



INTRODUCTION TO 1 THESSALONIANS

Week #1; Dec. 7, 2025, 11AM

Taught at: Ridgeview Classical Schools
1800 S. Lemay Ave., Fort Collins, CO
www.solidbreadcommunity.com

Background:

- It is likely that **1 & 2 Thessalonians** were Paul's first letters to the churches of Asia Minor. That means they are his earliest **divinely inspired** books in the NT.
- There is some debate about the book of **Galatians**. Some think that was Paul's first book, but most scholars conclude it was **1 & 2 Thessalonians**.
- Now - - we're beginning with **1 Thessalonians** in this series - obviously - and it seems to have been written about 51AD.
- **Context is important.** I want to put this letter of **1 Thessalonians**, into a broader framework – a larger timeline.
- Historical background is helpful, so here's the storyline:
 - Jesus Christ, after His death and resurrection, ascended to heaven in 32AD or 33AD.
 - That means this letter Paul wrote to the new church in Thessalonica is not even 20 years after that point. There is no record that Paul met Jesus during Jesus' earthly ministry.
 - Paul, BTW, is his Roman name. He was formerly known by his Hebrew name, Saul, and he is first introduced in **Acts. Ch. 7**, at the stoning of Stephen.
 - Paul was a highly educated religious leader of the Jewish faith. He referred to himself as a Pharisee of the highest order in **Acts 23:6**. He had a superlative education and the right pedigree.
 - He looked the part, and he met all of man's criteria, but he didn't have a right relationship with God.
 - Paul, at that time, was someone that Jesus described as a '*whitewashed tomb*' (**Cf. Matt. 23:27**).
 - Paul was probably about 33 y/o at the time of Stephen's death, so Paul would be (roughly) in his late-40's at the time he wrote this letter of **1 Thessalonians**.
 - Before his conversion, Paul was known as a murderous persecutor of the early Christians – the stoning of Stephen being one case in point.
 - But somewhere around 36AD-37AD, Paul had a transformative supernatural experience while he was traveling to Damascus, Syria.
 - He was going there to seek out and to imprison new Christians, but he had an unexpected personal encounter with Jesus Christ.

- Jesus appeared to Paul in a dramatic vision (not unlike the way Jesus Christ is appearing to unbelievers in that part of the world today), and this event completely turned Paul's life around.
- This Damascus Road experience inspired Paul to become every bit a radical FOR Jesus and FOR the Gospel as he had been against both before.
- From that point on, Paul did nothing but put into practice the unshakable convictions he had personally received that day.
- His entire existence was, from that point forward, seized by his mission to be a tireless witness concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ.
- Paul was specifically called to preach the Gospel to the Gentile world (non-Jews). He specifies this calling in several passages in the NT, one being **Romans 15:16**, where he writes:

“He chose me to be a servant of Christ Jesus for the Gentiles and to do the work of a priest in the service of his good news. God did this so that the Holy Spirit could make the Gentiles into a holy offering, pleasing to him.”

- Allowing the Gentiles to become part of the new Christian community posed a series of problems for the early church - - there were cultural mores, legalistic chaos, very strong and divided opinions, etc.
 - Paul was present at the Council of Jerusalem in (about) AD 48-49, which rendered some clarifying decisions on this issue (**Cf. Acts 15; Gal 2:1-10**).
 - But ultimately, Paul is well known for engaging in several ‘missionary journeys’ to that part of the world we call ‘Asia Minor’ (Greece, Macedonia, and large parts of Turkey).
 - **Acts 15:36-18:22** records the details of Paul's second missionary journey in 49AD-51AD. This is the journey which took him to the city of Thessalonica, a major city in northern Greece which still exists today (Salonica).
 - Various companions joined with Paul on this second missionary journey. Silas was with him when the journey began, and both Timothy and Luke were also part of that journey.
 - Silas was one of the earliest leaders and teachers in the new Jerusalem church, and he's first introduced in **Acts 15:22**. Later, Silas served with Peter too.
 - Timothy was a young man, probably in his teens to early 20's. The Biblical record suggests he came to faith early in his life – and he was likely influenced by his mother and grandmother (**Cf. 2 Timothy 1:1-5**).
 - Luke was a Gentile, and a physician. He probably authored the books of **Acts** and **Luke**. If so, he is the only non-Jew to have authored any part of the NT.
 - But, by the time Paul arrived in Thessalonica, it was he, Silas, and Timothy – and you see that trio mentioned in **Ch. 1:1** which we'll read in a bit.
- Let me back up a couple paces and tell you something that happened just before Paul arrived in Thessalonica.

- He and Silas were in Phillipi, about 100 miles NE of Thessalonica, and their ministry there was very effective.
 - For example, it was in Phillipi that the wealthy businesswoman, Lydia, was converted - - and all her household.
 - It was in Phillipi that Paul and Silas cast demons out of a young gal that was earning her owners a lot of money from fortune-telling.
 - Paul's and Silas' message was not only causing people's eyes to be opened to the truth, but it was causing financial disruption to the religious and business establishments.
 - And so, crowds gathered in opposition to Paul and Silas, and the masses spread lies about them. Paul and Silas were stripped, severely beaten, thrown into prison, and their feet were put into stocks.
 - Did they complain? No. Paul and Silas are singing hymns and praises to God, the other prisoners are listening - - and then an earthquake hits the prison.
 - The jailer, thinking all the prisoners had escaped, is ready to kill himself, but Paul intervened and told him, 'Hey, we're all here.'
 - The jailer is profoundly impacted by this personal testimony – by this virtuous example - and so **he** comes to faith, and all **his** family too.
 - Paul and Silas, *after all this*, are released from jail. And it is *after all this* that they declare their Roman citizenship. The point is, Paul and Silas were unfairly treated by the laws of that time.
 - And so, Paul and Silas are subsequently dismissed, and they go on their way to Thessalonica, leaving behind them the very first church in greater Europe, which came about partly as a result of their abuse and suffering.
 - But - - Paul is now in bad shape physically from the beatings he'd endured in Phillipi, and this plays a role in his life looking forward.
- While Paul was ministering in Thessalonica, he was there '*three Sabbaths*' in the **synagogue**, according to **Acts 17:2**. This bit of information is important for several reasons:
 - **First**, it suggests that he had somewhere around three weeks (+/-) to be with the new believers of Thessalonica. That's not much time.
 - **Second**, this shows Paul's routine when he went to a new area to evangelize and church plant. He always started with the Jews in the local synagogue, and he branched out from there.
 - Paul went to the synagogues **FIRST** as part of his strategy to be a light to the Gentiles.
 - These gathering places were mostly filled with Jews, and Paul would '*reason in the synagogues with the Jews*' (**Cf. Acts. 17:17**) since they already had some grasp of the OT Scriptures.
 - However, it was common for there to be two or three God-seeking Gentiles who would also gather with the Jews in these synagogues – and so it became a means to an end for Paul. He pursued the soft targets.

- This was an effective strategy for him, and it's how this little church in Thessalonica got started.
 - **And third**, as we will see, Paul emphasized the doctrines of the end times as he developed these new Christians for the short time he was with them in Thessalonica.
 - We'll circle back to the significance of this issue in various lessons ahead.
- But, again, things became dangerous for Paul and his companions in Thessalonica. Paul, Silas, and Timothy were teaching the truth and holding the religious establishment accountable, and that was not welcome.
 - The synagogues there in Thessalonica were 'losing nickels and noses' to Paul's teaching - - the same way as it had been in Phillipi and other places too.
 - Folks were leaving the ranks of the synagogues they'd previously been part of, and they were going in the right direction instead.
 - That angered the religious establishment that was entrenched in the culture, processes, goals, and financial interests of their own system.
 - Things got so bad for Paul and his companions that the new believers in Thessalonica feared another Phillipi incident.
 - So, these new believers sent Paul and his group away to Berea (**Cf. Acts 17:10**), a place about 50 miles to the west.
 - But the Jewish 'religious establishment' in Thessalonica didn't rest. They followed Paul and Silas to Berea and created major problems for Paul there too.
 - Things got dicey enough for Paul that, once again, he was sent on to Athens by other concerned believers.
 - While he was in Athens, Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to see how the little community of believers was doing there.
 - From Athens, Paul then went on to Corinth where he stayed about 18 months.
 - It was while Paul was in Corinth that Timothy rejoined him and gave Paul some updates about this tiny upstart church in Thessalonica.
 - And so, it was while Paul was in Corinth that he wrote **1 & 2 Thessalonians**.

NOTE: That's the story behind the books of 1 & 2 Thessalonians. I think it's important to know these details since they lend application to things we will study in this series ahead.

A. About the books of 1 & 2 Thessalonians:

NOTE: I want to provide a brief overview of the books of **1 & 2 Thessalonians**. While we are starting in **1 Thessalonians**, I am briefly commenting on both here.

1. Both books are heavily infused with the doctrines of the End Times, particularly the doctrine of the pre-Tribulation Rapture.
 - This is proof that Paul considered these eschatological teachings to be vital to the foundation and well-being of believers - - even BRAND NEW BELIEVERS.

- One would **not** be wrong to conclude that churches who do not properly teach these End Times doctrines are short-changing their congregants.
- **And it may be worse than that. One commentary resource says this:**

*“Believing the pre-Tribulational Rapture is not essential for salvation. However, its acceptance is **necessary for Christian maturity and essential for Christian obedience**. God **commanded believers to encourage one another** with the truth of the Rapture. Thus, one **cannot obey Christ without obeying this command**.”* (www.doctrine.org)

2. Besides their emphasis on the End Times, **1 & 2 Thessalonians** are noted by various scholars to contain **all** the essential doctrines of the Christian faith.

- These are the ‘big words’ things like sanctification (holiness), justification by faith (salvation), and so on.
- The bottom line is Paul was trying to ‘equip’ and ‘edify’ this brand-new church with deep truth and chewy meat. He wanted them to mature quickly.
- And so he focused on the spiritual needs of the believers rather than trying to be ‘attractive to the lost.’
- While a lot has changed in our world since Paul wrote these letters to the Thessalonians, in many other ways, little has changed.
- Are we really any different than the people then were? No, human nature is the same. So are the struggles and battles of growing in our faith.
- And so, Paul addresses other important matters that we will be studying in this series. For example:
 - We also need encouragement, and Paul attends to that in **1 Thess. 1:2–10**.
 - We too need integrity. Paul deals with that in **1 Thess. 2:1–16**.
 - We need to show love, and Paul address that in **1 Thess. 2:17–3:13**.
 - We also need to be challenged to live in sexual purity, close fellowship, and orderly conduct, and Paul tackles these things in **1 Thess. 4:1–12**.
 - We need hope in our future too, and **1 Thess. 4:13–5:11** provides that.
 - We also need virtue, assurance, correction, endurance, prayer, prodding, grace, peace, holiness, love, honesty, gratitude, motivation, happiness, faith, friendship, and so on and so on.
 - I have not provided all the references for all these things, but our study in **1 & 2 Thessalonians** is going to deal with each one.

NOTE: I have subtitled this series in **1 & 2 Thessalonians**, ‘Faithful Endurance in One Direction,’ because that was essentially Paul’s primary goal for the new believers in Thessalonica.

- He wanted them to grow – and in that process they needed to endure in many ways.
- They needed to endure their own personal struggles and challenges, they needed to endure each other, they needed to endure the uncertainty of their times, they needed to endure persecution, they needed to endure when they had few answers to their questions, and so on.

- Paul was concerned that they would stay faithful through all of that, and so we are subtitling this series *'Faithful Endurance in One Direction.'*

NOTE: With all that background, let's now read **vss. 1-2 of 1 Thessalonians Ch. 1.**

A. Paul opens with a clear expression of 'thanksgiving.' Why?

1. This is different than how he opens the book of **Galatians** where he immediately says he is *'astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ'* (**Cf. Gal. 1:6**).
2. The Thessalonian church was not like the Galatian church. Here, we see Paul is overjoyed at the report Timothy has given him about this small upstart church. He is thankful for the news, and his companions are too.
 - Timothy, I'm sure, was questioned closely by Paul, and there is not a lot of bad news to deal with. It's mostly good. And so, Paul is very grateful.
 - In the big picture, the church in Thessalonica was a special church in the life and ministry of the apostle Paul.
 - As some commentators put it, this little church in Thessalonica was a 'model church.'

NOTE: That cannot be said for some of the other churches Paul was instrumental in starting, the **Corinthian church**, for example. That church prompted the letters of **1 & 2 Corinthians**.

- *That* church caused Paul more than a few heartaches. He wrote at least four letters that we know about; two of them became part of Scripture.
- With the Corinthian church, Paul was knee-deep in trying to straighten out the carnality and sins that persisted in that group of believers: indulgence, division, pride, discord, drunkenness, and their casual disrespect for the proceedings and significance of The Lord's Supper.
- And the church at **Colossae**, the church which inspired the book of **Colossians**, also had challenges being faithful, and Paul had to deal with those issues.
- The Colossian church drifted into carnality, sensuality, and mysticism.
- The church at **Ephesus**, which inspired the book of **Ephesians**, was a proud church. It lacked humility, patience, and forgiveness.
- And as we noted earlier, the **Galatian church** had some serious problems. They were very weak in their faith and ministry.
- And so, in the book of **Galatians**, Paul had to deal with their disloyalty to the basic things of God – even their abandonment of Biblical truth ('apostasy') and their pursuit of fleshly ideals.
- As for the church at Phillipi – remember how they fit into the storyline? – they seemed like a solid church in many ways.

- However, we find in the book of **Philippians** that that church was marked by discord. There was a lot of complaining, grumbling, and worry.
 - There were also two very problematic women in the church at Phillipi who had their own personal agenda.
 - These two women caused so much disruption and distraction that Paul names them – he calls them out - in his letter to that church.
3. The bottom line is Paul had his hands full trying to start and build up these various new churches. From a strictly human standpoint, they gave him a lot of grief and stress.
- But that's not the case with this little group of believers in Thessalonica.
 - Paul's time with them was very brief. Then, he was run out of town. But the seeds he had planted yielded a good report, and Paul is thankful for that.

NOTE: I'm going to start winding down today's lesson, and in doing that, I want to look at:

SOME TAKEAWAYS FROM THIS INTRODUCTION:

1. First, this will be a highly relevant study for Solid Bread Community.

- In considering the subtitle of this series, '*Faithful Endurance in One Direction*,' it's all about our walk. It's all about staying faithful in our journey on this earth.
 - That path gets hard sometimes. It is stony and rutted. We must endure the many scrapes, falls, and bruises.
 - Along our journey, we are modeling Jesus to a world that is watching us. We may not always know that – but it's happening.
 - They watch our walk, so our walk needs to be the right kind of walk.
 - As these books of **1 & 2 Thessalonians** unfold, we will find we are to walk in holiness, walk in love, walk in honesty, walk in hope, walk in the light, walk in gratitude, walk in obedience, and so on.
 - Through all of that, we are enabled in our endurance by keeping our faces pointed toward our eternity in Christ Jesus.
 - We are nurtured in our faithful living by cultivating a deep and burning desire to see Jesus Christ return.
 - By keeping a proper focus on our eventual destination - on the eternal things to come – we stay 'on course.' We endure. We remain faithful.

2. Second, it's important to keep an accurate view of the church, and its struggles.

- We see in today's lesson that Paul faced many challenges trying to birth and lead various churches. These were not unlike – in various ways – what Solid Bread Community also is: 'an intentional community of believers.'
- That said, it is rare – *it is exceedingly rare* – to find a healthy, happy, God-honoring church that conforms well to NT parameters and prescriptions.
- Honestly, most churches today would be doing well if they qualified for a C-grade. They are not 'on fire' by God's standards as much as they are by man's'.

- This abysmal truth is – truthfully – a commentary on the church for **all ages**.
For example:
 - At the end of the first century, the Apostle John was inspired, by the Holy Spirit, to write the book of **Revelation** while he was in forced exile on the island of Patmos.
 - And in **Revelation, chapters 2 and 3**, John is instructed to write seven letters to seven REAL churches in that **same region** that Paul had his missionary journeys to, ‘Asia Minor.’
 - These churches had been established just two or three decades earlier through the ministry of the apostles, men who were eyewitnesses of the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ.
 - These churches were not only REAL physical churches of that time, but they were placed in **Revelation** to also prophetically represent a choreography, if you will, of the entire church age.
 - These churches, in the order they are mentioned, are a picture of the history of the church in our present ‘Age of Grace.’
 - These seven churches KNEW the apostles personally. They had a direct connection, and they were the first recipients of the divinely inspired letters that would become the books of the NT we know now.
 - All things considered, one would think they’d be flourishing churches - churches that brought thanksgiving to their founders, and joy and fulfillment to the hearts of their congregants.
 - But we see that’s not the case. This was a set of churches that was largely struggling.
 - Five of these seven churches receive such a severe warning from the Holy Spirit that we can see they are in danger of going out of existence.
 - Only two of these seven, only Smyrna and Philadelphia escape profound threats from the Lord, despite all seven being founded in the fervor, passion, accuracy, and integrity of the apostles.
 - From that point to now, we see throughout all the Church Age that churches and ‘intentional communities of believers’ are seldom model examples.
 - It is rare to find spiritually healthy, biblically sound, faithful, enduring, loving, serving, evangelistic, God honoring, and serious churches.
 - Such churches are the exception, not the rule. And we are wise to properly understand this dynamic – to see this truth!
 - If there is a key takeaway for you and me here, it is this: it takes work, it takes endurance, and it takes commitment to Biblical truth to be found faithful.
 - That’s my prayer for Solid Bread Community. It’s my hope and prayer that we ‘run the right race with endurance,’ and that we each one day hear, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant.’

3. The last takeaway I want to mention from this introduction into 1 Thessalonians is: 'God is not done writing the story.'

- That's a quote a good friend used to tell me – and he's right. You and I can see things now that Paul did not see during his time. We see the big picture of how God was working behind the scenes to forge HIS church!
- Paul did not see that (not then) - - and often today we do not see all the ways God is unfolding His perfect plan in our lives and in the lives of others.
- It's easy to get caught up in numbers. It's tempting to assess what is happening by the standards and processes we consider to be important.
- But the far greater reality is, 'God is not done writing the story.' Many things may be taking place concerning which we have no clue – no awareness.
- God sovereignly moves in the hearts of individuals, in the processes and events of our lives, and even in the challenges and trials we face - - to accomplish His perfect plan.
- God took a highly educated, highly pedigreed, and highly passionate man named Paul, and threw a big stick in his spokes.
- His life went upside down. Everything he had trained to become was put to use in ways he did not ever imagine.
- His expertise in the Judaic religious system enabled him later to '*reason in the synagogues*' with the Jews and to bring them to salvation.
- His diverse qualifications and keen intellect positioned him to be effective in reaching the Gentiles.
- Key relationships came into his life at just the right time. Provisions for ministry were doled out to him at just the right moment. Doors opened, and doors closed.
- God had prepared him for such a moment as this, because – while Paul did not know it at the time – 'God was not done writing the story.'

NEXT TIME: Paul explains why he is thankful. He lists three reasons why he is overwhelmed with gratitude. These are three things which should characterize you and me today.



Solid Bread Community was started with a passion to teach the truth of God's Word – every part of it, as it was divinely inspired to be understood.

The rules are simple. First, teach what IS there. Don't pretend the Bible is not saying what it is saying.

Second, don't teach what is NOT there. Don't force a passage to mean something it really doesn't.

And – number three, if the Bible states it plainly, we should too.

Solid Bread Community, PO Box 431, Windsor, CO 80550

Website: www.solidbreadcommunity.com

Email: connect@solidbreadcommunity.com

Please follow Solid Bread Community on Facebook and subscribe to our YouTube channel.