

Slow Food Bible Studies: 1 & 2 Thessalonians

1 THESSALONIANS (20 studies)

The two Thessalonian letters are, with the probable exception of Galatians, the earliest of Paul's letters. Thessalonica (mod. Saloniki or Thessaloniki) is still a busy seaport in northern Greece (then called Macedonia). The background to the letters is in Acts 17. Paul in Acts 16:9 had had a vision of a 'man of Macedonia' requesting help. So Paul, Silas and Timothy, and probably Luke, visited various Macedonian cities including Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea (Acts 16:11-17:15). The date is about twenty years after the Resurrection of Christ.

The Christian is in a nexus of relationships, some of which are likely to be a source of tension, others of encouragement. (A sample might be: God, family, church, other Christian friends, fellow-Christians at work, other colleagues.) How does faith in Christ make a difference? Sometimes we are in the place of the Thessalonians, needing encouragement; sometimes in that of Paul, with a ministry to fulfil.

A couple of useful commentaries: JRW Stott *The Message of Thessalonians* (BST 1991); Tom Wright *Paul for Everyone* (SPCK 2002). Howard Marshall in the *New Bible Commentary* (4th ed, 1994) is succinct and helpful.

Acts 17:1-9 What are the official and real reasons for the opposition to Paul? See also vv 11, 13.

1 Thess 1:1-3 What keeps these Thessalonians going? What keeps me going? *1 Pet 1:5-9*.

1 Thess 1:4-10 Why have they become Christian believers? Why have I? *Acts 2:37-41; Jn 16:8; Lk 1:1*.

1 Thess 2:1-4 If I am declaring 'the gospel of God' in one way or another, what are my motives? *1 Chr 29:17; Ps 139:23-24; Mk 12:14*.

1 Thess 2:5-8 What traps could I fall into in the ministry of teaching? *1 Pet 5:1-5; 2 Tim 2:24-26; 2 Cor 10:1*.

1 Thess 2:9-12 What is the connection between being a servant of the gospel and working really hard at one's secular job? *2 Th 3:7-9; 1 Pet 2:9; Phil 3:14*.

1 Thess 2:13-16 What part has the word of God played in shaping my faith? *Rom 1:16-17; Isa 55:8-11; 2 Cor 3:14*.

1 Thess 2:17-20 Is frustration always the work of Satan? *Acts 16:6-10; 2 Cor 12:7-10; 1 Th 3:5*.

1 Thess 3:1-5 Is it easy to be a Christian believer or minister? *2 Cor 4; 1 Pet 5:8-10*.

1 Thess 3:6-10 What is Paul's attitude to his 'students'? *Phil 1:8; 2 Cor 11:28; Gal 4:19*.

1 Thess 3:11-13 Why pray? Why not just get on with the business of living? *Heb 4:16; 7:25; 12:1-2*.

1 Thess 4:1-8 Is my current level of sexual self-control OK? *This may take two sessions! 1 Cor 7:1-5; 9:24-27; Gen 39:7-12; Mt 5:27-28; Prov 5:15-23; Eph 5:28-29*.

1 Thess 4:9-12 'Christian complacency is a particularly horrid condition' (Stott). Do I suffer from it? *Rom 12:16-18; Prov 6:6-11; 2 Cor 8:1-5*.

1 Thess 4:13-18 Is Christian hope purely speculation? *1 Cor 15:51-52; Jn 5:28-29; Job 19:25-26*.

1 Thess 5:1-5a Am I 'fully aware' of the Day of the Lord? *2 Pet 3:4, 7, 10; Mk 13:32; Acts 1:7*.

1 Thess 5:5b-11 Does my salvation depend on me? *1 Tim 2:4-6; Eph 6:14, 17; Phil 2:12-13*.

1 Thess 5:12-15 Do the relationships in a school have much in common with those in a church? *Heb 13:17; 2 Th 3:6-15; Acts 20:35*.

1 Thess 5:16-22 Tested against these seven or eight brief instructions, am I demonstrably failing in any of them? *Use the cross-references in the margin of your Bible*.

1 Thess 5:23-28 Need I worry about my sanctification? *Phil 1:6; Ps 57:2; 1 Pet 1:15*.

Review: Has studying this letter caused me to change any of my attitudes to (a) my teaching ministry (b) my personal walk with the Lord?

2 THESSALONIANS (16 studies)

This letter follows hard on the heels of the first one. Paul, still at Corinth, has heard more news from Thessalonica. Three groups of people were troubling the newly formed church: persecutors, who had never ceased from their opposition, and who were causing the Christians to ask why they had to suffer so much; false teachers, who were circulating a false document saying that the 'day of the Lord' had already come; and irresponsible layabouts who were claiming that no-one need work for a living. Paul takes the opportunity to deliver some seminal teaching about the Parousia, the coming of Christ in glory, which two thousand years later may still challenge and to some extent baffle us. Stott divides the letter as follows: ch. 1, 'the revelation of Christ'; ch. 2, 'the rebellion of Antichrist'; ch.3, 'the responsibility of Christians'.

2 Thess 1:1-2 Are there any similarities between the Thessalonians and my present situation? *2 Pet 3:8-9, 15-16; Jn 16:12-15; Eph 1:3.*

2 Thess 1:3-4 Is my faith surviving my trials? *Phil 1:29-30; 2 Cor 8:1-5; Heb 12:1-3.*

2 Thess 1:5-10 What will the return of Christ mean for those who have (a) accepted (b) rejected him? *Mt 25:34, 41, 46; Heb 10:31; 12:29.*

2 Thess 1:11-12 How can I pray for others more intelligently? *Col 1:9-12; 1 Th 5:23-24; Jas 5:16.*

2 Thess 2:1-2 Why is Paul so concerned about the Thessalonians? Would he have been similarly concerned about the church or fellowship that I belong to? *Mk 13:32-33; 1 Th 4:14-5:3.*

2 Thess 2:3-5 In what ways does this description of the Antichrist go well beyond our experience of greater or lesser tyrants? *1 Jn 2:18; Dan 11:36; Ezek 28:2.* Christians have come to markedly different conclusions regarding the events of the Parousia. Leon Morris describes vv1-12 as 'probably the most obscure and difficult in the whole of the Pauline writings.' Yet, reminds Stott, it is Scripture (2 Pet 3:16).

2 Thess 2:6-8 Given that we can only guess at the identity of the 'restraining' power, is there anything I can do to collaborate with God's sovereign restraint of evil as long as it continues? *Rev 20:1-3; 1 Cor 10:13; Lk 10:17-20.*

2 Thess 2:9-12 When this false king appears, will I be taken in by his impressive credentials? *Mt 24:4-5, 23-25; Rev 12:9; Heb 3:12-13.*

2 Thess 2:13-15 Can I be absolutely sure that I am going to heaven? Do I have to do anything about it? *Eph 1:4; Jer 31:3; Heb 6:11.*

2 Thess 2:16-17 Is 'encouragement' a feeling? *Rom 15:13; Gal 2:20; Heb 13:21.*

2 Thess 3:1-3 If 'the Lord is faithful,' why pray at all? *2 Tim 2:13; Rom 15:31; Jer 1:12.*

2 Thess 3:4-5 How committed am I? *Phil 1:6; Heb 12:1-2; Col 2:6-7.*

2 Thess 3:6-12 Am I so spiritually minded that I'm no earthly use? *Prov 24:30-34; Acts 20:34-35; Mt 18:15-17.*

2 Thess 3:13-15 Why bother about fellow-believers who may differ from myself on minor points, and not just get on with the gospel? *Lk 9:50; Mt 12:30; Gal 6:9-10.*

2 Thess 3:16-18 How is it possible to have peace in a non-peaceful environment? *1 Th 5:23; Jn 16:33; Num 6:24-26.*

Review: 1 and 2 Thessalonians What is the gospel according to St Paul in these two letters?