

**Studies in the Book of
1 & 2 Thessalonians**
Hope for a Hopeless World

Introduction

What does a church look like when it functions the way it is supposed to? It may resemble the church at Thessalonica. Of all the churches mentioned in the New Testament, the Thessalonians were perhaps the model in carrying out the instructions of the apostles. Their story of faith spread far and wide in the first century, impressing all who heard.

Their example still proves instructive today. Many people in our culture are choosing to live increasingly isolated lives, putting distance between themselves and the needs of the world. By contrast, Christians are challenged to engage the world and penetrate it with the light of God's love. As the Thessalonians did that in the first century, believers today can do the same. In a world that lacks hope, they can point toward the hope that is found in Christ.

Judging from his comments in the New Testament, the apostle Paul may have felt greater affection for the church of Thessalonica than any other congregation. The believers there didn't just talk about the gospel, they practiced it. In doing so, they were following the lead of Paul, Silas, and Timothy who had brought them the gospel message. The threesome had taken great pains to live Christlike among them. The demonstration of a Christlike lifestyle gave credibility to the Apostles message. Many Thessalonians were persuaded and encouraged in the faith. Even those who were unpersuaded recognized a power in these messengers, calling them the men who had "turned the world upside down".

The work that Paul calls for is the everyday work of making a living and maintaining a home. And yet there is an inner work that takes place in and through that day to day grind. As the Thessalonians carried out their everyday responsibilities, God was building character in their lives. When hope fades, people loose heart and doubts begin to grow. Two major questions are addressed in these letters: 1. What will happen in the end times? 2. How should believers live as they wait for the return of the Lord?

Two thousand years after Thessalonians, believers still are waiting for the return of the Lord. Has your hope faded? Have doubts flooded your mind so that you

wonder whether God will keep His Word? Has your lifestyle grown spiritually dull and undisciplined? The message of 1 & 2 Thessalonians remains the same. Keep working, stay faithful, don't lose heart, don't lose hope, God will honor His promises. He challenges you and I to live in a way that points to that hope.

When Hope Fades

Judging from his comments in the New Testament, the apostle Paul may have felt greater affection for the church at Thessalonica than of any other congregation. The believers there didn't just talk about the gospel, they practiced it.

In doing so they were following the example of Paul, Silas, and Timothy, who had brought them the gospel. The demonstration of a Christlike lifestyle lent credibility to the apostle's message, with the result that many Thessalonians were persuaded. Even those who were unpersuaded recognized a power in the messengers calling them men who had "turned the world upside down"

For a time, the gospel turned Thessalonica upside down. But after the apostles left and things quieted down, the new believers were left with an important reality of faith "that lasting change occurs over time." That's why Paul's two letters call for responsible, long term progress and the refusal to let hope fade. He reminds his readers his example how he worked among the Thessalonians. They should work as well, he says, and keep on working rather than burning out in the midst of doing good.

The work that Paul calls for is the everyday work of making and living and maintaining a home. And yet there is an inner work that takes place in and through that day to day toil. As the Thessalonians carried out their everyday responsibilities, God was building their character, so that Paul could speak of their work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope.

When hope fades people loose heart and doubts begin to grow. Perhaps this was happening in Thessalonians. A major question that these two letters address is, what will happen in the end times? And how should believers live as they wait for the return of the Lord? Again, Paul exhorts his readers to a lifestyle of faithful service and steadfast hope.

Two thousand years after the Thessalonians, believers still await the coming of the Lord. Has your hope faded? Have doubts crowded in so that you wonder whether God will keep His word? Has your lifestyle grown spiritually lax and undisciplined? The message of 1 and 2 Thessalonians remains, keep working, stay faithful, don't lose hope. God will keep His promises. He challenges you to live in a way that points to this hope.

Author and Setting

Both 1 & 2 Thessalonians indicate that Paul is their author, and he apparently signed the second letter with his own hand. Paul wrote both of these letters from Corinth. The first was produced shortly after he left Thessalonica following an uprising of Jews and local troublemakers. Timothy who had remained with the new congregation, brought Paul an encouraging word of the young believer's steadfast faith. Paul responded to this joyful news by writing 1 Thessalonians.

However, the Thessalonians still had questions about their newfound faith, especially in regard to the latter days. Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians to address these matters.

Key Scriptures you will find in 1 Thessalonians

“Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father” 1 Thess. 1:3

“But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children” 1 Thess. 2:7

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification, that you should abstain from sexual immorality” 1 Thess. 4:3

“For the Lord himself will descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”

1 Thess. 4:16-17

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks, for this is the will of God for Christ Jesus in you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test all things, hold fast to what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.” 1 Thess. 5:16-22