

First Thessalonians

Purpose:

1. Defend Paul's integrity
2. Encourage Endurance vs. persecution
3. Identify and encourage holy living
4. Christ's return (a source of encouragement)

History

325 BC - Thessalonica was founded in 315 BC by Alexander the Great's general Cassander, one of the four winds of Daniel 11:4, *"After he has arisen, his empire will be broken up and parceled out toward the four winds of heaven. It will not go to his descendants, nor will it have the power he exercised, because his empire will be uprooted and given to others."*

167 BC – Rome captured Thessalonica and made it the capital of the four districts they created.

146 BC – The four districts became one province and Thessalonica was named the capital

42 BC – Thessalonica sided with Octavian & Marc Antony vs. Brutus & Crassus (assassins of Julius Caesar). Thessalonica was made a free city which meant:

- a. Rule their own local affairs
- b. Mint their own coins
- c. No military occupation in the city
- d. Fewer taxes

Details

Population 100,000

Natural harbor was the best in the Aegean world

Via Egnatia met a junction here which made Thessalonica a major center for trade, commerce and Passing Roman military expeditions.

Local political structure

Thessalonica was a free city that was allowed to keep the democratic system in place (unlike other Macedonian cities).

Low Level Government: Public business was handled by an assembly of citizens. This is seen in Acts 17:5 where Paul and Silas were brought by Jews to be judged by an assembly of the Gentile citizens.

Upper Level Government: The City Council consisted of 5-6 local "politarchs" (translated NIV as "city officials"). This is seen in Acts 17:6-8 where the Jews used disreputable men to get Jason in front of the "politarchs."

"Politarchai" inscriptions refer 28 times to a unique political office mentioned by Luke 2 times in Acts 17:6 and 17:8. This unique word used by Luke was criticized by scholars, until 28 inscriptions from the ancient Thessalonica supported Luke's contemporary use of the word.

Religion

1:9 says the Thessalonians "turned to God from idols." There were many mystery religions from Greece and Egypt in Thessalonica.

- **Dionysius**, the god of the grapes and wine. This included rituals of ecstasy and madness. He is the son of Zeus and a human woman Semele (or, what the scripture would call a descendent of the Nephilim)
- **Serapis**, a god developed in 200's BC by Ptolemy I to help unify the Greeks and Egyptians.

- **Isis**, Egyptian goddess who was a friend of slaves, sinners, poor, and artisans. She was the ideal mother and perfect wife. Her name means “throne” and her headdress was a throne.
- Aphrodite (Venus), a beautiful goddess of love and sensuality
- **Demeter**, the goddess of the harvest who also oversaw marriage, religious law, and the cycle of life and death.
- **Zeus**
- **Asclepius**, the god of medicine and healing.
- Roman Emperor worship which was used to secure allegiance from the local population
- **Cabirus** was the patron god of Thessalonica. The Cabirus legend told that Cabirus had been a martyred hero murdered by his two brothers, buried with symbols of royal power since his decapitated head had been crowned and wrapped in royal purple cloth. Initiation rights included wearing robes, confessing sins, a water baptism and symbolic immersion into the blood of Cabirus. But, Cabirus was to return someday to help the poor and oppressed, especially those in Thessalonica.

1:1 – typical opening of a letter from this time:

- a. The sender, although Paul also adds the names of Silas and Timothy while using the “we” throughout the letter. Paul most likely does this for two reasons. One, they were instrumental in the establishing of the church in Thessalonica. Second, to give their personal presence his apostolic authority. Paul uses “I” in 2:18; 3:5; 5:27.
- b. The recipient
- c. The greeting – this was normally the Greek word **chairein** (“greetings”), but Paul replaces it with a similar sounding word **charis** (“grace”). This is coupled with the Hebrew concept of **shalom** (“peace”) by using the Greek word **eirene** (or, “peace”) meaning “tranquility, harmony, safety, prosperity.”

1:2 – Paul begins with a thanksgiving, which is typical for Paul and this culture that would similarly begin letters with a thanksgiving to the gods. Although the pagan gods were usually thanked for the physical wellbeing instead of Paul’s thanking God for spiritual blessings, growth and production. Paul also assures the Thessalonians he is praying for them.

1:3 – The reason for Paul’s thankfulness are listed:

- a. Work produced by faith (Legalism is work produced by guilt, manipulation, society, etc.)
- b. Labor prompted by love
- c. Endurance inspired by hope

“We continually remember” includes the word **mnemoneuontes** which means to call something to mind and to make mention of it.

The word “your” is in an emphatic position in the Greek sentence at the head of each of the three phrases: “Your work”, “Your labor”, “Your endurance”.

Paul had taught them the truth

The truth provided the foundation in their souls for FAITH, LOVE and HOPE.

These three in their souls produced WORK, LABOR and ENDURANCE

“Work” is **ergon** which is the act, process or product. The work or end product performed. 1:9 could be an example: they turned from idols to the true God. “Work” or ergon is an essential fruit of a believing life. James 2:14-18 and Galatians 5:6

“Labor” is **kopon** which means strenuous effort. It comes from the Greek root word “to strike.” **Kopon** is a difficult, tiring and painful exertion. The word itself emphasizes the weariness and fatigue that follow the work. This is more than doing “kind, Christian” deeds. This is toil beyond ordinary effort while facing unceasing hardships. This is seen in 1 Thessalonians 1:6 where they have continued in the face of persecution. Also, Paul uses this in 1 Thes. 2:9 to refer to his daily work done to sustain the ministry; 1 Cor. 3:8 in reference to spreading the Gospel; 1 Cor. 15:58 is a promise that labor, or **kopon**, in the Lord is not in vain.

“Endurance” is **hupomones** which is bearing up patiently under a heavy load. It is not passive suffering, but an active endurance that is aggressive and courageous. It is a blazing hope that produces this endurance. This is not the victim mentality, but the hero syndrome. This concept is seen in 1 Thessalonians 2:14 in the face of physical persecution.

“Faith” leads to work. Confident of the past, so you act today.

“Love” leads to labor. Confident of God’s presence now, you labor today.

“Hope” leads to endurance. Confident of the future, you endure today

Faith – is **pistis (pistews)**. This comes from hearing the message which is the Word of Christ, Romans 10:17.

Love – is **agape** which is a Greek word not used as much as the Greek words **eros** until the rise of Christianity. **Eros** means to love those who are worthy and refers to a love that desires to possess. **Agape** is a love of those who are not worthy and seeks to give.

Hope – is a confident assurance. It includes expectation, but simple optimism. In 1 Thessalonians they were waiting for Jesus’ to return. Also, Romans 5:1-5 and Hebrews 6:19.

Annianus and Sapphira are an example of someone who wanted to skip the Word and go right to human works. But, they were human works to impress men, not works of love (fruit of the spirit) that desired to give to men.

1:4 – The second reason Paul gives thanks is for the Thessalonians having been “chosen.” The word literally means “your election” and is a direct reference to OT language exclusively reserved for Israel. The fact that God’s Spirit and the fruit of the Truth was growing in Thessalonica means the Gentiles in Macedonia had now been chosen just like Israel had been. (This does not refer to individual Gentiles being chosen any more than the Abrahamic covenant and Israel’s choosing referred to individuals.

1:5 – With this verse Paul is setting up chapter 2 where he defends his ministry and his integrity.

1:6 –

1:7 –