.

DAY THREE

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

3. According to Paul, what two things must happen before the coming of the day of the Lord?

1. The rebellion must come first.
2. The man of lawlessness must be revealed.

4. What do you think the rebellion is?

It clearly is not just any ordinary rebellion. After all, man has been in rebellion against God from the time of Adam's sin. This is the rebellion of rebellions—a massive turning from God. While some believe this rebellion will be of true Christians (or perhaps Jews) turning from the faith, I don't believe this is the case. I believe Paul is referring to a worldwide rebellion by nominal Christians (Christians in name only). At this time, those who have been connected to God by any other way than faith in Jesus will turn from their "faith" and will oppose the one they once claimed to follow. Psalm 2:2 speaks of people raging and plotting "against the LORD and against his Anointed" (ESV). They say, "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us" (Psalm 2:3 ESV). This rebellion will be the ultimate fulfillment of these verses. Of course, this rebellion will not be successful. Psalm 2:4 says "He who sits in the heavens laughs" (ESV). For further thoughts on this rebellion see the study notes on pages 82-83.

5. How does Paul describe the “man of lawlessness”?

He calls him “the son of destruction”. He says that this man “opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God”. This man will not tolerate any kind of faith. He alone, he will insist, is God. All must worship him.

6. Outline the events Jesus indicates will take place before his (Jesus’) coming? *Matthew 24:3-31*

Jesus said a great deal about the events that would take place before his coming. He begins by describing the general events that will take place:

1. Many will come in his name, claiming to be the Christ. Many would be led astray by these false teachers.
2. There will be “wars and rumors of wars”.
3. There will be “famines and earthquakes in various places”.
5. Saints will suffer persecution even to the point of death and will be hated by all peoples because of Jesus.
6. “[M]any will fall away and betray one another and hate one another.”
7. “[M]any false prophets will arise and lead many astray.”
8. “[L]awlessness will be increased”, because of this, “the love of many will grow cold”.
9. “[T]he one who endures to the end will be saved.”
10. “[T]his gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come”.

At verse 15, Jesus specifically talks about a period of “great tribulation”. During this time period, the following will take place:

1. The “abomination of desolation” will be seen “standing in the holy place”.
2. Jesus’ followers should flee when they see this take place.
3. This event will kick off a time of “great tribulation”, the like of which has never been seen in world history.
4. “[F]or the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.”
5. “[F]alse christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonder.” These signs and wonders will be so incredible that they would, if it was possible (which it’s not), deceive even the elect. (This should comfort the believer: the elect cannot be deceived!)
6. The coming of Christ will be visible to all: “as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man”.
7. After these events, “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken”.
8. The “sign of the Son of Man” will “appear in heaven” and “all the tribes of the earth will mourn”.
9. Jesus will come “on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory”. All peoples will see this take place.

10. “[H]e will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

7. What similarities do you find between 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 and Matthew 24:3-31? Any differences?

There are many similarities. Clearly, Paul knew of Jesus’ words recorded in Matthew 24. He probably heard them from one of the apostles. He also, like Jesus, took some of his thoughts from the book of Daniel. Both passages speak of a massive falling away. Although different language is used, both passages speak of an evil person taking up residence in God’s holy place. Jesus speaks of much Paul leaves out. Paul doesn’t refer to earthquakes, wars, or persecution. Paul speaks of one who is presently restraining the coming evil. Jesus doesn’t refer to a restrainer. Jesus speaks of a gathering of the elect. Paul doesn’t, at least in this chapter, speak of this event (but see 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17).

DAY FOUR

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

8. Why, according to verse six, hasn’t this “man of lawlessness” already been revealed?

He is being restrained by something or someone “so that he may be revealed in his time”.

9. How will the “man of lawlessness” be defeated?

No great battle takes place between Jesus and this man: “the Lord Jesus will kill [him] with the breath of his mouth and bring [him] to nothing by the appearance of his coming”.

10. What does this tell you about the Lord? What does this tell you about the “man of lawlessness”?

The most wicked man of all time cannot stand—even for a moment—against Jesus. This man is as nothing before the Lord. Just the appearance of Jesus is enough to undo him and all of his works.

11. Read verses 11 and 12 carefully. Who is behind the coming of the “man of lawlessness”?

God is behind his coming.

12. Why would he do this?

These people have “refused to love the truth and so be saved”. Because of this, God sends “the lawless one” “so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness”. The phrase “love the truth” is worth some thought. There is no such thing as faith apart from love. We cannot have faith in Christ without loving the gospel and the Lord.

13. What does this tell you about Satan?

He is not nearly as powerful as many might think. His greatest efforts backfire. They serve to accomplish God’s purposes.

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14. What does this tell you about God?

He is all-powerful. He uses all things—even “the activity of Satan”—to increase his glory.

15. What comfort, if any, can the Christian find in this fact?

The world is not spiraling out of control (even when it appears to be). Even events like the coming of the antichrist will happen when, where, and how God wants them to happen. We can be confident that nothing will happen that is outside of God’s plan.

DAY FIVE

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

16. Paul’s words in these verses are a contrast to verses one through 12. Why, based on these verses, can the believer take great hope in the days ahead?

Because the believer isn’t destined for God’s wrath. Rather, “God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth”. God will orchestrate events so that believers will make it to the end intact. As Jesus indicated in Matthew 24, it is not possible for the elect to be deceived. They will make it to the end.

17. Compare the work God does for the saved (verses 13-17) with the work he does for the lost (verses 1-12).

God works for the sanctification of the saved and for the destruction of the lost.

God’s work for the saved

Believers are described as “beloved by the Lord”. This love is demonstrated by the fact that he chooses them to be saved. (The saving happens through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth). He does this so they might “obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ”. God has given believers “eternal comfort and good hope through grace”.

God’s work for the lost

God send a “strong delusion” on those who refuse “to love the truth and so be saved” so that their wickedness might increase! He sends a delusion “so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness”.

DAY SIX

18. Read the study notes and then complete the following sentence. This week the Holy Spirit has taught me ...

?????



“Darkness and Light”
WEEK NINE: 2 Thessalonians 3

DAY ONE

2 Thessalonians 3

The prayers of the church would result in the gospel being spread and accepted. Do we truly believe this to be true? If so, we will also pray.

The prayers of the saints served to advance the gospel (v. 1) and to deliver its messengers (v. 2).

I love how Paul places these statements next to each other.

Paul and his companions lived in such a way that they could tell people to imitate them. Could I tell people the same thing?

The church must understand this principle. We provide no real and lasting help when we assist those people who refuse to work.

When a brother or sister refuses to obey the word of the Lord, we are to have nothing to do with them. The goal of this is that they might be ashamed and start obeying the truth. Do we actually practice this?

Paul probably stresses this because of the false report that had come to the church (see 2 Thessalonians 2). His signature proved that this letter was genuine. If the church learned what his signature looked like they wouldn't be deceived by false letters in the future. This is a little window into the issues facing first century Christians. How did they know that the letters they received were genuine? This was an important question to be answered.

1 Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, **2** and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith. **3** But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one. **4** And we have confidence in the Lord about you, that you are doing and will do the things that we command. **5** May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.

6 Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. **7** For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, **8** nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. **9** It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. **10** For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. **11** For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. **12** Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.

13 As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good. **14** If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. **15** Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

16 Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all.

17 I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the sign of genuineness in every letter of mine; it is the way I write. **18** The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

DAY TWO

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5

1. In regard to the preaching of “the word of the Lord”, Paul asks for prayer concerning two things. What are they? 1 Thessalonians 3:1

1. That the word of the Lord “may speed ahead”.

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2. That the word of the Lord might “be honored”.

2. What do these requests tell you about the work of the gospel?

It is helped by prayer. It is hindered by a lack of prayer.

3. If God desires that these things happen, why do we need to pray about them?

He has decreed that his work on earth will take place (at least in part) in response to the prayers of his saints. He has allowed us to be a real and necessary part of what he is doing on earth. For this, we should be grateful. We are part of the building of Christ’s kingdom.

4. In regard to himself and to his co-workers, Paul asks for prayer concerning one thing.

What is it? *1 Thessalonians 3:2*

“[T]hat we may be delivered from wicked and evil men.”

5. The last sentence in verse two and the first sentence in verse three are tied together.

What do you think these sentences, taken together, meant to Paul? What do they mean to you?

Jesus’ faithfulness was the reason Paul had confidence. He knew that he could trust him to keep his word. Even when “wicked and evil men” were surrounding Paul (as was usually the case), he kept going, knowing that Jesus had called him and that he would never leave him or forsake him.

DAY THREE

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12

6. According to these verses, there seems to have been a major problem in the church in Thessalonica. What was it?

Laziness! It seems that a number of people weren’t working. They weren’t ashamed of their laziness, either. Instead of working, they were busybodies.

7. Three different commands are given in verses 6 through 12 related to this problem. What are these commands, and to whom are they directed?

1. “[K]eep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us.” This command is directed to the “non-lazy” in the church.

2. “If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.” This command was directed to the entire church.

3. “[S]uch persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.” This command was directed to those who were walking “in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies”.

8. Do you deal with issues like this in a similar way in your church? Why or why not?

This is an important question and is worth some discussion. Do we, because we refuse to obey Paul's commands here in the name of "niceness", actually promote evil in our midst?

9. What do you think happens when churches ignore these commands?

There are many negatives that take place when churches tolerate laziness. Among them are (in no particular order):

- (1.) The work of the deacons—those who are to care for the physical health of the church—becomes far more difficult. They will be constantly dealing with problems they shouldn't have to deal with. For instance, they will constantly be asked to help meet the needs of those who aren't truly needy but are simply lazy.
- (2.) More burden is placed on those Christians who do work, as they're forced to provide for themselves and for the lazy.
- (3.) The gospel is seen by outsiders in a negative light, because they see those who hold to it as lazy.
- (4.) Because people aren't working, less money is earned by the saints, therefore less money is given by the saints, therefore less money is available to advance the cause of the gospel.
- (5.) Relationships within the church will increasingly be stressed, because working members will harbor negative thoughts toward those who do not work.
- (6.) People will begin ignoring other aspects of God's word. When one command is ignored, others are sure to follow.
- (7.) Leadership will be despised. People disdain leaders who tolerate laziness and refuse to do anything about it.
- (8.) The preaching of the word of God will grow more difficult. For instance, if churches refuse to deal with laziness, how would they preach through verses like these? How would they talk about kingdom stewardship?
- (9.) Sin will increase. When people do not work hard with their hands they become busybodies. This leads to all sorts of other sins (gossip, idle speculations, etc., etc., etc.).

10. What do you think happens when churches keep these commands?

You could take the reasons listed in the question above and reverse them. For instance, the work of the deacons would become far easier. They will be free to focus on those needs that are truly worthy of their attention.

11. Why did Paul and his companions work like they did in Thessalonica? What was their work designed to accomplish?

They worked night and day so that they wouldn't be a burden to any within the church. They did this "to give you in ourselves an example to imitate".

12. What does this tell you about the work of the gospel?

The work of the gospel involves far more than just words. Paul was very careful in how he lived. He went out of his way to give people an example to follow. Those who preach the gospel must be aware that their actions matter. Our actions give people something tangible to imitate.

DAY FOUR

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:13-15

13. Verses 13 through 15 describe another problem sometimes seen within the church. What is that problem?

Disobedience.

14. How is the church to deal with this problem?

“[T]ake note of that person and have nothing to do with him”. “Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.”

15. What is this supposed to accomplish?

This was supposed to cause the person to be ashamed. This shame was to lead them to repentance.

16. Do you deal with issues like this in a similar way in your church? Why or why not?

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17. What do you think happens in the church when problems are not dealt with in this manner?

This is worth some discussion. When disobedience to Christ’s commands is tolerated, that sin is allowed to fester and grow. We become tolerant of things that we do nothing about. More than that, sin usually spreads to other people. Leadership that doesn’t deal with sin is seen as hypocritical. People recognize that they preach about sin yet they are unwilling to do anything about it. Such leaders are seen as cowardly.

DAY FIVE

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:16-18

18. Why does Paul make the comment here about writing the greeting with his “own hand”? See 2 Thessalonians 2:2

I think this is related to Paul’s words in 2 Thessalonians 2:2. Paul was proving to the saints that this was a genuine letter of his.

19. What does this tell you about the work of the gospel?

We need to do what is necessary in order to cut Satan’s work off before it begins. A signature may seem to be a small thing, but it could save the church from a great deal of trouble.

20. Imagine you are a believer in the first century Thessalonian church. What do you think happened after this letter was read to the church?

I think they certainly would have wanted to read it again. It was probably studied over a period of weeks. The church would have been greatly relieved about a number of issues (for instance, that they had not missed the day of the Lord!). They would have, hopefully, addressed problems

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within the church (for instance, they would have told those who weren't working to find jobs). As this church was influential in Macedonia and Achaia, they probably would have made copies of this letter so that it could bring help to other churches. I'm sure that parts of this letter were memorized and quoted. It was used as the believers encouraged one another.

21. What should happen in churches today after this letter is read to the church?

We should receive it in the same way the Thessalonians received it. We should listen to its message and obey it. We should find comfort from its words. We should study it, memorize it, encourage other believers with it, and live in its light.

DAY SIX

22. Read the study notes and then complete the following sentence. This week the Holy Spirit has taught me ...

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