

1 Thessalonians 1

October 16, 2019

First Thessalonians is thought by many to be Paul's first epistle. It was written to the assembly that he had personally planted in Thessalonica in the province of Macedonia as we read in Acts 17:1-9.

Imagine Paul's concerns and misgivings as he thought back to that infant assembly. He had left it to fend for itself in a city rife with Gentile idolatry, and under attack by the local Jews. It was a mix of Jews and Gentiles. These groups would not normally even associate in public. How could they possibly become a unified whole? There were no strong leaders, at least none identified in this letter. And they had no bylaws, constitution, or longstanding traditions by which to govern their new organization. By all laws of human nature, this new "church" of the Thessalonians should have dissolved into apathy or bickering.

But human nature was not the guiding force here. The same Spirit that had drawn the believers to Christ (verses 5 and 6) now sustained them in relation to Him and each other. Timothy, having been sent by the anxious apostle to visit Thessalonica, returned with a glowing report of their practice of love, faith, and hope which was known throughout the region.

There's a freshness and simplicity evident in the assembly to which Paul writes with such tender and

personal love. But they are not undeveloped babes in Christ, only fit for milk when they should be ready for meat (see Hebrews 5:12). They can now receive more advanced teaching. Paul delivers it to them in this book in the form of new revelations about the coming of Christ. This doctrine is of intense interest to us today. But let us not overlook the "love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" that Paul and others found in the Thessalonian assembly. These provide the fertile and wholesome ground where teaching can bear real fruit (not lead to controversy, as happened in Corinth).

Notes

1:1 Thessalonica, now Thessaloniki in the country of Greece, was at the northern point of the Aegean Sea. It stood at a juncture between Europe and Asia and between the Roman Empire and the wilder Balkans to the north. The main land trade routes between the western and eastern arms of the empire ran through Thessalonica.

Paul is thought to have sent this epistle from Corinth around AD 51, so it may be earlier than even the Gospels.

1:6 Roughly speaking, Macedonia was the northern part of Greece, part of which is now an independent country. Alexander the Great came from Macedonia; Philippi was named after his father. Achaia was the Roman province in the south, encompassing Athens, Corinth, and other cities.

Questions:

1. Silvanus is probably another name for which person known in Acts?
2. What are the three virtues displayed by the assembly at Thessalonica? Where else are they grouped together?
3. What does this chapter say about faith and works?

4. Where is the doctrine of election mentioned? What evidence does Paul give that his readers are among the elect?

5. Verse 6 commends the readers for imitating Paul and his companions. Where does scripture recommend imitating others? What are the limitations?

6. In this chapter, what is one very specific practice of Paul we can imitate?

7. Verse 7 tells us the Thessalonians have progressed from following his example, to **being** examples. What does this tell us?

8. Acts 17 mostly relates Paul's evangelism in the synagogue of Thessalonica. How do we know that Gentiles became part of the assembly?

9. Every chapter of this book says something about the Lord's coming. Where in this chapter is it mentioned?