

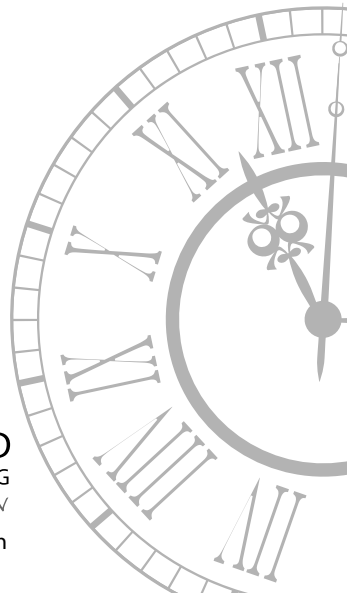
**Cornelius Hanko**

*Studies in*  
**1 & 2**

# **THESSALONIANS**



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# Preface

Especially in the times in which we live, when so many signs point us to the end of the ages, the two epistles to the Thessalonians take on greater significance since they instruct us concerning the second coming of Christ.

Paul had sent Timothy to Thessalonica to ascertain the welfare of this newly organized congregation. Upon his return Timothy reported that they were growing spiritually so that their faith was known throughout the churches. But there were problems. Some in the congregation expected Christ to return in their day and even in the very near future. This had raised a question in their minds concerning those who die before the Lord's return and had also caused some to give up their work, sell their homes, and idle away the time while they waited for the day of Christ's coming.

These and other problems occasioned Paul's writing of the two epistles to the Thessalonians. The apostle would have gladly paid them a personal visit; but since this was impossible, he writes these epistles under divine inspiration, and they are preserved for our edification.

In the second epistle Paul thanks God for the spiritual advancement of the congregation. They were growing exceedingly in faith and were abounding in love toward one another and others of the household of faith. Even though they suffered severe persecutions and tribulations, they bore them patiently and stood firm in the truth (1:3-4).

But their original problem, mentioned in the first epistle, still persisted and was even aggravated. They were shaken in mind and troubled, possibly by a letter purported to have been sent from the hand of Paul (2:2). They had the mistaken idea that the day of the Lord had come (2:3). There were some among them who had become idle busybodies and dependent on others for their daily existence (3:11-13).

Especially important in the second epistle is the instruction concerning the future rise of false prophets, the apostasy that

must come before Christ's return, and the man of sin who will appear in due time. The theme is the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming.

As we prepare to study these epistles, we should bear in mind that we are treading on holy ground. We are dealing with the infallibly inspired scriptures, which must be considered reverently and accepted in simple child-like faith. When man speaks, we may disagree or contradict; when God speaks, we humbly listen. Moreover, God's word is the power unto salvation (Rom. 1:16), our spiritual meat and drink. We must search the scriptures with the prayer that we may live unto the praise of our God.

For your study it is important to have a Bible with references, a good concordance, a Bible dictionary, and a good commentary on 1 and 2 Thessalonians such as the *New Testament Commentary* by William Hendriksen.

## *Lesson 1*

# **Overview of 1 Thessalonians**

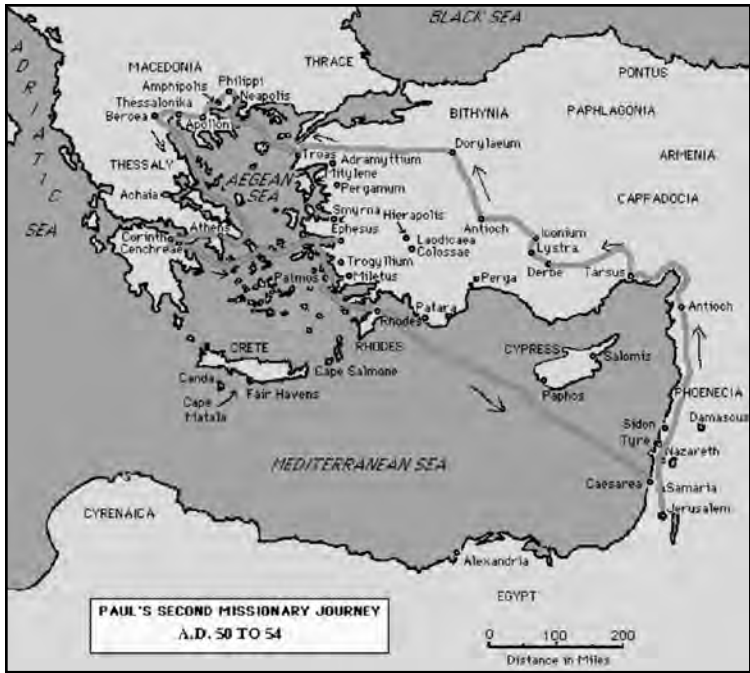
### **Introduction**

On his second missionary journey the apostle Paul, accompanied by Silas and Timothy, had labored for some time and had established a church in Philippi. Because of the persecution experienced there they continued on their journey to Thessalonica. Both Paul and Silas, having been beaten and imprisoned in Philippi, arrived in Thessalonica with fresh wounds they had received for the sake of the gospel.

Yet the apostle and his coworkers were ready to continue preaching the word also in Thessalonica until the persecution compelled him to leave. While Paul continued on to Berea, Silas and Timothy continued to labor for a time in the Thessalonian church and later joined Paul in Corinth. From Corinth Paul had sent Timothy to ascertain the conditions in the congregation of Thessalonica. As a result of Timothy's report Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians, the first of all his epistles.

### **Study Questions and Activities**

1. Read carefully the entire epistle.
2. Study the map of Paul's second missionary journey. Locate Thessalonica.



3. Where did Paul begin his labors in Thessalonica (Acts 17)?
4. Paul's preaching in Thessalonica
  - a. What did Paul preach?
  - b. Did some Jews believe and join Paul and Silas?
  - c. Who also believed?

- d. How long did Paul minister the word in Thessalonica?
5. Why was Paul forced to leave Thessalonica?
  6. The congregation evidenced true faith and a sincere hope of eternal life (1 Thess. 1:3).
    - a. To what does Paul ascribe this tremendous change from unbelief and idolatry to faith in the living God (1:4–6)?
    - b. Was there evidence of a common bond with the other churches?
  7. Labor among the Thessalonians (2:1–12)
    - a. How had Paul and his coworkers labored among the Thessalonians?
    - b. Of what had Paul and his coworkers been accused (2:3–6)?
    - c. How was the Thessalonians' wholehearted reception of the gospel proof of Paul's sincerity as a true servant of Jesus Christ (2:12–14)?

- d. What proof did the Thessalonians have that their faith was God's work of grace in them (2:14–20)?
  
8. Paul's concern for the congregation
  - a. Why was Paul concerned about the congregation? What problems had arisen there (3:1–13)?
  
  - b. What does Paul teach the members regarding a holy walk (4:1–2)?
  
  - c. What does he say about brotherly love (4:9–12)?
  
  - d. What problem had arisen concerning those who had died since coming to the faith (4:13–18)?
  
  - e. Of what does Paul assure them?
  
9. What is our calling as believers who wait for the coming of the Lord?
  
10. What must be our attitude toward officebearers in the church (5:12–13)?



11. Sum up Paul's admonitions.

12. To what does Paul repeatedly refer, particularly at the end of almost every chapter?

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“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”  
—John 14:27

## Lesson 2

# Greeting and Thanksgiving

## 1 Thessalonians 1

### Introduction

In comparison with Paul's greetings in the other epistles, his greeting is very brief, showing that he is eager to get at the heart of his message to this newly organized congregation. The apostle mentions the senders, including Silas and Timothy, who must have known the contents of this letter. He also mentions the church that is brought into the fellowship of God and Christ. Then he pronounces the customary apostolic benediction: "Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ."

He is thankful to God for the work of grace wrought in these believers. For here once more God had given evidence of his sovereign mercy and of the power of the gospel. The power of the gospel was evident in the preaching, for they were drawn from the worship of idols to serve the living God with the hope of eternal life. And this power was also evident in the believers themselves—in their works of faith, their labors of love, and their patient hope in the return of our Lord. Thus the word of the Lord sounded forth even to the saints throughout Macedonia and Achaia. (Look up these places on the map on page 6.)

At the same time the Thessalonian church became the object of persecution not only from the local Jews, but also from the unbelieving Gentiles, both of whom revealed themselves as enemies of the cross of Jesus Christ.

### Study Questions and Activities

1. Read chapter 1.

2. Paul's greeting to the Thessalonians
  - a. Compare this greeting with his greetings in other epistles.
  - b. Is Paul's greeting a mere wish, or does it have apostolic authority in the name of Christ?
  - c. Does the benediction in a divine worship service today have apostolic authority in the name of Christ? Why or why not?
  - d. How are grace and peace related?
  - e. When did Silvanus join Paul?
  - f. What do we know about Silvanus?
  - g. When did Timotheus join Paul?
  - h. What do we know about Timotheus?
3. What is the church (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 54–55)?

4. A great wonder of grace had been wrought in the Thessalonian believers.
  - a. What was this wonder of grace (v. 9; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 33; Canons of Dordt 3–4.11–12)?
  - b. What threefold evidence of grace was manifest in the congregation (v. 3; 1 Cor. 13:13)?
  - c. How was this grace wrought among them (v. 5)?
  - d. What is the basis for their salvation (v. 4)?
5. The external and internal call of the gospel
  - a. What is the external call of the gospel?
  - b. Is the external call the same as a general, well-meant offer of salvation? Explain.
  - c. What is the internal call of the gospel?
  - d. What is the fruit of the internal call (Rom. 10:8–17)?

- e. What is true faith? What are its elements? (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 7)?
  - f. How can we be assured of our calling and election (2 Pet. 1:10)?
6. Paul and his coworkers were examples to the believers.
- a. How were they examples (v. 5)?
  - b. How did the believers become imitators (v. 6)?
  - c. What kind of joy filled the believers? (v. 6; 1 Pet. 1:8)?
  - d. How did they become examples for others (vv. 6–9)?
7. What is Christian witnessing?
- a. Prove from scripture and the creeds our calling as believers to witness.
  - b. Where should witnessing begin?

- c. What should be the content of our witness?
  
  - d. Who are the objects of our witness?
  
  - e. In what manner should we witness?
  
  - f. Give some misunderstandings or errors that are prevalent today concerning witnessing.
9. At what cost had the Thessalonians received the gospel (v. 6)?

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“But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.”  
—1 Corinthians 1:30–31

## *Lesson 3*

# **Paul's Defense of His Preaching**

## **1 Thessalonians 2:1–12**

### **Introduction**

Verse 1 of this chapter can more accurately be translated as “For ye ourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not empty handed.” The emphasis is on the treasure that Paul and his fellow workers carried with them: the free gift of God unto salvation (2 Cor. 4:7). They had a message that, in spite of all opposition, they were impelled by the zeal of God to proclaim.

Both the unbelieving Jews and the pagans sought to undermine Paul's preaching by bringing false accusations against him and his coworkers. They brought three charges against them: their message was no different from the vain philosophies of others; they exploited the church for personal gain; and their walk of life was not beyond reproof.

In these verses the apostle answers these charges, not because he wishes to defend himself, but because he wants no discredit to be brought upon the gospel.

### **Study Questions and Activities**

1. Read chapter 2.
2. Opposition to the labors of Paul and his coworkers
  - a. Who were the main opponents of Paul on the mission field, even as in Thessalonica (Acts 17:5)?

- b. Is the false church always the greatest enemy to the people of God?
  
  - c. Will the false church be the greatest enemy of the people of God at the end of time? Prove your answer from scripture.
  
  - d. How does Paul sum up opposition in 2 Corinthians 4:8–12?
  
  - e. Which of the three charges mentioned in the introduction are found in verses 3–6?
  
  - f. Which charge is mentioned in verse 9?
3. Paul's defense of his ministry among the Thessalonians
- a. How did Paul's experience in Philippi prove that he was not seeking personal gain (v. 2)?
    - 1) How else did Paul show that he and others were not exploiting the church (vv. 3, 5)?
  
    - 2) What was Paul's occupation (Acts 18:3; 2 Thess. 3:8)?



- 3) Would it have been wrong for Paul to expect the church to support him (Luke 10:7)?
  
  - 4) In what sense was the apostle out to “get” the Thessalonians (v. 8)?
- b. How does the apostle show that he was aware of the seriousness of his calling to preach the gospel (v. 3; 1 Tim. 1:11–12)?
- 1) How is the preaching of the gospel distinctive (Rom. 1:16; 10:15; 1 Cor. 1:18)?
  
  - 2) *Preached* in verse 9 refers to proclaiming or heralding the gospel, even as a king’s herald proclaims the message of the king in the exact words, tone of voice, and inflection of the king. What words does Paul use in 1 Thessalonians 1:5 and 2:2–4 to refer to his preaching?
  
  - 3) How else does Paul describe his ministry (v. 7)?
  
  - 4) How does he defend his ministry in verses 10–12?

5) Distinguish carefully between the three words, *exhorted, comforted, and charged*, used in verse 11.

c. Why are those who defend the truth of the gospel hated?

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“But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.”  
—Galatians 6:14