

New Testament Survey Class 16  
1 Thessalonians

**Authorship:** The overwhelming majority of scholars agree that 1 Thess is from the hand of Paul. There is not serious debate on this point.

**Date:**

*Probably AD 51 no later than AD 52. Paul wrote this letter from Corinth during his second missionary journey shortly after leaving Thessalonica.*

**Occasion:**

*Paul, Silas, and Timothy had visited Thessalonica on his second missionary journey. Thessalonica is about 100 miles west of Philippi. It was the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia. It was originally called Therme but was refounded by Cassander in 315 BC and named for his wife Thesssalonica a step sister of Alexander the Great. The Romans made a capital in 164 BC and like Philippi it chose the side of Marc Antony and Octavian against Brutus and Cassius following the assassination of Julius Caesar in 42 BC. Rome made it a free city in gratitude. Later they sided with Antony and Cleopatra against Octavian/Augustus in 31 BC but quickly came in line with the victorious Augustus. They retained many of the Greek ways in both civil government and religion. It was a harbor town, filled with temples and idols. It was highly loyal to Rome and had a strong Jewish community. It is situated on the Via Egnatia which connects Rome to the Eastern part of the Empire. Paul's first visit is narrated in Acts 17:1-9. As was his practice he went first to the Synagogue where he preached that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer, die and rise again from the dead, and that Jesus was therefore the Messiah. Several of his hearers believed along with a number of 'God-fearers' Gentiles. After three Sabbaths the Synagogue leadership turned on him and he moved his base of operations to the house of Jason. He continued there until his opponents stirred up public disorder accusing Paul of being a 'Messianic Agitator' proclaiming another king in rivalry to the Emperor. He was arrested and his friends made his bail and he fled the city by night. The young*

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*church faced active opposition and Paul worried about them since his quick departure kept him from completing their instruction. He sent Timothy back after he went on to Beroea and Athens and then Corinth.*

One of the issues that troubled the church was the fate or destiny of those who died before Christ returned. This issue of eschatology also created other issues, like, what is life about until Christ returns?

Paul expounded on the deity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He demonstrated the tripartite virtues of faith, hope, and love. Paul also demonstrates the nature of Apostolic preaching covering Jesus' death as being 'for us'. His resurrection which had already taken place and His coming again which had not. It would occur on the Day of the Lord, when his people delivered from the wrath to come are to live forever with Him. Those who believe this message turn from idols to the living and true God, to serve Him in the light of Christ's second coming.

**Structure:**

*1:1 Salutation*

*1:2-10 Thanksgiving or Baracha*

*2:1-16 Apologia*

*2:17-3:10 Narrative of events since Paul left Thessalonica*

*3:11-13 Prayer for speedy reunion*

*4:1-12 Exhortation to holy living*

*4:13-5:11 Instruction concerning the Second Coming of Christ*

*5:12-22 General Exhortations for life until Christ returns*

*5:23-28 Prayer, final greeting and benediction*

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## **Eschatology:**

***We learn in 1 Thess that believers who die before Christ returns are not lost nor do they experience loss but will be the first to rise on the Day of Christ's Return.***

***Toward the end of each chapter of this letter there is a reference to some aspect of the Second Coming.***

***However we understand the so-called Rapture, it is this letter that tells us about it.***

***Paul does not encourage speculation about the date of the Second Coming...it will come unexpectedly 1 Thess 5:1,2...the important thing is that whether we live or die, wake or sleep that we may live together with Him 1 Thess 5:10***

## **Apostolic Defense or Apologia**

***Evidently Paul had been accused of a number of shortcomings...flattery, after money not spiritual progress...in rebutting, Paul lays out an example for Pastors and leaders for all time 1 Thess 2:1-10.***

***Paul issues a call for sexual purity which is a call as relevant today as it was in his day 1 Thess 4:3-8.***

***Paul also lays out a theological perspective on work 1 Thess 4:11,12; 5:14***