

1 Thessalonians

Listed Scriptures

Acts 16-18, 1 Thessalonians

Lesson Aim

- 1) To encourage students to live a life pleasing to God in good times and bad.
- 2) To emphasize the importance of evangelizing.
- 3) To teach students to prepare for eternity by aiming for spiritual purity.

Memory Verse

"Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Thess 5:23)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

1 Thes 1-5

B I B L E B A C K G R O U N D



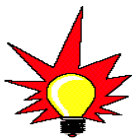
The city of Thessalonica (present day Salonica or Thessaloniki) was a prosperous city due to its strategic location near the north-west corner of the Aegean Sea. The Egnatian Way that passed through Thessalonica linked Rome to the East and made it one of the wealthiest trade centers of the Roman Empire. At the time 1 Thessalonians was written, Thessalonica was the capital and the largest city of the province of Macedonia, with a population of about two hundred thousand.

Thessalonica was one of the first cities on the continent of Europe that Paul and Silas preached in. Their visit there was initiated by a vision of a man from Macedonia (Acts 16:9) who pleaded to Paul to go to Macedonia to help. It was during Paul's second missionary journey that the church was established there.

After leaving Thessalonica, the well-being of the new believers was always on Paul's mind. Out of his great affection for the infant church, Paul sent Timothy to visit, counsel and check up on their spiritual progress (1 Thess 3:2). When Timothy rejoined Paul in Corinth with encouraging news (Acts 18:1, 5; 1 Thess 3:6-7), Paul wrote a letter to express his relief and encouragement.

Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians was written around 51 AD. The letter is considered to be one of Paul's earliest epistles (with Galatians as the only one preceding it). The letter is full of Paul's concern for the church. In it, Paul urges the Thessalonian believers to maintain their purity and commends them for their steadfastness in the face of persecution. Paul also corrects false accusations that arose after his departure. He clarifies the truth regarding Christians who die before the Lord's return. In speaking of death, Paul reminds the believers that the certainty of standing before God is the greatest assurance of all. Structurally, the first three chapters of 1 Thessalonians are more personal in nature, while the last two lean toward practical application of the doctrines.

W A R M U P



How does purity relate to eternal life? What will happen to us if we die today? Do we have assurance of our salvation? In this sex-saturated society, maintaining purity is one of the biggest struggles of our youth today. However, staying pure is not only a present-day matter. Spiritual purity is an essential part of pleasing God and preparing for His second coming. In this lesson, let us learn how Paul relates a God-fearing life to our hope of eternal salvation.

B I B L E S T U D Y



Teachings of 1 Thessalonians

A. Overview

Though savvy and materially blessed, Thessalonica was not a welcoming place to the gospel. Since Paul could not spend more time in Thessalonica to lay a more solid foundation, he was very concerned about the new believers' survival in such

a spiritually hostile environment. In this letter, we can see how Paul builds up the newly-converted believers. First, he encourages them to continue their steadfast course in the Lord. Second, he teaches them how to apply Christ in their daily lives. Third, he reminds them of the gospel of Christ and the hope of His second coming. By doing so, Paul helps the believers keep the end in mind as they live a life worthy and pleasing of the Lord's sacrifice.

B. Commendable Faith of the Thessalonians

The church in Thessalonica was founded amidst a period of great persecution. However, instead of buckling under tribulation, they prospered in their faith and increased in number. Here are a few things we can learn from their faith:

a. Spiritual Endurance (1:3-6)

Although the believers in Thessalonica faced persecution for their faith, they exhibited the work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope.

b. The spirit of giving (1:7-8)

Because they had experienced the joy of the Holy Spirit, the faith of the Thessalonian believers was strong. They became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia and were known for their spirit of giving (2 Cor 8:1-8). They were willing to help other believers financially even though they themselves were in want. As a result, the Thessalonians' faith touched others at home and abroad.

c. A testimony to others (1:9-10)

The transformation of the Thessalonians was a living testimony to others. People could see how they turned from idols to serve the true and living God. No doubt, the believers fully understood and testified of Jesus' loving sacrifice and the hope of eternal life.

C. Paul An Example of Christian Living

In chapter 2, Paul relates the events leading up to his visit and the establishment of the church in Thessalonica. In the process, he sets an example of Christian living for the new believers.

a. Undaunted by troubles (2:1-2)

Prior to the visit to Thessalonica, Paul suffered insults and imprisonment in Philippi.

His visit to Philippi was marked by strong opposition and persecution (Act 17:5-9). However, Paul remained fearless and spirited in preaching the Lord's gospel with all his heart. Persecution may be demoralizing, but it can also be a cause for spiritual growth. In James 1:2-4, it says that trials and tribulations that come our way test character. Suffering together also produces fellowship and helps believers bond together as one in Christ Jesus.

b. Motivated by love (2:3-8)

Paul's preaching did not spring from impure motives for the sake of personal gain. On the contrary, he spoke the genuine gospel in order to please God. He did not seek praise, but treated the church as lovingly as a mother cherishes her baby.

c. Testifying with action (2:9)

Paul's ministry would naturally require funding. But realizing the early Thessalonian believers were not well off, Paul worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while he preached the gospel of God. Paul and his coworkers also testified with their daily living (2:10). This teaches us that holy, righteous and blameless conduct is the best witnesses for the gospel.

 **D. Building Up Faith Through Encouragement** 

In chapter 3, Paul continues to show his concern for the Thessalonian believers.

a. Display of timely concern (3:1-5)

When Paul found out about the Thessalonians' hardships, he immediately sent a worker to offer them spiritual relief and encouragement. We, too, should be proactive in our love. We should grasp the opportunity to help others by showing them concern when they need it most.

b. Encouragement through praise (3:6-9)

Paul gave the Thessalonians high praise for their faithful endurance under trial (1:3). Showing genuine appreciation for others' strength and merits is the most positive way to motivate people.

c. Unceasing Prayers (3:10-13)

One of the best gifts one can give is the prayer of intercession. Night and day, Paul earnestly prayed that God might supply what was lacking in the faith of the Thessalonians. Even though they were steadfast in enduring trials, the Thessalonians were "young" believers who needed direction and care. Paul prayed that God would strengthen the believers' hearts so that they would be

blameless and holy in the presence of God during the second coming of Christ.

 **E. Encouragement Spiritual Growth** 

Chapters 4 and 5 contain practical instruction in matters pertaining to what was lacking in the Thessalonians' knowledge of the second coming of our Lord Jesus. These chapters encourage the believers to apply the truth in their Christian lives.

a. Aiming for Higher Spiritual Ground

Paul encouraged the believers to strive for higher spiritual ground by:

i. Pursuing sexual purity (4:1-8; 5:23)

The believers were new converts. They were continually being surrounded by immoral and irreligious practices. Therefore Paul urged them to stay away from sexual immorality and live a sanctified life. Today, we are no less vulnerable to worldly pressures than the Thessalonians. We must constantly examine ourselves and "bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor 10:5). We must also allow the word of God to sanctify and cleanse us (Eph 5:26).

ii. Living an orderly life (4:9-11)

The Thessalonian believers already knew how to love one another, but Paul urged them to try to set the bar even higher. He asked them to not only love, but maintain an orderly lifestyle in order to set an example for non-believers. He encouraged them to pursue a quiet life, mind their own business, and work with their own hands to support themselves.

iii. Being thankful & joyful (5:16-18)

When we are working hard for the Lord, it is inevitable that we encounter discouraging situations. In those times, we must remember that it is God's will for us to be joyful, prayerful, and content under any situation.

b. Preparing for the Second Coming

Paul encouraged the believers to prepare for Christ's second coming by practicing:

i. Spiritual alertness (5:1-10)

Many people of the world live in darkness and continue to sin without fearing God or His judgment. We, however, are children of the light and the day. We must remain sober and set our minds on God's commands. We should not be like those of the night (of darkness), who are spiritually asleep and reveling in worldly pleasures like drunkenness. Instead, we should guard our hearts with the breastplate of faith and love. We should

- also protect our minds (head) with the thought of God's hope and salvation.
- ii. Mutual encouragement (5:11-14)
Since we are only human, we will all inevitably experience moments of weakness. To build up our faith in the body of Christ, we need to edify and encourage one another.
 - iii. Constant prayer (5:17)
Human strength is extremely limited. To overcome worldly temptation and persecution, we must pray constantly to receive greater power from God.
 - iv. Testing all things (5:19-21)
How do we know what's right and wrong in such a complicated society? The best standard of judgment is based on the truth and wisdom given by the Holy Spirit. We will then be able to test and affirm what is God's good, pleasing and perfect will (Rom 12:2).

F. Resurrection

As new believers, the Thessalonians had questions regarding death and the second coming of Christ. Thus, Paul uses a portion of his letter as a Q & A session. Reviewing the truth of the second coming also helps us keep focus on our end goal in faith.

- a. What will happen at the moment of resurrection? (4:16)
 - i. We will know for sure when the Lord comes, because He will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God (4:16).
 - ii. Christians who died in the Lord will rise first (4:15, 1 Cor 15:23).
 - iii. Those who belong to Christ and are still alive will be transformed into spiritual beings (4:17).
 - iv. Transformed Christians will be caught up together with the previously sleeping saints in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Those who belong to Christ will live with the Lord forever (4:17).
- b. What does the teaching of resurrection have to do with us today?
 - i. We don't need to be afraid of death. When loved ones in Christ pass away, we should not grieve like unbelievers who have no hope of eternal life (4:13). Rather, we ought to comfort the grieving family (4:18), take care of their needs, and uphold their faith. Doing so will demonstrate the spirit of belonging to the household of God.

- ii. With such a beautiful hope in eternity, we should try to evangelize so that more people can be saved on the last day.

C H E C K F O R U N D E R S T A N D I N G



- 1 Why did Paul say that the Thessalonian church was a model church? What can we learn from them?
- 2 How did Paul treat the Thessalonian church? What kind of qualities did he demonstrate?
- 3 What was Paul's attitude when encouraging the Thessalonian believers?
- 4 What are three spiritual goals Paul gives the Thessalonians?
- 5 How did Paul encourage the believers to prepare for the second coming?
- 6 According to 1 Thessalonians, what will happen to Christians who die before Christ's second coming?

L I F E A P P L I C A T I O N



Part A: The 3-Step Plan to Sexual Purity

As believers living under the hormonal changes of young adulthood, how can we be pure and stay pure? Take a look at the table and read the various passages about staying pure. Then think about how can those examples relate to your life.

STEPS	What the Bible has to say	How it applies to my life
1. Read Job 31:1	Job made a conscious determination not to lust. The promise was implanted in his heart to guide him before temptation even came to him.	I should make the determination to remain pure and holy. This way, I will have a plan of action when faced with unexpected temptations.
2. Read Genesis 39:12 and 2 Timothy 2:22	Joseph fled from temptation by physically running away.	I can physically run away or remove myself from situations that compromise my purity and my faith in God.
3. Read Psalm 119:9 and Galatians 5:16-25	A young man can keep his way pure by living according to God's word. We can avoid the lust of the flesh by walking in God's Spirit.	I can rely on God's word and His Holy Spirit to guide me and cleanse me in my daily life. I should set aside time for prayer and Bible reading in order to draw close to God.

Part B: Cost Benefit Analysis

Living a sanctified life may cause us to be seen as odd by mainstream society, since being "separate and holy" may require shying away from cultural norms such as dances, games, parties, and social situations that are affiliated with sin and temptation. However, though the cost of forgoing "fun" may seem great, the benefits may be even bigger. In this activity, let us help the students visualize the cost and benefits of carnal pleasure vs. spiritual purity.

Step 1:

Ask the class to brainstorm temptations that may compromise the purity of J2 students today. (For example: dating, dances, TV, R-rated movies, video games, billboards, romance novels, magazines...)

Step 2:

As a class, vote on and choose the top 3 most difficult temptations to overcome.

Step 3:

Fill in the following analysis for each of the 3 temptations. An example has been done for the students to see. They can fill in the blank table below.

Temptation Example: Going to websites I should not be visiting	...gave into temptation now		...resisted temptation now	
	Cost	Benefit	Cost	Benefit
What would be the results if I...	a little guilt	excitement, wonder at new things	denying myself of what my friends can see, seeming naive	a guilt-free conscience
How I will feel 20 years down the line if I...	I may be addicted to bad Internet sites because of the habit I formed in J2	the knowledge of the world	not much	being able to be a good example to my children
How I will feel when I die and face God if I...	I will be judged for my actions	none	none	glad to stand before God with no regrets about visiting bad sites

Temptation Example:	...gave into temptation now		...resisted temptation now	
	Cost	Benefit	Cost	Benefit
What would be the results if I...				
How I will feel 20 years down the line if I...				
How I will feel when I die and face God if I...				



The Thessalonian believers were considered the “role-model Christians” who loved the Lord, gave generously to those in need, and testified of God’s faith. Yet, they had much room to grow and learn. Just because they were fervent in the Lord did not mean that they were immune from daily persecution and temptations of sexual immorality, disorderliness, and apathy. They were also fuzzy on basic doctrines such as the second coming of Christ. We may find many of our J2 students to be like the Thessalonian believers. Although they love the Lord and come to church, they are only coming of age in the spiritual sense. They have the heart to do good and work for the Lord, but face the challenges of peer pressure and tempting situations. Let us learn from Paul and guide them in a gentle and loving matter; let us pray that they will be able to grow in the Lord, overcome youthful temptations, preach the word, and aim for eternity in their daily lives.

2 Thessalonians

Listed Scriptures

Acts 17, 2 Thessalonians

Lesson Aim

- 1) To learn how to encourage someone undergoing persecution.
- 2) To help students recognize signs of the end times.
- 3) To encourage students to prepare for Christ’s second coming by pursuing a godly and productive lifestyle.

Memory Verse

“We constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith...” (2 Thess 1:11)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

2 Thes 1-3

BIBLE BACKGROUND



Paul’s second letter to the Thessalonians was written in Corinth, approximately half a year after the first letter (circa 50-51 AD). The first letter had greatly encouraged the members in Thessalonica. However, false teachers soon began distorting Paul’s message regarding eschatology (the theology of the end times). Some even counterfeited Paul and taught in his name (2 Thess 2:1-2)! As a result, many believers stopped working because they believed the world was about to end. They became idlers who whittled away their time and lived off the labor of others. This created a chaotic situation for the church. Thus, Paul wrote this second letter with three purposes in mind:

1. to encourage believers undergoing persecution,
2. to correct false teachings regarding the second coming,
3. to urge believers to return to work and live a godly, productive lifestyle.