

1 THESSALONIANS: THE EFFECT OF THE GOSPEL

THESALONICA (modern Thessaloniki) was a prominent city with a long and distinguished history. As the capital and largest city in Macedonia with a first-century population swelling to over 100,000, it was a wealthy commercial center that occupied a strategic position between Rome and the eastern provinces. Even today, Thessaloniki is the second largest city in Greece behind Athens.

Thessalonica became a free city in 42 BC when Mark Anthony declared it to be self-governing. The city was led by magistrates called “politarchs” (see Acts 17:6-8). The city offered something for everyone when it came to religion. Long a center of Greek cultic and philosophical traditions, Thessalonica offered many opportunities to worship the ancient Greek gods and goddesses. Additionally, there was a strong devotion to Roman emperor worship, with the city actually minting coins declaring the emperor divine. The city also had a temple dedicated the Egyptian gods Isis and Osiris which featured an inscription stating that Egyptian cult worship had spread across Macedonia from Thessalonica (compare to 1 Thess 1:8). Lastly, the city had enough of a Jewish population to have a synagogue, which is where Paul preached on three successive sabbaths upon arrival there (Acts 17:1-2).

Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke, fresh off their success in Philippi, came to Thessalonica in AD 49/50. Several God-fearing Greeks along with some of the Jews came to know the Lord under Paul’s preaching (Acts 17:2-4) and many pagans turned from their idols (1 Thess 1:9). This small band of followers immediately faced opposition, as prominent Jews in the city, jealous of Paul’s growing influence, whipped a crowd into a riot. With the city in an uproar, Paul and Silas had to be smuggled out of town (Acts 17:6-10).

Paul, Silas, and Timothy were forced to separate as they continued to face hostility. The agitators from



Thessalonica followed them to Berea (Acts 17:13) so Paul was taken on to Athens. After a brief reunion there, Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica, and Silas to Philippi (most likely). This left Paul alone in Athens (Acts 17:16). After teaching in Athens, Paul moved on to Corinth, and there he was reunited with his missionary companions (Acts 18:5). It was then that Paul received the good report on Thessalonica from Timothy and wrote the letter we know

as 1 Thessalonians (1 Thess 3:6). This letter was one of Paul’s earliest, likely coming after only Galatians.

Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians reveals the deep concern he had for the young church that he had so hastily left. Imagine Paul’s relief when Timothy joined him in Corinth with the report that the church they had planted together was enduring the persecution that came their way and growing in their faith and love (1 Thess 3:6-7).

The themes of holiness, love, and hope are woven throughout this informal and personal epistle. Paul spends the first part of the letter (1:2-3:13) seeking to encourage and strengthen the Thessalonians after he was “torn away from them” (2:17). The second section (4:1-5:24) is dedicated to instruction in specific areas of their new life in Christ.

In his wonderful treatment of the letters to the Thessalonians, John Stott writes this:

What is of particular interest, because it applies to Christian communities in every age and place, is the interaction which the apostle portrays between the church and the gospel. He shows how the gospel creates the church and the church spreads the gospel, and how the gospel shapes the church, as the church seeks to live a life that is worthy of the gospel.¹

¹ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Thessalonians: The Gospel and the End of Time, The Bible Speaks Today* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 20.

1 THESSALONIANS TEACHING SCHEDULE

Sept	12 & 13	1 Thess 1:1-7	The Gospel Comes in Power
	19 & 20	1 Thess 1:8-10	The Gospel Sounds Forth
	26 & 27	1 Thess 2:1-12	The Gospel Transforms Leadership
Oct	3 & 4	1 Thess 2:13-20	The Gospel Has An Opponent
	10 & 11	1 Thess 3:1-13	The Gospel Can't Be Stopped
	17 & 18	1 Thess 4:1-8	The Gospel Makes Sex Holy and Honorable
	24 & 25	1 Thess 4:9-12	The Gospel Makes Work an Act of Love and Service
	31	1 Thess 4:13-18	The Gospel Gives Us A Future Hope
Nov	1	1 Thess 4:13-18	The Gospel Gives Us A Future Hope
	7 & 8	1 Thess 5:1-11	The Gospel Hope Motivates Faithfulness
	14 & 15	1 Thess 5:12-28	The Gospel Sustains Spiritual Growth

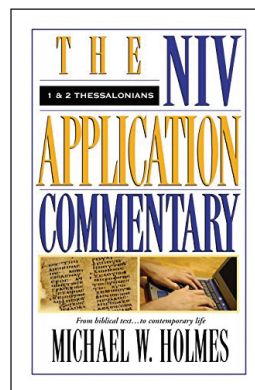
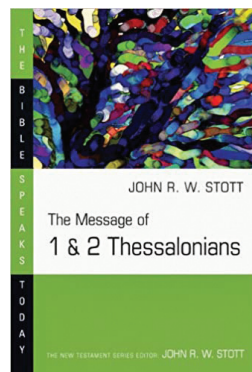
CLOSING THE CLARITY SERIES

This final section of our Clarity series is designed to put the gospel of Jesus Christ on full display in all its beauty. By the time we finish this 1 Thessalonians teaching series we will have spent one year seeking to see Jesus more clearly. We will have traced the story from His long-promised birth through His life and death. We will have looked carefully at His resurrection and ascension and studied many of the important implications of these truths for our lives. Finally, we have observed through scripture how He continues His work today, from Jerusalem out into the rest of the world through His church. The thread that ties all of this together is the same thread that binds the book of Thessalonians from beginning to end: grace. It is that unmerited favor that caused God to not give up on us. It was His grace that compelled Him to send His Son, not just to our broken planet but to the cross where He would bear our sin. Now that same grace works through us, broken and sinful men and women who form this new thing He is doing called the church. First Thessalonians shows us how the grace of the Gospel informs every part of our life and mission as a church. Here's how Dr. Stott closes this section of the study:

If a local church is to become a gospel church, it must not only receive the gospel and pass it on, but also embody it in a community life of mutual love. Nothing but the grace of Christ can accomplish this.²

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

*The Message of
1 and 2 Thessalonians*
by John R.W. Stott



*The NIV Application
Commentary on
1 and 2 Thessalonians*
by Michael Holmes

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² Stott., 135.