

Bible Study # 59
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Life and Letters of Paul Series—1 and 2
Thessalonians

We have started into our series of the Life and Letters of Paul. We went into basic background of Paul's life. We have noted in the book of Acts the story of Paul being struck down on the road to Damascus and his conversion.

I would like to give you a little insight into why we are going through the Epistles of Paul in the order that we are. Basically, we **are going through them in the order that he wrote them.** How do we know in which order he wrote them? How do we know when he wrote each book? I'd like to share a little of that with you here in the beginning.

We went through a lot of these things last time. I am just going to briefly refer to his conversion in Acts 9.

In Acts 10, Peter has a vision and the gospel goes out to the Gentiles for the first time.

Acts 11 is the story of the Gentiles being accepted into fellowship; Peter explains his vision to others there in Jerusalem, and the headquarters Church sends Barnabas to Antioch to raise up a Church.

Acts 11:25, "Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul." This is several years after Paul's conversion. He had been dispatched back to Tarsus, his hometown. In effect, he had been told, 'Don't call us, we'll call you.'

You have to understand the situation. Paul was the leading persecutor of the Church prior to his conversion.

Acts 9:3-8, he was struck down on the road to Damascus in a very dramatic way.

Verses 9-22, he was blinded, subsequently anointed and healed of his blindness and then baptized. He went into the synagogue. They were expecting him to speak and he started teaching that Jesus was the Messiah. People couldn't believe it. It's kind of like Billy Graham getting up and preaching a sermon on the importance of keeping the Sabbath. It created quite a stir. It stirred up a hornet's nest. Within a matter of a very few weeks he left Damascus.

Acts 9:23, "Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him."

When you put the "many days" with Galatians 1:17-18, we find that Paul left and went to Arabia.

Verses 11-16, he was directly taught and worked with by Jesus Christ.

Galatians 1:17-18, "...but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days." After three years (the "many days" in Acts 9:23) he came back to Damascus. It talks about when he returned to Damascus.

Acts 9:23-25, the situation had hardened. When he showed up, within a week or two he had to flee for his life. They actually let him down the city wall at night in a basket so he could escape. Some of the Jews were literally ready to kill him. They felt he had betrayed them and that this was too much.

Verse 26, therefore, he went to Jerusalem. Nobody in Jerusalem wanted to deal with him very much.

Verse 27, Barnabas finally took him and introduced him to Peter and James. He spent a couple weeks with them, and at the end of that two weeks or 15 days, as he mentions in Galatians 1:18, they simply told him, 'Don't call us, we'll call you.'

Galatians 1:21, he went back to Tarsus and stayed there for about four or five years. He went back to his business and remained there. It is important to realize that God does work through the government in His Church. Paul had to prove himself. He was called and converted. God had called him for a specific job. God had revealed that to him, but he had to wait. It wasn't enough that he knew it. God had told him, but he had to wait until it became apparent to others, to the leadership in the Church.

Can you imagine what it must have been like when Ananias contacted Jerusalem with word that Paul had been baptized? Can you imagine Peter's and James' reactions and responses? It would be like calling up and saying, 'I just baptized the Pope; he's keeping the Sabbath and everything.' Because it was such a total shock, it was literally a matter of years before matters had settled to the point that Paul was given an opportunity to be directly used in the ministry.

He was converted in 35 A.D. and it was 42 A.D. (seven years later) when he came into the ministry as Barnabas' assistant to be used in Antioch. From that time, it was still about three and one-half years later before he was ordained, in 45 A.D., as an apostle. He was sent forth on the first evangelist journey. Even after he was in the ministry, he didn't start out at the top.

In Acts 11:25-26, Paul is brought by Barnabas to Antioch.

Acts 12 primarily deals with other things.

Acts 13 starts out with Paul's ordination. Paul and Barnabas were ordained as apostles by prophets sent down from Jerusalem.

Acts 13:1, "Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul."

"Cyrene" is an area in North Africa on the Mediterranean coast, perhaps the area of modern-day Tunisia. "Niger" was an area that would refer to West Africa. The term is still utilized in context of Nigeria or the Niger River. It was normally used to refer to West Africans as opposed to East Africans who were generally termed "Ethiopians."

The ordination of Paul and Barnabas is recounted in Acts 13:1-3 and their **first evangelistic journey** in Acts 13:3—14:28.

Acts 13:4, Paul and Barnabas left Antioch sailing to Cyprus. They went through and preached in Cyprus.

Verse 13, they sailed up from Cyprus into Asia Minor. If you have a map in the back of your Bible, you might notice the mid-section of modern-day Turkey. He went through the areas that we would term modern-day Turkey, anciently the area of Galatia. He came through, as he mentions in the latter part of Acts 13, Antioch of Pisidia (v. 14), which was part of that area, then on to Iconium (v. 51), Lystra and Derbe (14:6), areas in Galatia, central Asia Minor or modern-day Turkey.

In Acts 14:28, they completed that first journey in the area of Galatia. They had gone through Cyprus and Galatia and retraced their steps, except they didn't go back to Cyprus; they went directly back to Antioch. The first journey lasted about three years, 45 A.D. to 48 A.D.

Acts 15, Paul came back in late 48 A.D. He returned to Antioch and was there for a number of months. In 49 A.D., there was the ministerial conference in Jerusalem to resolve the issue of circumcision in the Church and to ensure uniformity of practice. The decision was made there. Paul and others had gone up to Jerusalem about the question. We have the account of that.

Verses 30-35, Paul came back to Antioch. Basically, he wintered there in Antioch.

Then Paul began his **second evangelistic journey** (Acts 15:40 through 18:22) in the late winter or very early spring of 50 A.D., perhaps February or early March, but more likely

February because of the timing a little later on and the distance it would have taken him.

Acts 15:41—16:1, this time he went overland, going from Antioch, which is modern-day Syria, up into ancient Asia Minor, the area of Galatia, what is now modern-day Turkey. He went back across through Galatia to the Churches that he had been to before. This was in 50 A.D.

Paul had been there two years earlier. He had originally helped to raise up those Churches about five years earlier. He had been there, about two years earlier, at the end of his first evangelistic journey. Now on his second journey, he started back by retracing some of the areas. He took a little different route.

Verses 6-8, he went up overland all the way across Asia Minor. He came through Asia Minor rather quickly.

Verse 9, by the late spring (around May), he crossed from Asia Minor into Europe. He came into ancient Macedonia, what is now the northern part of modern-day Greece. Actually, a portion of it is in southern Yugoslavia.

Verses 12-13, but the portion Paul appears to have preached in, Philippi, is in Greece. He crossed over from Asia into Greece, into Europe and was there around the time of Pentecost in 50 A.D. He preached in Philippi.

Verses 14-15, we have the account of Lydia being baptized. There was a synagogue in Philippi. The indication is several women who were Jews gathered outside of town in a little park-like area on the side of a river bank. They met there every Sabbath to visit and fellowship together. Paul went out there to fellowship with them and wound up baptizing at least one lady and her household.

Verses 39-40, Paul was not able to stay in Philippi very long. Great controversy was stirred up.

Acts 17:1, he left Philippi and came to Thessalonica, a little further down.

Verses 2-3, Paul went in and preached several Sabbath days; he reasoned with them out of the Scriptures showing that the Messiah must have to suffer and rise again from the dead. They understood that there was a Messiah to come, but they had not grasped the fact that the Messiah was to come a first time and suffer. They had, exclusively, focused in on the prophecies in the Old Testament about the Messiah coming in power and glory. Paul focused their attention on prophecy such as Isaiah 53—of the suffering servant—showing that the Messiah was to come and suffer and to be raised from the dead. Undoubtedly, he was preaching out of Isaiah 53.

The result was that it stirred up such a controversy that Paul had to flee the city.

In verses 8-9, Jason, a man with whom Paul was staying, actually had to post bond. Paul had to leave because there were about to be riots in the city of Thessalonica.

Verse 10, after Paul was forced to leave Thessalonica, he went down to Berea. He preached there in a synagogue.

Verse 16, then he came down to Athens.

Verses 17-31, we have the account of Paul's sermon on Mars Hill given in detail.

Acts 18:1, "After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth."

Verse 2-3, he gets to Corinth and stays with a couple of Jews there. Aquila was of the same profession as he was—a tentmaker.

Verse 4, we find that shortly after he got there, he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath persuading Jews and Greeks.

Verse 11, "And he continued there a year and six months [fall 50 A.D.—spring 52 A.D.], teaching the word of God among them." By this time, we are only into fall.

If you trace it back, there's only a few weeks coming down through. He spent the summer going through Thessalonica. He was only there for about three weeks. He came down to Berea and stayed a longer time there. He spent, perhaps, a couple of weeks in Athens, a little travel time, and then he came down to Corinth, arriving there by September 50 A.D. or so. He pretty well spent the summer traveling.

Verse 5, Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia.

Let's go back to 1 Thessalonians. We find that at this point, Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians. He wrote it in the fall of 50 A.D., only a matter of a few months after he had been in Corinth. Our basis for saying that is that we know Paul didn't write it before this because he hadn't been to Thessalonica before and there weren't any Churches there. Paul didn't even get to Greece until around Pentecost of 50 A.D. He had worked his way down through Greece that summer and wound up in Corinth. He was there for a year and a half. Shortly after he got to Corinth, Silas and Timothy caught up with him. They were coming from Macedonia, which is the area where Thessalonica was.

1 Thessalonians 1:1, "Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians...."

Verse 7, "so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe."

1 Thessalonians 3:1-4, "Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to

be left in Athens alone, and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith, that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know."

Verses 6-7, "But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you—therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith."

What we see here in 1 Thessalonians, as we put it together with the account in Acts 17:1-15, several weeks had gone by when Paul got down as far as Athens. Paul was the chief spokesman. He was the one who was known and recognized. They all left. They had to flee Thessalonica. They had only been there about three weeks, just enough time to preach. There had been some who were baptized, and then they had to leave.

He was very concerned about that because there was a need to give deeper instruction.

These were people who, obviously, had a strong background of the Old Testament. They understood the law, the Sabbath, clean and unclean meats—those things weren't issues. But there were a lot of things they didn't fully understand. There were things that needed to be more fully explained that Paul had not had opportunity to do. There wasn't a magazine or booklets or that sort of thing. There weren't any Bible lessons or literature that he could send them.

By the time things had settled down and they got to Athens, he sent Timothy back because Timothy was not known there. Because he had not been someone who had attracted public attention in Thessalonica, he could go back and go into the city. His job was not to go back in and evangelize the unconverted. He was to go back to the Church that was meeting in Jason's house and work with the brethren. He was to instruct them, to quietly and privately deal with them and to bring Paul a report back of how things stood. That's what we read in Acts 17.

Acts 17:16, "Now while Paul waited for them at Athens," He sent Timothy back.

Acts 18:1, we are then told, "After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth."

Verse 5, Paul got to Corinth and Timothy caught up with him coming from Macedonia.

1 Thessalonians 3:1-2, we read, “Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone, and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith...”

Verse 6, “But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you...”

When we put the account in 1 Thessalonians together with the account in Acts, we can see that Paul, obviously, wrote 1 Thessalonians just a short time after he got to Corinth. He wrote it from Corinth and sent it back.

Let’s understand a little bit about Thessalonica. The original name of the city was Therma; it was renamed by Cassandra about 320 B.C. in honor of his wife, the sister of Alexander the Great. Thessalonica was the largest city in Macedonia in the first century. It was a major trading center located on one of the main Roman roads. It held the status of a Roman free city. It was the capital of Macedonia. It was a major city on a trading route.

There was a sizable Jewish community in Thessalonica due mainly to its status of a trading center. The majority of the population followed pagan mythology, which by that time had lost its hold. The stories and the accounts of pagan mythology were such that they really did not answer the questions that people had.

There were philosophies that had arisen that had begun to have a certain amount of influence throughout the Greek world, but there was no real concept of salvation and an afterlife. The Greeks, as with many of the others, did not have much concept of the resurrection of the body. The concept of the resurrection was alien to the Greek world. Some of them following Plato had a concept of an immortal soul. The teaching of the philosophers was that the physical represented something bad and you wanted to be freed from your body. The concept that the body was going to be resurrected was a little difficult because it was so different from the ideas that most of them had grown up with.

We will see that 2 Thessalonians was basically written a short time after 1 Thessalonians. As we look at the book itself and at the message it brings, we find that there were a couple of major purposes in Paul’s writing. Certainly, he wrote to

strengthen them during persecution. There were a lot of problems, a lot of persecution that broke out that directly impacted him and spilled over to the brethren. He wanted to encourage and build them up during persecution.

1 Thessalonians 2:2, “But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know; we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict.” He spoke the gospel in the midst of a lot of contention and problems. ‘We have already gone through problems in Philippi, but that didn’t stop us from coming down there to teach you.’

Verse 14, “For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Jews...” He talks about how they had gone through many things.

1 Thessalonians 3:1-7, “Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone, and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith, that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know. For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain. But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you—therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith.”

Paul seeks to encourage them and to build them up in the midst of trials. Timothy came back and clearly pointed out things to his attention. The people were suffering a lot of trials and persecution, so he wanted to encourage and strengthen them during persecution. Also, he wanted to give them instructions concerning the return of Christ, about the resurrection and the proper attitude for Christians to take during the time preceding these events. This was clearly a major issue.

He spent a great deal of chapter 4 and a portion of chapter 5 dealing with instructions about the resurrection. He talks about the fact that there would be a resurrection. He discusses the Day of

the Lord and gave them instructions as to what they were to do. Chapter 5 has a lot of short exhortations and things that he did.

2 Thessalonians, which he wrote a little while later, again gives more detailed instructions concerning events relating to the Day of the Lord, to the return of Christ and to the attitude that Christians are to have. We are going to notice that there was a problem that came in.

Paul laid great stress on the fact that Christ was going to return and there was going to be a resurrection. He laid great stress on that in 1 Thessalonians. Then he had to turn around in 2 Thessalonians and explain to them that there were things that had to happen first because some were ready to “jump the gun” and figured that things were just about over. Therefore, he had to explain that there were prophesied things that had to happen first.

The other problem was that there were those who felt that with the end being that close, there was no point in them doing anything—they were just kind of “bumming” off the charity of others. Paul admonished them in 1 Thessalonians and then really “chewed them out” in 2 Thessalonians 3.

2 Thessalonians 3:10, “...If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.”

Verse 11, he was concerned that some were just going around being busybodies and not really being productive.

If you put 1 and 2 Thessalonians together, one book stressed that, ‘Yes, Jesus Christ is going to return to this earth as King of kings and Lord of lords, and there is going to be a resurrection of the saints. Our focus and attention needs to be on that, and that is the basis of our hope that brings us through trials, difficulties, stresses and things of that sort, but it’s not going to happen immediately.’

1 Thessalonians 5:2, “...the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.” It will come on the *world* as a thief in the night.

Verse 4, “But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.” He told them there were things that had to happen first. They needed to be conscious and aware of those things. Paul brings that out in 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

Until these things do happen, we need to be productive people, doing the things that we should do. We are to be living our lives in a responsible way and be in a position to help and share and give. God has not called us to go off and sit in a cave somewhere and wait for Christ to return.

Paul wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians to (1) strengthen them during persecution, (2) give them instruction concerning the return of Christ and the resurrection and (3) explain the attitude that we need to have in the time preceding these events.

It’s clear that the bulk of the Thessalonians Church was Gentiles.

1 Thessalonians 1:9-10, “For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.” He said, ‘You turned to God from idols.’

When we look at the background of the Thessalonians Church, we’re basically looking at people who were Greek. Acts 17:1-4 make plain that there were some Jews. You have to realize that Greeks in some of these cities made a practice of going in and sitting in the back benches of the synagogue on the Sabbath and listening to the law being read. They were searching for something. They did not participate in the life of the Jewish community, but they recognized that the religion of the Jews had answers that they didn’t have. Their own mythology and philosophies really did not provide fulfilling, satisfying answers. It was not uncommon in many of the cities, particularly of the Greek world, that people would go in and simply sit on the back benches of the synagogue and listen to the law being read and expounded on the Sabbath. The Gentiles had a certain familiarity, but we see clearly that these were people who had turned from idolatry.

We will note what seems to have been a problem in Thessalonica. Thessalonica was a big commercial trading center and tended to attract a lot of people who were what we would term some really “smooth operators,” real “sharpies” —guys who really weren’t that interested in working hard but liked to turn a “fast buck.” Thessalonica was on a major route. It was a major area where you had trading caravans coming through from the east on their way to Rome. You had a lot of different people, different nationalities, and that was a great place for a “sharpie” to try to turn a “quick buck” because you are dealing with people who don’t speak the language very well.

There seemed to be a lot of this sort of thing in Thessalonica. The city seemed to have attracted people who had this sort of attitude—people who were not anxious to be hard workers and

productive but were anxious to make a few dollars quickly.

There's a problem with that; people tend to suspect others of being like them. We will notice in Thessalonians that people seemed to have been a little bit suspicious about Paul's motives. Paul recognized that and made a special effort to work hard while he was in Thessalonica. The first thing Paul did when he conducted a service was not to "pass the hat"; he particularly didn't do it in a place like this because this was exactly what they were suspicious of.

1 Thessalonians 2:2-12, "But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict. For our exhortation did not come from deceit or uncleanness, nor was it in guile. But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness—God is witness. Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would have a walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory."

Paul made a special effort there because he knew the attitude of the people. He knew they were suspicious. They were suspicious of his motives. They kept waiting for the "hook."

"When we might have made demands as apostles of Christ." In other words, it was not that Paul did not have the right to have received monetary support. He was only there for a very short time (about three weeks). Whatever he had to say on the subject and whatever instruction he gave, he evidently made a point that any monies were to be utilized there locally. He did not take any of it. He made a special point of working during the time that he was there to set an example, not

because he had to, in the sense that he did not have the right to receive monetary support. He makes the point that it was not that he couldn't have in the sight of God; it was simply that it was not the best time to stress that, "we might have made demands of you as apostles of Christ."

The prerogatives of the office were such that we had the right. That's what Paul means when he mentions in 1 Corinthians 6:12 and 1 Corinthians 10:23 that all things are lawful but are not expedient (helpful, profitable) or beneficial. It was not necessarily going to be for the best at that particular time. Paul dealt with them in a special way because he was dealing with people who had certain hang-ups and certain problems. They were suspicious of motives. It was a city full of salesmen, a bunch of "slick operators," and as a result, people were very suspicious of everybody who came through. They kept waiting for "what's in it for him?" He wanted to stress to them that he wasn't doing what he did to get rich. That was not his motive.

There were people who only knew or became aware of Mr. Herbert Armstrong in his latter years at a time when the work had grown greatly. They looked at Ambassador College and all the things and trappings of the work and said, 'He's just in it for the money.' Well, if he was just in it for the money, why was he in it for about 30 years before there was no money? Why was he in it through the years when there was no money at all or during the years when his salary was \$2.50 a week—not an hour, but a week! Why was he in it then? The same reason Paul was.

You don't come along and do something and say, 'I know there's nothing now. I know I will suffer for 30 years, but when I am 80 years old, the income of the work will increase and I'll be able to fly places in a jet plane.' There weren't any jet planes back when the work started. Do you know what will happen 30 years down the road? Of course not! You don't even know if you're going to live for the next 30 years.

We have Paul's example. Paul did not immediately lay claim on their tithes for his livelihood. He brings out in verse 6 that he wanted to make a point that he had a right to it, but he hadn't done it. Tithing was not the first sermon he preached.

Verse 14, he admonished them, "For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus." What did Paul do in the Gentile area? What did he do in Greece? He pointed the Churches there back to headquarters. How do they do it there? They

became followers of the Churches in Judea. They were practicing the same thing.

The commentators like to say the Jerusalem Church kept the Sabbath. They can't deny that the Jews kept the Sabbath. You can read the book of Acts and what James told Paul in the latter part of Acts.

Acts 21:20, "...‘You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law...’" The Jerusalem Church and the Jews were zealous for the law. There's no way that the modern commentators can deny that the Jerusalem Church in the first century kept the Sabbath and the Holy Days. They all acknowledge that, but they claim the Jerusalem Church kept the Sabbath and the Gentile Churches kept Sunday. No, they didn't! Paul told the Churches in Greece to be followers of the Churches in Judea. The Churches in Greece were taught by Paul to do the same thing the Churches in Judea did. And guess what? They got the same persecution. They were just as popular with their neighbors as the Church in Jerusalem was popular.

In 1 Thessalonians 3, Paul recounts the background of how he came to write the letter and why he was doing it.

1 Thessalonians 3:13, "so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints." He was warning them to be established and to be dedicated in serving God.

1 Thessalonians 4:3, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality..." Immorality was taken very lightly in the Greek and Roman world, particularly the Greek world. All sorts of immorality including premarital sex and homosexuality were treated very casually. They were very common sins. As he writes back to the Thessalonians, Paul lays stress—"this is the will of God: God wants you to be holy. He wants you to live holy lives. He wants you to be set apart as a holy people; one aspect of that is you have to abstain from immorality."

Verse 4, "that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel [how to gain a wife and how to do so] in sanctification and honor..." He says, 'There is a different way of doing it then the way you've done it.'

Verse 5, "not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God..." He's telling them that they needed to go about getting married and to conduct themselves in a totally different way than their unconverted neighbors. Their

conduct was not to be motivated by lust and lawlessness.

Verse 6, "that no one should take advantage of and defraud [KJV, margin, "overreach"] his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified." What does he mean that no man should defraud or overreach his brother? This is tied in with what he is saying about immorality. You need to know how to go about obtaining a mate in sanctification and honor. You don't do it the way the unconverted do it. You need to make sure that you don't go beyond the bounds of propriety because if you do, you are defrauding your brother. You're taking what doesn't belong to you. When you engage in immorality, you are taking from the future mate of this person that which they are entitled to. Paul laid great stress on this because the whole culture of the Greek and Roman world was, frankly, very similar to some of the worse areas of our modern world.

I guarantee you that a place like San Francisco would not have been out of place in pagan Greece. The big Halloween blast they had has been sort of adopted as "the big gay extravaganza" in San Francisco. They have big parades. It's really a desire to flaunt a lifestyle. There were some Pentecostals who got the idea that they were going to come in. They rented the Civic Center and were going to hold a big revival service and cast out all the demons of San Francisco. Well, they didn't cast out all the demons; they attracted all the demons. If you saw the news, I think every demon within 50 miles congregated outside there and it was literally pandemonium. "Pandemonium" is a Greek term that literally means "all demons." There was a chaotic, confused mess. There was a horrible sort of confrontation and things that were going on there. It was the sort of thing that was certainly a very pagan extravaganza that would not have been out of place in ancient Greece.

Verse 7, Paul lays stress on some of these things, "For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness."

God called us to be different, to be clean and not to conduct ourselves the way the world does. God wants His people to be different. He wants us to exemplify a different attitude, different actions and to carry and deport ourselves in a totally different way. The world emphasizes a totally false set of values—values that revolve around the lusts of the flesh and a lifestyle that is completely at variance with God's law and the concept of holiness. We find it flaunted in

actions, entertainment, television shows, movies, music, magazines, styles of dress and grooming—in virtually every aspect of our society.

The thing to realize is that the solution is not simply changing and cleaning up of the external. We have to realize that inner values are reflected by outer actions. The two go hand-in-hand together. In some cases, people have changed their outer actions, but the inner values really remain the same. That is backwards. If we change our inner values, our outer actions will reflect a different way. It will reflect a godly lifestyle and set of values, as opposed to a worldly lifestyle and a worldly set of values. Paul laid great emphasis on this to the Thessalonians.

Verses 11-12, “that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing.” We see over and over where he emphasizes people need to be productive and set a good example. There was a real problem. There were too many ways to get by—panhandling and making slick deals with the traders who were coming through—doing some of these things and really not doing anything of productive value. The people had a reputation for laziness and they looked on working hard as somehow demeaning.

Verses 13-14, “But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.” Paul talked about the coming of the Messiah. Evidently, even some who had been baptized had, perhaps, died in just a matter of months. Some were concerned, “When the Messiah comes back, what about the ones who have died? Are they going to share in it?”

Verse 15, he said he didn’t want them to be worried about those who were asleep in Jesus. We are not going to precede them.

Verses 16-17, “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.” This is clearly not talking about being raptured up to heaven.

Zechariah 14:4, “And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives,”

“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.” We are going to be with Him from then on. Where is He going to be? Is He going back to heaven? No.

“In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives.” If we are with Him, then we are going to be standing there, too.

The Protestants want to read the rapture into the scriptures. Most don’t even know where they got the idea of a rapture. The doctrine of the rapture originated with a Catholic mystic during the Middle Ages who had all sorts of visions and ideas. He was the source of the teachings about the rapture; it was absorbed by early Protestant thinkers. Now they try to take various scriptures to read the rapture into them.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-2, “But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.”

My old Baptist preacher liked to quote the Bible about that point and then he would close the book. He could really kind of “warm up the fires.” “The Lord is going to come as a thief in the night. He may come back tonight. You better come down and give your heart to the Lord or burn in hell forever.”

He is going to come as a thief in the night, but upon whom? The Church? God’s people?

Verse 4, “But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.” Paul didn’t expect that day to come upon him as a thief. A thief is someone who sneaks up unexpectedly. The return of Christ should not come upon God’s people unexpectedly.

Verse 6, “Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober.” We are to have an approach that is going to be constructive. It will come as a thief on the world, as a whole, but not on Christians who are watching and praying.

Verses 9-10, “For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.” Death, in the scriptures, is compared with sleep. You see that over and over. The state of death is not consciousness.

Verses 11-13, “Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing. And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the

Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves." He encouraged them to look to and to know the ministry and those who labored among them, to respect them for the work that they did, and to have peace among them.

Verse 14, "Now we exhort [KJV, margin, "beseech"] you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted [KJV, "feeble-minded"], uphold the weak, be patient with all." He admonished and exhorted the brethren or he beseeched the brethren. It was to warn or admonish those who are unruly or disorderly. There are those who need to be admonished, strongly corrected and exhorted because their conduct is disorderly. There are others who need to be comforted, encouraged and cheered up.

This term "feeble-minded" basically means "those who are depressed or discouraged." That is the sense of the original word. "Feeble-minded" has a different connotation in modern English. We think of it as someone who doesn't have all their mental faculties, but it means those who are depressed or discouraged. There are those who need to be told to "shape up" or "ship out"; there are others who need to be encouraged because they are discouraged, somewhat depressed and need to be encouraged and comforted. There are some others who are weak who simply need to have somebody pay attention to them and give them some help. Different problems call for different things.

Verse 17, "pray without ceasing." The concept of this is to never break the prayer habit. Never get away from prayer. Pray without ceasing. He exhorted them in these areas.

2 Thessalonians 1:1 begins again with Paul, Silvanus [Silas] and Timothy writing to the Church of the Thessalonians.

Acts 18:11, he was in Corinth for a year and a half. Clearly, this would have been written fairly soon after he wrote 1 Thessalonians because the problem was that some had jumped to conclusions with all his warnings about the end. **He has to let them know that there are things that have to happen first.**

2 Thessalonians 2:3, "Let no man deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition..." He had to go back and explain that there were things that have to happen first. This was to help clarify some of what he was getting across in 1 Thessalonians.

2 Thessalonians 1:3, "We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other..."

Verses 4-5, he says that they were still going through persecutions and tribulations.

He brings out that God is going to recompense tribulations.

Verse 6, "since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you..."

Verses 7-9, "and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power..."

What does "everlasting destruction" mean? The term "everlasting" here is Greek "*aionios*" and it means "age lasting." The destruction that is being spoken of here is a destruction that is to endure for the remainder of that age; in other words, the Millennium. It is a wrath that is to be executed. The lake of fire is not being referred to here. It is the wrath that Jesus Christ is going to pour out at His return on those that don't know God, those who are actively rebelling against God. They are going to be punished with age-lasting destruction. They will be destroyed for the entirety of that millennial age.

Revelation 20:5, we're told, "But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished." The "rest of the dead" will rise up in the second resurrection.

But these are going to be destroyed at the return of Christ. Those who are actively opposing God and God's people are going to be dealt with. It will be an age-lasting destruction. It is not the ultimate lake of fire because that doesn't come at the return of Christ but rather after the Millennium and White Throne Judgment period (Revelation 20:7-16).

2 Thessalonians 1:8 shows those who don't know God. Christ is going to come back with power and glory and put the rebellion down; then they will be dealt with at a later time.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-3, "Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or trouble, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not

come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition...”

Two things have to happen: a falling away and the man of sin will be revealed. This individual called “the son of perdition” or “the son of destruction” is an individual whose purpose is to be destroyed—someone who is cut out for destruction. Who is this individual?

Verses 4-11, “who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And now you know what is restraining [what’s holding things back], that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains [or hinders] will do so [will continue to restrain or hinder] until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie...”

Who is this talking about? There are those who have misunderstood and tried to apply 2 Thessalonians 2 to various individuals. I’ve heard various ones. Some have applied it to somebody that they are upset with in the Church in a leadership capacity—most of whom have long since gone by the wayside and are not around anymore. It doesn’t refer to any of them.

This is clearly a reference to the final false prophet. I don’t care how far off track anybody in the Church gets; they are not going to be elected pope.

Verses 3-4, there will be a falling away, and the final man of sin will be revealed, the son of perdition. He is going to sit in the temple of God showing himself that he is God. What does that make reference to? What does that bring to mind?

Does that remind you of what Jesus said back in Matthew 24?

Matthew 24:15, “Therefore when you see the “abomination of desolation,” spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place’ (whoever reads, let him understand)...” There were those who thought it was different ones in the Church leadership. In effect, what happens is

that people get mad at somebody; they get upset and then try to find something really bad in the Bible to hang on them. We don’t want to read into the Bible; we want to read out of the Bible.

Luke 21:20, “But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near.”

Mark 13:14, “But when you see the “abomination of desolation,” spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it [he; “it” is not a neuter in the Greek] ought not’ (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.”

Matthew 24:15, “...spoken of by Daniel the prophet...”

What do we find? We find what’s called the “abomination of desolation.” Mark makes plain it is going to involve an individual standing where he should not. This is the abomination of desolation that Daniel spoke of. This is going to have to happen before the return of Christ. Paul brings it out here in 2 Thessalonians 2 but in different words. He says you are going to see this man of sin stand in the temple saying he is God. That’s pretty abominable. It is an abominable thing that brings about desolation and destruction.

Daniel 11:31, we find Daniel said, “And forces shall be mustered by him, and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily sacrifices, and place there the abomination of desolation.” What is Daniel talking about?

Daniel 8:11, “He even exalted himself as high as the Prince of the host; and by him the daily sacrifices were taken away, and the place of His sanctuary was cast down.”

Verses 23-25, “And in the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors have reached their fullness, a king shall arise, having fierce features, who understands sinister schemes. His power shall be mighty, but not by his own power; he shall destroy fearfully, and shall prosper and thrive; he shall destroy the mighty, and also the holy people. Through his cunning he shall cause deceit to prosper under his hand; and he shall magnify himself in his heart. He shall destroy many in their prosperity. He shall even rise against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without human hand.”

We find various other places where he is alluded to. There was a forerunner. The final abomination that makes desolate is what is going to happen just shortly before the return of Christ. It is going to begin the Great Tribulation. Christ

emphasized that it would be an abomination that Daniel had talked about (Daniel 8 and 11).

In context, you find that there was a forerunner, an event that occurred in the second century B.C. when Antiochus Epiphanes was the king of the area of Syria. Antiochus Epiphanes invaded Jerusalem. He came into the temple, stopped the daily sacrifices, set up an idol of Jupiter Olympus in the Holy Place. He took it into the Holy of Holies and stood there and proclaimed that he was God incarnate. "Epiphanes" in Greek meant "the glorious appearing." He claimed to be deity in the flesh; he was there as the personification of deity. He set up this idol and stopped the daily sacrifice. He had a pig slaughtered on the altar. What Antiochus Epiphanes did was a forerunner. The slaughter that he launched against the Jews is clearly referred to in context in Daniel 8 and 11. He is used as a forerunner for an individual who is his spiritual successor.

2 Thessalonians 2:9-10, we are also told, "The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved."

Verse 8, we are looking at an individual who is going to be destroyed at the return of Jesus Christ.

Revelation 19:20, "Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone." The false prophet works great signs or wonders to impress the whole world.

Matthew 24:11, "Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many."

Verse 24, "For false christ and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect."

Revelation 13:13-14, "He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived." We find lying wonders or false miracles; things that are so impressive and appear so right that if it was possible, even the very elect would be deceived.

When we go back to 2 Thessalonians 2, we find that there will not only be a falling away from the truth, but there will be that final man of sin who will be revealed. He will oppose and exalt himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped; he's going to stand there in the temple of God proclaiming himself God incarnate. He is going to work great lying wonders and he is going to be destroyed by Christ at His coming.

When you put 2 Thessalonians 2 together with Daniel 8 and 11, Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Revelation 13, it is talking about the same thing. It is talking about the events that relate to the abomination that makes desolate—that final false prophet. There is going to be a daily sacrifice stopped, which means that there is going to be a literal temple, a holy place. It doesn't mean the temple is going to be completely built, but certainly an altar will be dedicated in some way or another. We have to take some of these things in their context.

Events are being held back until that final false prophet is on the scene.

2 Thessalonians 2:6, "And now you know what is restraining [withheld], that he may be revealed in his own time." Events are being held back until the final individuals are in place. The man and the events have to come together for things to happen as they are prophesied to happen. There are events on the world scene that can't happen or progress too rapidly in certain areas until the right people are in place, so that when the event occurs, the response is what is prophesied.

God has a time schedule. Events are being held back until it's time. Then the right individual will appear and be in place and things will come to a head. Paul explains that.

The mystery of iniquity was already at work even in 50 A.D., which had its beginnings with Simon Magus in Samaria in 33 A.D. Things were already stirring. The groundwork was being laid for some to fall away from the Church, but that final man of sin was not and has not been so. But once that occurs, things are going to come together very, very quickly.

Paul lays great emphasis on working. It evidently continued to be an ongoing problem.

2 Thessalonians 3:7-9, "For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not

have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.”

Some take this out of context, and say, ‘Since Paul didn’t take a salary from the Church, ministers shouldn’t do that.’ There are many other places where it is clearly shown that Paul did receive his livelihood from his ministry. We will go through them in some of his Epistles.

When Paul was in Thessalonica raising up the Church, he did certain things, “not because we do not have authority [KJV, “power”].” He did it for the purpose of setting an example. He wanted them to see a little bit of what hard work was like.

Verses 10-14, “For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread. But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good. And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed.”

In other words, he is to be disfellowshipped. “You are not to have company with him” is what “disfellowshipped” means. If an individual is going to conduct himself that way, then that individual needs to be noted and you need to leave him alone. He is not free to continue in the fellowship of the Church—with the hope that he will be ashamed of himself and realize the seriousness of what he’s done.

Verse 15, “Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.” You are not doing it because he is your enemy; you admonish him as a brother because you care what happens to him.

Paul had to come down really hard on this because there were some who would not do what they should do. They had this kind of lazy mentality. They didn’t want to work and wanted to “bum off” of some who were working and had money. They were saying, ‘You’re supposed to have love and you’re supposed to share—so why don’t you share with me?’

It’s not that we should be weary in well doing. But on the other hand, it’s taking advantage and it’s taking it out of context to say, ‘You’re supposed to love me and share. I’m going to show up at your house every day to eat and “bum off” of you.’ As many times as Paul brought up the issue, it was obviously a problem—a

problem that affected more than one or two. People are a product of their background.

The mystery of iniquity that Paul makes reference to certainly refers to the Simon Magus followers.

2 Thessalonians 2:7, “For the mystery of lawlessness [KJV, “iniquity”] is already at work;” –The mystery religion that teaches lawlessness—it certainly refers to the Simon Magus followers, which ultimately grew into what became the Catholic Church. It is an outgrowth of the old Babylonian Mystery Religion that taught that the law was done away. It’s called the “mystery of iniquity.”

2 Thessalonians 3:14 deals with the subject of what we term “disfellowshipping.” An individual is unwilling to listen to the Church and respect admonition after he has been admonished on a serious matter, and he won’t listen. There comes a point where we simply say, ‘You really don’t have any basis for continued fellowship with those who are trying to live the right way.’ Those individuals are to be noted and simply left alone in terms of any sort of spiritual fellowship—with the idea that they will eventually wake up, realize the seriousness, repent and be restored to fellowship.

Hopefully that will give you an overview of 1 and 2 Thessalonians. There’s a lot that is packed in there.