

# THE EPIC LIFE – BOB HALLMAN

## Introduction to 1 Thessalonians

1 Thessalonians 1:1-3

2010

### Introduction

1 Thessalonians is the second book of the New Testament to be written – the first was the Book of Galatians. In spite of its early writing and short length, it covers a wide variety of topics and points of doctrine including:

1. Salvation by grace
2. Faith and works
3. Predestination and sanctification
4. The Holy Spirit and the gift of prophecy
5. The Rapture, the Great Tribulation, and the Second Coming of Christ.

### I The Background

A. The date: Approximately 51 A.D.

It was written shortly after Paul visited Thessalonica on his 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey (Acts 17) and is the second of Paul's epistles – the first was Galatians, which he wrote two years earlier.

B. The purpose:

1. To defend Paul's ministry and the Thessalonians' conversion (1:1-3:2)
2. To encourage the new converts in their trials (3:3-13)
3. To give instruction concerning godly living (4:1-12)
4. To give assurance regarding Christ's return (4:13-5:28)

C. The overall theme and key verse:

1. Overall theme: "The Lord's return"

Every chapter of 1 Thessalonians ends with a reference to the second coming of Christ, with ch. 4 giving it major consideration (1:9-10; 2:19-20; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:23-24).

1 & II Thessalonians are often designated as the eschatological letters of Paul.

2. Key verse: 1 Thessalonians 3:12-13

1 Thess 3:12-13 "May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones."

## II The Author

### A. The human authors:

1. Paul: *Saul* (Hebrew) *Paul* (Latin)
  - a. His pre-conversion life:
    1. He was a Roman citizen and devout Jew - Acts 22:3-5
    2. He was a Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin
    3. He was a persecutor of the saints - Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-2
  - b. His post-conversion life: - Acts 9:1-19; 22:1-29
    1. He was a herald of Jesus Christ and a preacher of the gospel - Eph 3:7-11
    2. He was an apostle/missionary/church planter - 1 Tim 2:7
    3. He was author or at least 13 NT books

**Application:** The transforming power of the gospel!

2 Cor 5:17 “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”

2. Silas: *Silas* (Aramaic) *Silvanus* (Latin)
  - a. He was a chief elder in the Jerusalem church - Acts 15:22,27
  - b. He was a prophet - Acts 15:32
  - c. He took Barnabas' place in ministry as Paul's traveling companion - Acts 15:34,40-41
  - e. He suffered mistreatment and imprisonment with Paul in Philippi - Acts 16:19-25
  - f. He helped established the church in Thessalonica - Acts 17:1-4
3. Timothy: also known as “Timotheus” = “Dear to God”
  - a. He was raised by his mother/grandmother - 2 Tim 1:5
  - b. He was converted on Paul's 1<sup>st</sup> journey - 2 Tim 3:10-11
  - c. He accompanied Paul on his 2<sup>nd</sup> journey - Ac 16:1-3
 

He became Paul's *hanai* (informally adopted) son and is described as:

    1. Paul's faithful son in the Lord - 1 Cor 4:17
    2. Paul's “true son in faith” and Paul's fellow worker - Rom 16:21; 1 Thess 3:2
    3. Paul's protégé and a true undershepherd - Phil 2:19-22
  - d. He was appointed to pastor the church in Ephesus - 1 Tim 1:3; 3:14

**Question:** Why did Paul, who clearly authored this book, include Silas and Timothy?

1. He made it a practice to elevate others: no pride, no fear and no jealousy
2. He was a team player: always eager to acknowledge other's gifts
3. He was visionary: always training others in ministry

### B. The divine author: God

1. It is God-breathed - 2 Tim 3:16-17
2. It is Jesus Christ-embodied - John 1:1
3. It is Spirit-inspired - 2 Pet 1:20-21

**Application:** Our confidence in God's Word!

Ps 12:6 "And the words of the LORD are flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times."

### III The Recipients

A. The primary recipients: The Thessalonian church

Paul identified the believers in Thessalonica in two spheres of life:

1. He identified their position *geographically*: "At Thessalonica"
2. He identified their position *spiritually*: "In Christ"

1. Their **geographical** position

a. The city of Thessalonica

1. Named for Alexander the Great's half sister's husband, King Cassander of Macedonia
2. It was the capital and largest city of the Roman province of Macedonia
3. In Paul's day it had a population of over 200,000

The majority of the inhabitants were Greeks, but there was also a mixture of other ethnic groups, including Jews (according to Acts 17:1-10).

4. It was located on the Egnatian Way, a major road to and from Rome
5. Known today as Thessaloniki off the northern edge of the Aegean Sea south of Bulgaria

b. The church of Thessalonica

**Church** = Ecclesia = "Called out ones"

When Paul references the "church" in Thessalonica he is not talking about a building, but about people!

1. Its establishment is recorded in Acts 17:1-9

- a. On his second journey, Paul and his companions had just left Philippi
- b. Traveling through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they arrived at Thessalonica
- c. Paul immediately located the synagogue and used their Sabbath gathering as an opportunity for evangelism
- d. For three weeks he reasoned with the Jews, converting some and a number of prominent Gentiles
- e. Unbelieving Jews soon caused a riot, forcing Paul to leave

2. Despite such ominous beginnings, a strong church was established

- a. It quickly gained a good reputation - 1Thess 1:8
- b. It was made of mostly Gentiles - 1Thess 1:9
- c. Members included Jason (Ac 17:9), Aristarchus and Secundus (Ac 20:4)

## 2. Their **spiritual** position

### a. In God the Father

1. He is sovereign in power and divinity (Ps. 19; Rom 1:18ff)
2. He is our heavenly father by adoption (John 1:12-13; 3:3f; Gal 3:26)
  - a. He expects our honor, obedience, and trust (Ps 103:12-14; Matt 6:25-34)
  - b. He promises His direction, provision, and protection (Matt 6:34)

### b. In the Lord Jesus Christ

1. The title, Lord (Kurios), identifies Him as the supreme Creator and Sustainer of the universe (John 1:1; 20:28; Phil 2:5ff; Col 1:15ff)
2. The name “Jesus” reveals His humanity -- eternal God made flesh (Phil 2:5-8).
3. The title, Christ (Messiah), identifies Him as the promised Anointed One who would save His people from their sins.

**Illustration:** What does it mean to be “In God the Father” or “In Christ”?

Noah’s ark is a perfect illustration of what it means to be “in” Christ. God provided the ark for Noah and his family to escape the impending judgment on the earth. Genesis tells us that when the rain came, God shut Noah and his family in the ark (Gen 7:16).

In the same way that God put Noah in the ark, He has put us in Christ.

### **How is a person put *in Christ*?**

Eph 1:13-14 “And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession-- to the praise of his glory.”

### **Application:**

As believers, we are always moving in two spheres:

1. Our true and ultimate identity is found in Christ.
2. But we live in a certain place in the world – Kauai

Where is your identity today? *Kauai* or *in Christ*?

B. The secondary recipients: The "**catholic**" church [that’s us]

## IV The Greeting

### A. The opening salutation:

This blessing is common to Paul’s letters (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Col 1:3; Eph 1:2; 2 Thess 1:1; Philemon 1:2-3)

In fact, of the 27 books that make up the NT, 17 of them contain this greeting!

1. **Grace** = "God's **favor** in spite of demerit" [A Greek greeting]

We all deserve to be burning in hell, but if we ask, God will give us what we don't deserve – forgiveness. That's called mercy!

Grace goes beyond mercy and is God's favor in spite of demerit! You can't earn it! You don't deserve it! And you can't buy it! But you can receive it by faith!

Eph 2:8-9 "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God -- not by works, so that no one can boast."

When you finally realize that it's not your righteousness, but God's righteousness that has saved you, that's where peace comes in. When you finally understand that you didn't earn, nor are you keeping, your salvation based on good behavior, then you don't feel condemned anymore – you're not constantly afraid you've lost or are going to lose your salvation.

It's God's righteousness! It's God's faithfulness! It's God's grace that keeps you! When you realize that, then you can rest and relax. Then you know that you are secure in His hands. Then you have peace!

2. **Peace** = Eirene, the Greek equivalent of *shalom* [A Jewish greeting]

a. "Man's **release** from enmity with God"

b. "An inner quietness, tranquility, and rest."

**Note:** It is not the absence of problems, but:

1. The confidence that you are reconciled with God

Rom 5:1 "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ ..."

2. The confidence that God is with you in the midst of them.

Isa 41:10 "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

3. The confidence that God is working for your good

Rom 8:28 "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

**Summary:** *You can never know God's peace until you know God's grace.*

Peace is always the product of knowing and appropriating the grace of God in Christ (2 Pet 1:2-4). This order can never be changed. The more we experience the grace of God, the more capacity we have to experience the multifaceted aspects of God's peace.

B. The opening exhortation:

1. They were always giving **thanks** for them

**Thanks** = Eucharisteo = "To be grateful, or to express gratitude"

It seems that in every letter Paul was expressing his thankfulness for the positive, redeeming qualities of the fellowship. Even when he was writing primarily to correct the church, he always managed to find something in those churches for which he could be thankful (Eph 1:16; Phil 1:3-5; Col 1:3-6; Philemon 1:4-5).

**Application:** You often find what you're long for!

Thomas Hardy said, "Some people can find the manure pile in any meadow."

1 Thess 5:16-18 "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

2. They made mention on them in their prayers

**Without ceasing** = Adialeiptos = "Uninterruptedly"

Most of Paul's letters begin with wonderful expressions of his constant, unceasing and fervent prayer for the saints (Rom 1:9-10; Eph 1:15; 1 Thess 1:2; 2 Tim 1:3; Philem 4)

2 Tim 1:3 "I thank God, whom I serve, as my forefathers did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers."

3. They continually remembered before God:

a. Their **work** produced by faith

**Work** = Ergon = "Toil or labor"

We learn a lot about someone based on "how" they work:

1. Some work in fear of the whip
2. Some for hope of gain
3. Some in sense of duty
4. Others are inspired and motivated by faith!

2 Thess 1:11 "With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith."

b. Their labor prompted by **love**

**Labor** = Kapos = "Toil that produces fatigue and physical exhaustion"

**Love** = Agape = "Sacrificial, intentional service in behalf of others"

1. Love for God: Vertical

John 14:21 "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me."

2. Love for others: Horizontal

John 21:16 "Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take

care of my sheep.”

- c. Their **endurance** inspired by hope in the Lord Jesus Christ  
**Endurance = Hupo** = “Under” **Meno** = “To stay, remain, abide”  
 It means to remain under a trial without giving in, running away or complaining --  
 regardless of the *intensity* or *duration* of the testing.  
 It means to wait on God for answers and deliverance without taking things into  
 your own hands.

The scriptures repeatedly exhort us to a life of perseverance and promise  
 wonderful fruit for those who persevere:

1. You will receive what God has promised - Heb 10:36-37
2. You will grow in Christian character - Rom 5:1-5
3. You will be mature and complete, not lacking anything - James 1:2-4
4. You will receive the crown of life – James 1:12

It is in this hope of the soon return of the Lord Jesus Christ that inspires  
 our capacity to endure life’s challenges and hardships.

**Illustration:** A mother going through the pain of labor and delivery

1. Experiencing present pain
2. Anticipating future joy

**Application:** Heb 12:1 “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great  
 cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so  
 easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance [hupomone] the race  
 marked out for us.”

## Conclusion

1. If you want the peace of God, you must first experience His grace! It’s as simple as *ABC*!
  - a. **Admit** and repent of your sin  
 Acts 3:19 “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that  
 times of refreshing may come from the Lord ...”
  - b. **Believe** in Jesus Christ  
 John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that  
 whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”
  - c. **Confess** Jesus as your Lord  
 Rom 10:9 “That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your  
 heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”  
 Luke 12:8-9 “I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will  
 also acknowledge him before the angels of God. But he who disowns me before  
 men will be disowned before the angels of God.”

2. What can you do this week to evidence a life that is marked by 1) Work produced by faith, 2) Labor prompted by love and 3) Endurance inspired by hope?
3. Where is your true identity today? Is it in what you do, where you live, what you have – or is your identity “in Christ”?  
Col 3:1-4 “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”

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