

**1 Thessalonians 1**  
**A Continuation of the Study of the Formation**  
**Of the Church**

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We finished a study of the book of Acts written by Luke and now we are hopefully going to study books written by Paul during his missionary trips he made under the direction of our Lord Jesus Christ in the establishment of His church. My notes on ACTS are available at <http://livingtheology.com/Acts.htm> and I hope that you will read them. We will now follow the time lines for the letters Paul wrote during his work for the Lord:

**Approximate time lines for Bible books involving Paul.**

50 A.D. – 53 A.D. 1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians written from Corinth

53 A.D. – 57 A.D. Galatians from Antioch

55 A.D. – 57 A.D. 1 Corinthians written in Ephesus

~57 A.D. Paul wrote Romans

56 A.D. – 58 A.D. 2 Corinthians from Macedonia (perhaps while in Philippi)

61 A.D. – 62 A.D. Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon written from Roman prison

62 A.D. – 63 A.D. Acts finished by Luke

62 A.D. – 63 A.D. Paul set free from prison the first time

Titus, 1 Timothy, and 2 Timothy written during his freedom of about two years.

64 A.D. Paul returned to Rome after the great fire of Rome

66 A.D. Paul beheaded at Rome

We have already studied Romans and my notes for that study can be found at <http://livingtheology.com/Romans.htm>. We have also already studied Ephesians and my notes for that study can be found at <http://livingtheology.com/Ephesians.htm>. So, if the Lord approves, during the next few years we will be studying 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, Galatians, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, Titus, 1 Timothy, and 2 Timothy in that order. At the conclusion of this study we should have a good understanding of God's work in the establishment of the church and the men He used in that work.

**Background**

1 Thessalonians was written by Paul while he was in Corinth probably in the spring of A.D. 50 when he was on his second missionary journey. On his first missionary journey he, Barnabas, and John Mark begin the trip but John Mark leaves them at Perga and returns to Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas go to Antioch in Pisidia and then to Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. They then retrace their steps back to Perga during which they strengthen and further teach the converts in those cities. Paul's concern was never just

for evangelism but also for the discipleship of the people chosen by God. The thrust of discipleship is indeed in line with the “great commission” of our Lord:

*Matt 28:18 “And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.*

*Matt 28:19 “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,*

*Matt 28:20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. “”*

We must always remember that God chooses His children and it is our task to disciple them according to the Word of God. It is very clear from our study of the book of Acts that such was Paul’s thrust throughout his ministry and it will be even clearer as we study the epistles that he wrote to the churches that he had either established or visited.

Paul and Barnabas then stay and teach at Antioch for about three years. They then go to Jerusalem for the important “Jerusalem Conference” concerning the importance of the Law in the life of the Christian. He had to continually work to overcome the desire of the Jewish converts to continue to practice as a Jew. In Jerusalem Paul and Barnabas also privately meet with James, Peter, and John about the circumcision question.

Paul and Silas start the second missionary journey in Tarsus and then travel to Derbe and Lystra where Paul meets Timothy who would become an important companion. The three of them then travel to Iconium, Antioch in Pisidia and then to Troas where Paul has the important vision of the man in Macedonia that we discussed in our study of Acts. They then travel to Philippi where Paul and Silas are beaten and put into prison. In the prison we studied the miracles of the earthquake and the removing of the bonds as they are freed. They then travel to Thessalonica where Paul teaches for three Sabbaths in a synagogue. Many there believe but many are jealous and form a mob and start a riot. The mob goes to the house of Jason but they did not find Paul and Silas so they dragged Jason and others to the magistrate and accused them of wrongdoing. Jason and the others are found not guilty and Paul and Silas leave for Berea where the people are more willing to listen to Paul than the people at Thessalonica. But some of the jealous Jews from Thessalonica come to Berea to give Paul considerable trouble. Paul then leaves for Athens where he preaches his famous Mars Hill sermon.

In the summer of A.D. 50 Paul leaves Athens and travels to Corinth where he stays and preaches for about 1.5 years (Acts 18:11). It is from Corinth that Paul writes his letter to the Thessalonica Christians. Since he did not stay there long and the writing of Luke indicates that he had little success, it is indeed a miracle that God established a church there. We know that Paul sent Timothy to Thessalonica from Athens so God worked through Timothy to establish the church there (1 Thes 3:2)

We must never forget that it is God that chooses His people and establishes His churches even when we might think that we have failed. Often in my Christian walk I see that God makes considerable success out of what I would judge to be failure on my part. Even

though the people at Thessalonica must have thought highly of Paul there were also many people wanting to discredit Paul and break up the church. Timothy was instrumental in helping the churches become established and he then reported back to Paul and it is based upon this report that Paul wrote to the Christians in Thessalonica.

### **The Letter**

Paul seems to have had three reasons for writing this letter.

- 1.) He wanted to praise the people and the Lord for the spiritual condition of the church there (1Thes 1:2-10).
- 2.) He wanted to defend his reputation of himself and his associates (1Thes 2:1-3:13).
- 3.) He wanted to express some ways in which the Christians there could further develop their Christian walk (1Thes 4:1-5:24).

**1Thes 1:1 “Paul and Silvanus and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.**

**1Thes 1:2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers;”**

Note that Paul writes using “we” for he includes Silas and Timothy in this greeting and praise to God for them. As all of us should always do, he is giving praise to God for His work in the lives of His children. It is very important to let people know when we are praying for them, especially when we are thanking God for them and for their work for the Lord. Have you ever had someone pray for you by name? It is a wonderful feeling to hear your name lifted to God. I thank God for the people He has brought into my life and in particular to those in the SS classes that I have taught and that I am teaching. I have primarily a lecture style in my teaching of SS but people do feel open to express their comments and questions. I am thankful to several people in the class who have asked questions and who have clarified items that I am trying to teach. I am thankful in particular to Cathy, Dave, Fred, Beth, Pete, Susan, Carol, Cheryl, John, Lori and others. I hope that the entire class knows that I do lift them up to God in prayer.

**1Thes 1:3 “constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father,**

**1Thes 1:4 knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you;**

**1Thes 1:5 for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.”**

Paul recognized that God chose each of them for the work that they were performing for the kingdom of God. He also knows that the gospel he preached to them was not just in his words but also in his actions. Just as James later said,

*James 2:14 "What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him?"*

*James 2:15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food,*

*James 2:16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?"*

*James 2:17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.*

*James 2:18 But someone may well say, "You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works."*

*James 2:19 You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.*

*James 2:20 But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?"*

Paul is saying that his works of faith were to prove to them that the gospel was real and that his concern for them was genuine. The gospel was also proven to them by the works of the Holy Spirit's power.

**1Thes 1:6 "You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit,**

**1Thes 1:7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia."**

Remember how Paul left the area and the problems that were caused by the gang of Jews who were jealous of him and the message and how they then drug Jason before the authorities and we begin to understand the tribulation that they received because of their reception of the truth. But then we also see that they had the joy of the Holy Spirit to more than balance the tribulation of the world. These believers then became imitators of Paul, Silas, and more importantly the Lord. Even in the face of more tribulation they chose to become followers of Jesus Christ so that they became examples to all the believers in a large region. Macedonia was the province of northern Greece and Achaia was the southern province of Greece. These people were poor but we know from other writings of Paul that they gave money for the Jerusalem church out of their poverty.

*2Cor 8:1 "Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia,*

*2Cor 8:2 that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality.*

*2Cor 8:3 For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability they gave of their own accord,*

*2Cor 8:4 begging us with much entreaty for the favor of participation in the support of the saints,*

*2Cor 8:5 and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God."*

They also set the example for us today.

*1John 2:4 "The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him;  
1John 2:5 but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected.  
By this we know that we are in Him:  
1John 2:6 the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked."*

**1Thes 1:8 "For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything.**

**1Thes 1:9 For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God,  
1Thes 1:10 and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come."**

Even two thousand years later we hear of the faith given to them by God, which was manifested by their walk, and we praise God for His choosing these people as members of His family and as examples for us today. They turned away from serving their idols and to serve the living and true God just as we also turned away from our idols. They waited in anticipation for the second coming of Jesus and we also are waiting for His coming that will not bring wrath upon us but will actually deliver us from the wrath of God.

*John 3:36 "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."*

Thessalonica was a hub of travel in that day and people traveling through that city would have the opportunity to hear the truth. Similarly today, Atlanta is a hub of travel in the world and rather than being known as a haven for homosexuals and witches we should be known as a city of faithful followers of Jesus Christ. Christians have been especially criticized in this time for "hellfire and brimstone preaching" but the coming wrath of God is real and we have the responsibility of preaching the truth of the Gospel message so that His chosen people will hear and obey.

From this chapter Paul has revealed to us the ten marks of the true elect who are serving Jesus Christ. God knows who the real elect are but we are touched as we see these same marks in ourselves as we can know even more certain that we are indeed His children.

### **Ten Marks of the Elect**

1. Works of Faith (1:3a)
2. Labor of Love (1:3b)
3. Steadfastness of Hope (1:3c)
4. Revealed Divine Power of God (1:5)
5. Imitators of Apostles and Jesus (1:6a)
6. Joy in all Circumstances (1:6b)

7. Exemplary Conduct (1:7)
8. Faithfulness in Proclaiming the Gospel (1:8-9a)
9. Submission to a New Master (1:9b)
10. Patiently Waiting for His Return (1:10)

**Figure 1**  
**Areas to which Paul wrote his epistles.**



**Figure 2**  
**First Missionary Journey**



Figure 3

Second Missionary Journey



## References

- 1.) John McArthur, "1 & 2 Thessalonians", Moody Press, 2002.
- 2.) Edited by Frank E. Gaebelin, "The Expositor's Bible Commentary Volume 11", 1978.