

Introduction to 1 Thessalonians

Authorship

This letter is widely regarded as a genuinely Pauline epistle. Although in the 19th century various historical and literary arguments against Paul as author were put forward, none has carried the day.

Manuscript History

The earliest manuscripts date to the third century. The earliest three manuscripts are:

P46, or P. Chester Beatty II+University of Michigan inventory 6238 is housed in two collections in Dublin, Ireland and Ann Arbor, Michigan. The papyrus contains portions of many New Testament books. The portions of 1 Thessalonians that it contains are 1:1; 1:9-2:3; 5:5-9; 5:23-28. This manuscript has been dated paleographically to the early third century AD.

P30, or P. Oxy. 1598, housed in Gent, contains both the first and second epistles to the Thessalonians. The portions of 1 Thessalonians it contains are 1 Thessalonians 4:12-13; 4:16-17; 5:3; 5:8-10; 5:12-18; 5:25-28. This manuscript has been paleographically dated to the third century AD.

P65, or PSI 1373, housed in Florence, contains 1 Thessalonians 1:3-2:1; 2:6-13. This manuscript has been dated paleographically to the third century AD.

Many other manuscripts have survived, but all date later than these three. The third chapter (and most of the second chapter) of 1 Thessalonians is not preserved before the fourth century.

Canon

1 Thessalonians is listed in both the Muratorian Canon and Marcion's *Apostolicon*. It is quoted by name by Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian, and possibly alluded to by Polycarp. As mentioned above, it is included in p⁴⁶, the most ancient manuscript of Pauline material in existence.

Setting

Paul went to Thessalonica in the company of Silas during his second missionary journey. According to Acts 17, he preached during "three Sabbaths" there when the Jewish leaders, fearful of the number of converts Paul was gaining, started a riot and claimed that Paul and Silas were advocating another king than Caesar. Paul left for Beroea, then went to Corinth, and finally came to Athens.

Unable to return to the city, Paul sent Timothy as his envoy to check on the fledgling congregation there, and Timothy reported to Paul both that they continued faithful and that they had certain questions about the second coming. This letter is the result. It was probably written in about AD 50, soon after Paul arrived at Corinth.

Outline

- I. Salutation (1:1)
- II. Paul and the Thessalonians
 - A. Expression of Thanks (1:2-10)
 - B. Defense of Paul's Apostleship (2:1-16)
 - C. Paul's Desire to Visit (2:17-3:10)
- III. The Lord's Return
 - A. Living a Life Pleasing to God (4:1-12)
 - B. The Imminent Return of the Lord (4:13-5:11)
- IV. Final Exhortations and Greetings (5:12-28)

Further Readings

Non-LDS Sources

Malherbe, Abraham J. *The Letters to the Thessalonians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary. Anchor Bible.* New York: Doubleday, 2000.

LDS Sources

Anderson, Richard Lloyd. *Understanding Paul.* Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983.

Brandt, Edward J., J. Lewis Taylor, and Lane Johnson. "New Testament Backgrounds: Thessalonians through Hebrews." *Ensign* 6 (April 1976): 56-59.

Sperry, Sidney B. *Paul's Life and Letters.* Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1955.

The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Thessalonians

Chapter 1

Salutation

¹ PAUL,¹ and Silvanus,² and Timotheus,³ unto the church of the Thessalonians⁴ which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.⁵

The Thessalonians' Faith and Example

² We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; ³ Remembering without ceasing⁶ your work of faith,⁷ and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father;⁸ ⁴ Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.⁹ ⁵ For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance;¹⁰ as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. ⁶ And ye became followers¹¹ of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in¹² much affliction,¹³ with joy of the Holy Ghost: ⁷ So that ye were ensamples¹⁴ to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.¹⁵ ⁸ For

¹ IE from Paul.

² The LAT form of Silas, which derives from the ARAM form (*Sa'ila*) of the name Saul. Cf. Acts 15-17.

³ IE Timothy, one of Paul's regular missionary companions.

⁴ Thessalonica was the largest city and capital of Macedonia, along the Via Egnatia, a strategic road spanning Macedonia from east to west. At the time of Paul its population may have been as high as 200,000. The city was named for the wife of Cassandra (and half-sister of Alexander the Great).

⁵ Some mss. omit "from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ."

⁶ ἀδιαλείπτως *adialeiptōs* constantly.

⁷ IE inspired by and carried out through faith.

⁸ OR our God and Father. The conjunction is intensive.

⁹ IE brethren beloved of God, that he has chosen you.

¹⁰ πληροφορία *plērophoria* deep conviction.

¹¹ μιμητὰι *mimētai* imitators.

¹² IE despite.

¹³ This suffering is imposed by persecution from without and so is not incompatible with internal joy.

¹⁴ Some mss. have the singular τύπον *tupon* example. The plural was probably an assimilation to the preceding plural pronoun, "ye." This GR word is the source for ENG "type."

¹⁵ IE the name of the Roman province including Greece (from which Paul was writing).

from you sounded out¹⁶ the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward¹⁷ is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing.¹⁸ ⁹ For they themselves¹⁹ shew of us what manner of entering in we had²⁰ unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; ¹⁰ And to wait²¹ for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, *even* Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.²²

Chapter 2

Paul's Ministry in Thessalonica

¹ FOR yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto²³ you, that it was not in vain.²⁴ ² But even after that we had suffered before,²⁵ and were shamefully entreated,²⁶ as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention.²⁷ ³ For our exhortation²⁸ *was* not of deceit,²⁹ nor of uncleanness,³⁰ nor in guile.³¹ ⁴ But as we were allowed³² of God to be put in trust³³ with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth³⁴ our hearts. ⁵ For neither at any time used we flattering words,³⁵ as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness,³⁶ God *is* witness: ⁶ Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor *yet* of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ.³⁷ ⁷ But we were gentle³⁸ among you,

¹⁶ OR resounded, echoed forth.

¹⁷ OR toward God.

¹⁸ IE so that we do not need to say anything.

¹⁹ Meaning the believers in the places just mentioned.

²⁰ OR what sort of entrance we had (IE how you received us).

²¹ In the sense of looking for the second coming.

²² A theme of ch. 5.

²³ IE about our coming to.

²⁴ IE to no purpose.

²⁵ IE earlier.

²⁶ ὑβρισθέντες *hubrithentes* treated with insolence, insulted. (Cf. ENG "hybris.").

²⁷ IE notwithstanding much opposition. Cf. Acts 16:19-40, Phil. 1:30.

²⁸ IE appeal [to the Thessalonians].

²⁹ OR error.

³⁰ Here not ritual impurity, but mixed motives.

³¹ Paul denies charges his opponents had made against him.

³² OR judged fit, hence approved.

³³ IE entrusted.

³⁴ OR examines.

³⁵ λόγῳ καλακείας *logō kalakeias* lit. a word of flattery, a Semitic idiom for flattering speech.

³⁶ IE with a pretext for greed.

³⁷ IE although we could have imposed our weight as apostles of Christ.

³⁸ Based on ms. evidence, the original reading was probably νήπιοι *nēpioi* little children rather than TR ἤπιοι *ēpioi* gentle.

even as a nurse cherisheth³⁹ her children: ⁸ So being affectionately desirous of you,⁴⁰ we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls,⁴¹ because ye were dear unto us. ⁹ For ye remember, brethren,⁴² our labour and travail:⁴³ for labouring night and day,⁴⁴ because we would not be chargeable unto⁴⁵ any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God. ¹⁰ Ye *are* witnesses, and God *also*, how holily⁴⁶ and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe: ¹¹ As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father *doth* his children, ¹² That ye would walk⁴⁷ worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.

¹³ For this cause also thank we God without ceasing,⁴⁸ because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received *it* not *as* the word of men,⁴⁹ but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually⁵⁰ worketh also in you that believe. ¹⁴ For ye, brethren, became followers⁵¹ of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they *have* of the Jews: ¹⁵ Who⁵² both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own⁵³ prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to⁵⁴ all men: ¹⁶ Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins always⁵⁵: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.⁵⁶

Paul's Desire to Visit the Church Again

¹⁷ But we, brethren, being taken⁵⁷ from you for a short time in presence, not in heart,⁵⁸ endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face⁵⁹ with great desire. ¹⁸

³⁹ IE a nursing mother cares for.

⁴⁰ IE longing for you in this way.

⁴¹ OR lives.

⁴² Gender neutral: brothers and sisters.

⁴³ OR toil.

⁴⁴ Rhetorical exaggeration, called hyperbole.

⁴⁵ IE impose a burden on. Paul supported himself by working at his trade as a tentmaker (cf. Acts 18:3).

⁴⁶ OR devoutly.

⁴⁷ IE live in a way.

⁴⁸ IE constantly.

⁴⁹ IE a merely human message.

⁵⁰ IE effectively.

⁵¹ OR imitators.

⁵² The antecedent is the Jews from v. 12.

⁵³ The earliest mss. omit "own."

⁵⁴ IE opposed.

⁵⁵ IE to constantly fill up their measure of sins.

⁵⁶ IE completely.

⁵⁷ ἀπορφανισθέντες *aporthanisthentes* lit. being made orphans, bereft.

⁵⁸ The idea is that though we were physically removed from you, our affections towards you remained.

Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again,⁶⁰ but Satan hindered⁶¹ us. ¹⁹ For what *is* our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing?⁶² *Are* not even ye⁶³ in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? ²⁰ For ye are our glory and joy.

Chapter 3

¹ WHEREFORE when we could no longer forbear,⁶⁴ we thought it good⁶⁵ to be left at Athens alone; ² And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the gospel⁶⁶ of Christ, to establish⁶⁷ you, and to comfort⁶⁸ you concerning your faith: ³ That no man should be moved⁶⁹ by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto.⁷⁰ ⁴ For verily, when we were with you, we told you before⁷¹ that we should suffer tribulation;⁷² even as it came to pass, and ye know. ⁵ For this cause, when I could no longer forbear,⁷³ I sent to know⁷⁴ your faith, lest⁷⁵ by some means the tempter⁷⁶ have tempted⁷⁷ you, and our labour be in vain.⁷⁸

⁶ But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings⁷⁹ of your faith and charity,⁸⁰ and that ye have good remembrance of us always,⁸¹ desiring greatly to see us, as we also *to see* you: ⁷ Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith: ⁸ For now we live,⁸² if ye stand fast⁸³ in the Lord. ⁹ For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith

⁵⁹ IE to see you in person.

⁶⁰ ἅπαξ καὶ δὶς *hapax kai dis* lit. once and twice, a GR idiom meaning several times.

⁶¹ OR thwarted.

⁶² IE crown in which we glory (as a matter of pride).

⁶³ OR is it not you? The GR interrogative anticipates a positive answer.

⁶⁴ IE bear it.

⁶⁵ And so we resolved, determined.

⁶⁶ IE in spreading the gospel (as a missionary).

⁶⁷ OR strengthen.

⁶⁸ OR encourage.

⁶⁹ IE shaken. The GR verb originally had reference to a dog wagging its tail.

⁷⁰ IE placed, set, and so destined for them.

⁷¹ IE in advance.

⁷² IE persecution.

⁷³ IE bear it.

⁷⁴ IE find out about.

⁷⁵ OR whether perhaps.

⁷⁶ An allusion to Satan.

⁷⁷ OR had tempted (the aorist tense probably has pluperfect force here).

⁷⁸ IE to no purpose.

⁷⁹ OR news.

⁸⁰ ἀγάπην *agapēn* love.

⁸¹ IE you always think of us with affection.

⁸² IE we are alive again.

⁸³ OR if only you stand firm.

we joy for your sakes before our God; ¹⁰ Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect⁸⁴ that which is lacking in your faith?

¹¹ Now God himself and⁸⁵ our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct⁸⁶ our way unto you. ¹² And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all *men*, even as we *do* toward you: ¹³ To the end he may stablish⁸⁷ your hearts unblameable⁸⁸ in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.⁸⁹

Chapter 4

A Life Pleasing to God

¹ FURTHERMORE then we beseech⁹⁰ you, brethren, and exhort *you* by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received⁹¹ of us how ye ought to walk⁹² and to please God,⁹³ *so* ye would abound⁹⁴ more and more. ² For ye know what commandments we gave you by⁹⁵ the Lord Jesus. ³ For this is the will of God, *even* your sanctification,⁹⁶ that ye should abstain from fornication:⁹⁷ ⁴ That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel⁹⁸ in sanctification⁹⁹ and honour; ⁵ Not in the lust of concupiscence,¹⁰⁰ even as the Gentiles which know not God: ⁶ That no *man* go beyond¹⁰¹ and defraud¹⁰² his brother in *any* matter:¹⁰³ because that the Lord *is* the avenger of all such, as we also have

⁸⁴ IE make up for, complete.

⁸⁵ The conjunction is intensive: even.

⁸⁶ καταρτίσαι *katartisai* prosper. The GR verb is used for wishing one well on a journey.

⁸⁷ OR strengthen.

⁸⁸ IE blameless.

⁸⁹ Some mss. add "amen" here.

⁹⁰ OR urge.

⁹¹ This word refers to the reception of instruction by a student from a teacher.

⁹² IE live.

⁹³ A parenthetical clause at this point, "just as you are doing," was mistakenly omitted from TR and thus is not reflected in the KJV.

⁹⁴ IE do so.

⁹⁵ IE in the name of, by the authority of.

⁹⁶ IE that you become holy.

⁹⁷ πορνείας *porneias* sexual immorality. Cf. ENG pornography (lit. "prostitute writing").

⁹⁸ Metaphoric, either for the body generally, or in a euphemistic sense for one's sexual organs.

⁹⁹ IE holiness.

¹⁰⁰ IE passion, desire (in the sense of sexual lust).

¹⁰¹ IE overreach, transgress (a LAT derived word that lit. means "to go beyond [the mark]").

¹⁰² OR wrong.

¹⁰³ OR the matter (the definite article is present in GR, contra the KJV).

forewarned you and testified. ⁷ For God hath not called us unto uncleanness,¹⁰⁴ but unto holiness. ⁸ He therefore that despiseth,¹⁰⁵ despiseth not man,¹⁰⁶ but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit.

⁹ But as touching brotherly love¹⁰⁷ ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. ¹⁰ And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech¹⁰⁸ you, brethren, that ye increase more and more; ¹¹ And that ye study¹⁰⁹ to be quiet,¹¹⁰ and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; ¹² That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without,¹¹¹ and *that* ye may have lack of nothing.¹¹²

The Lord's Coming

¹³ But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep,¹¹³ that ye sorrow not, even as others¹¹⁴ which have no hope. ¹⁴ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

¹⁵ For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord,¹¹⁵ that we which are alive *and* remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent¹¹⁶ them which are asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout,¹¹⁷ with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump¹¹⁸ of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: ¹⁷ Then we which are alive *and* remain shall be caught¹¹⁹ up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

Chapter 5

¹⁰⁴ IE impurity.

¹⁰⁵ IE disregards this counsel.

¹⁰⁶ Standing for human authority.

¹⁰⁷ φιλαδελφίας *philadelphias* love of the brothers, brotherly love. This word is the source of the place name Philadelphia, the City of Brotherly Love.

¹⁰⁸ OR urge.

¹⁰⁹ OR strive earnestly.

¹¹⁰ In the sense of leading a quiet, tranquil life.

¹¹¹ IE outsiders, non-Christians.

¹¹² IE not be in need.

¹¹³ Metaphoric for those who have died.

¹¹⁴ IE nonbelievers.

¹¹⁵ A claim of revelation.

¹¹⁶ OR go ahead of. To be dead already will not be a disadvantage at the second coming.

¹¹⁷ IE a cry of command, a summons.

¹¹⁸ IE trumpet.

¹¹⁹ OR snatched. This v. is the source for the Evangelical dogma of the Rapture.

¹ BUT of the times and the seasons,¹²⁰ brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. ² For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord¹²¹ so cometh as a thief in the night.¹²² ³ For when they shall say, Peace and safety,¹²³ then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail¹²⁴ upon a woman with child;¹²⁵ and they shall not escape. ⁴ But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. ⁵ Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. ⁶ Therefore let us not sleep,¹²⁶ as *do* others; but let us watch¹²⁷ and be sober.¹²⁸ ⁷ For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. ⁸ But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.¹²⁹ ⁹ For God hath not appointed¹³⁰ us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ Who¹³¹ died for us, that, whether we wake¹³² or sleep,¹³³ we should live together with him. ¹¹ Wherefore comfort¹³⁴ yourselves together, and edify¹³⁵ one another, even as also ye do.

Final Exhortations and Greetings

¹² And we beseech you, brethren, to know¹³⁶ them which labour among you, and are over¹³⁷ you in the Lord, and admonish you; ¹³ And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. *And* be at peace among yourselves. ¹⁴ Now we exhort¹³⁸ you, brethren, warn them that are unruly,¹³⁹ comfort¹⁴⁰ the feebleminded,¹⁴¹ support the weak,

¹²⁰ An idiom for indications of the second coming, what we might call signs of the times. Some of the Thessalonians desired an eschatological timetable. Note that an early LDS newspaper bore the name *Times and Seasons*.

¹²¹ IE the day when the Lord shall return.

¹²² An image highlighting the unexpected and surprising nature of the Lord's return.

¹²³ IE there is peace and safety.

¹²⁴ IE labor pain.

¹²⁵ Lit. [a woman] having in her womb.

¹²⁶ IE in carelessness and sin.

¹²⁷ IE stay alert.

¹²⁸ OR self-controlled, vigilant.

¹²⁹ An allusion to Isa. 59:17.

¹³⁰ OR destined.

¹³¹ IE Jesus Christ.

¹³² IE are alive.

¹³³ Metaphoric for death.

¹³⁴ OR console, encourage.

¹³⁵ OR build up.

¹³⁶ And therefore value.

¹³⁷ IE preside over.

¹³⁸ OR urge.

¹³⁹ OR undisciplined.

¹⁴⁰ IE console, encourage.

¹⁴¹ ὀλιγοψύχους *oligopsuchous* faint hearted; IE discouraged.

be patient toward all *men*.¹⁵ See that none render evil for evil unto any *man*; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all *men*.

¹⁶ Rejoice evermore.¹⁴² ¹⁷ Pray without ceasing.¹⁴³ ¹⁸ In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. ¹⁹ Quench not¹⁴⁴ the Spirit. ²⁰ Despise not prophesyings. ²¹ Prove¹⁴⁵ all things; hold fast that which is good. ²² Abstain¹⁴⁶ from all appearance of evil.¹⁴⁷

²³ And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly;¹⁴⁸ and *I pray God* your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ Faithful *is* he that calleth you, who also will do *it*.

²⁵ Brethren, pray for us.

²⁶ Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss. ²⁷ I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy¹⁴⁹ brethren.

²⁸ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you. Amen.¹⁵⁰

The first epistle unto the Thessalonians was written from Athens.

¹⁴² OR always.

¹⁴³ IE constantly.

¹⁴⁴ IE do not extinguish.

¹⁴⁵ OR examine, test.

¹⁴⁶ OR keep away from, avoid.

¹⁴⁷ OR every form of evil. This passage is commonly misunderstood to be saying that we should avoid things that might appear to others to be evil, even if they are in reality not. While perhaps a good principle, that is not what this v. is saying. This mistaken reading is based on a misapprehension of the import of the word "appearance," which here means simply "occurrence," not that which superficially seems to be real but is not.

¹⁴⁸ IE make you completely holy.

¹⁴⁹ Some early mss. omit the word "holy."

¹⁵⁰ The "amen" at the end was not original, but was added by scribes.