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1 and 2 Thessalonians (Overview) - Part 1



Bible Book Overviews - Steve Gregg

Discover the early epistles of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, believed to be among the earliest writings of the apostle Paul. Emphasizing the message of allegiance to Jesus over Caesar, Paul nurtures the infant church as he travels from Thessalonica to Berea and Athens. These epistles address ongoing issues in Thessalonica, assuring readers of the power of the Holy Spirit and the witness of genuine conversion. Join Steve Gregg as he explores the assurance of salvation and the joy of the Holy Spirit in the face of trials and persecution.

Transcript

So tonight we are going to be talking about 1 and 2 Thessalonians. This is just an introduction and overview of the two books. The two books have much in common.

One is they're both written to the same church. Another is they're probably written within the same month. If not the same month, within a very short period of time of each other.

Another is that they are the epistles that have the most focus on the Second Coming of Christ of any of Paul's epistles. Now it's not that Paul doesn't mention the Second Coming of Christ in other epistles, nor that he doesn't have a longer chapter on them than we have in Thessalonians. Actually, 1 Corinthians 15 would be the longest chapter we have about the resurrection of the dead, which corresponds with the Second Coming of Christ.

And Paul talks about the resurrection also in 1 Thessalonians 4. But the thing is that Corinthians is a long letter and only one chapter is given to it. Thessalonians, both of the epistles together are only eight chapters. And there's a ton of material about the Second Coming as we shall see in them.

It's definitely the focus of both epistles. There are some other concerns in 1 Thessalonians that also appear in 2 Thessalonians. So the epistles are very similar to each other, written to the same church within a very short time.

Same issues in both of them. And therefore, it would be in our attempt to just do an overview and an introduction to the books each month, it would be kind of nonsensical to give separate introductions to each of them in separate months. So we're going to look at both tonight.

And what I want to start out first is give you a background to both of the epistles. And then we'll actually go through each chapter, not verse by verse, but we'll go through each chapter of both of the epistles as well. So the Thessalonian epistles are almost certainly the earliest epistles of Paul other than Galatians.

I say almost certainly the only thing that's not certain is whether Galatians is earlier or not. I believe the evidence is excellent for Galatians being the earliest of Paul's epistles. There is another theory.

Some scholars believe it's a little later. Their evidence is not good, in my opinion. So I take it for granted that Galatians is the first epistle Paul wrote.

But definitely, 1 Thessalonians would be the next earliest. And if Galatians is not the earliest, then these two are the earliest. They're very early.

This church in Thessalonica was established on Paul's first, excuse me, his second missionary journey. The Galatian churches were established on his first missionary journey. I think he wrote the book of Galatians at the end of that journey.

And that's why I say Galatians is earlier. But on the second missionary journey, Paul and Silas and Timothy and Luke traveled to Greece. It's the first time the gospel came to the region we would call Europe today.

And the first church they established was in Philippi. And you might remember Paul and Silas were beaten and imprisoned in Philippi. And they left there and they went south to Thessalonica.

Now, they had a very good reception in Thessalonica, but not an uncontroversial one. The Jews who were very upset with Paul followed him around and made trouble for him. And the Jews in Thessalonica turned the city officials against Paul.

They said he was preaching a subversive message that was contrary to their loyalty to Caesar. And that he was saying there's another king, one Jesus. And the Jews told this to the Greeks.

We don't know if the Jews continued the persecution beyond that, but the Greeks picked up the ball from there and took it to the officials. And Paul and his companions were taken before the officials and run out of town. Now, we don't know how long they were in Thessalonica before this happened.

We're told that when this story is in the first nine verses of Acts 17. And we're told that when Paul first came to Thessalonica, it says he preached three weeks in the synagogue. And then he was driven out of the synagogue and began to meet outside the synagogue with the Gentiles who were receiving the gospel.

Actually, some Jews did receive the gospel, but not very many. Almost everyone who was converted in the city were Gentiles. A few of the men, but especially Luke tells us in Acts chapter 17, especially many of the prominent women.

Which probably means the women who are married to the leaders of the city who actually drove Paul out of town. But the church survived and Paul was driven out of town, but it was probably a very young church. Again, he'd only spoken three weeks in the synagogue.

We don't know how long he was meeting outside the synagogue before the problem came up. As the book of Acts doesn't really tell us the full length of time, but it just tells us after he was kicked out of the synagogue, the Jews stirred up these troubles and then he got driven out of town. He may have been almost immediately driven out of town and left a very infant church in Thessalonica in an environment of persecution.

And that certainly is what he describes the Thessalonians as when he writes to them. Now, he went from Thessalonica down to Berea, traveling down the Greek peninsula southward. And the Bereans are said to have been more noble than the Thessalonians.

Now, Paul is actually very flattering to the Thessalonian Christians. He's very happy with them. He's very excited about their faith.

But when it says that Bereans were more noble than the Thessalonians, it means than the Jewish Thessalonians. It was the Jews in Thessalonica that got him into trouble. Mostly Gentiles received the gospel from him.

And therefore, the Jewish people in the synagogue in Berea were better than the ones in Thessalonica. It says they heard Paul gladly. They searched the scriptures daily to see if these things were so, and therefore, many believed.

But, of course, the Jews from Thessalonica who had caused problems for Paul there came down to Berea. They chased him down there, and they caused problems there and got him run out of town there, too. Now, he did leave Timothy and Silas behind in Berea when he went on down to Athens.

And he had left Luke behind in Philippi. When they first came into Europe, when he was driven out of Philippi, he left Luke behind. When he was driven out of Berea, he left Silas and Timothy behind.

See, Paul was the lightning rod. You know, the people were focused on him. He was the

main preacher.

And so, you know, most of the persecution was coming against him. His partners were much lower profile. So he could leave them in a church where he'd been driven out of town, but they could nurture the infant church.

And so when he left Berea, he left Silas and Timothy there. We don't know if he left anyone in Thessalonica or not. But he was continually in contact with Timothy and Silas and probably Luke, though we don't read of it until later.

And so he was keeping tabs on how the churches were doing. Well, Paul did not have a good time in Athens. He mainly got ridiculed there.

And he wasn't driven out of town there, but he spoke it on Mars Hill to the philosophers. And they just kind of made fun of him. And so he kind of left there with his tail between his legs and went to Corinth, which is not really very far away, a major city.

And he stayed in Corinth for 18 months. And it was there that he wrote these letters to the Thessalonians. So he had left Thessalonica.

We don't know the time frame, but probably weeks, weeks before he wrote this, maybe months at the most. It depends on how long he was in Berea, how long he was in Athens. But the impression is he wasn't very long in those places.

So he came to Corinth. And from there he wrote the Thessalonian epistles. Now, he wrote these epistles because he heard of things going on in the church that he felt needed some attention.

And there were three things in particular in the church in Thessalonica that he was concerned about when he wrote to the first epistle. One of those things was the issue of fornication. Now, in the Greek world, fornication did not have the stigma that it has in Christianized lands or in Jewish culture.

The Jews, of course, were against fornication and Christians were against fornication. But there weren't any Christians in these countries until Paul brought Christianity there. So these people who became Christians were converted out of paganism.

They were not Jews mainly. Therefore, they didn't have the Jewish culture. They didn't have Christian culture because they had just become Christians and there weren't any Christians in their town until they were converted.

They were the first ones. So they were definitely the product of pagan culture. And in pagan culture, fornication was not considered to be a bad thing.

Prostitution was practiced in their temples. In Corinth, for example, where Paul was when he wrote these epistles back to Thessalonica, Corinth had a temple to Aphrodite that had

a thousand prostitutes on staff. And the way you would worship Aphrodite, the goddess of love, was to sleep with one of these prostitutes and pay money to the temple.

And that was considered religious. So, I mean, it's obvious that in the Greek culture, it never occurred to them that fornication was something immoral. Now, it seems strange to us, maybe not to our younger people here who are raised now, because no one now thinks it's immoral in America either.

But when I was growing up, everyone, including fornicators, believed it was immoral. I'm not saying they didn't do it, but they knew it was not right. Nowadays, there's not the slightest hint among many younger people that it's even controversial.

It's not really. Our culture is becoming more thoroughly pagan in my lifetime and the lifetime of many of you. But if you're an older person, you remember growing up at a time when people who, a girl who got pregnant out of wedlock, it was kind of a shameful thing.

Or, you know, if a guy was sleeping with his girlfriend, they weren't broadcasting that to everybody because that was kind of immoral, conservative immoral. I realize that's not true now, but those of us, it's hard to understand a culture that doesn't have any sense of stigma to having sex with whoever you want to have sex with. But that's how the Greeks were.

And therefore, of course, when Greeks got saved, they had to adopt this totally new idea. No, sex is only for marriage. You can't have sex outside of marriage.

That's sin. Fornicators will not inherit the kingdom of God. Paul told the Corinthians.

And of course, that was his view to all the Greeks. And it must have been very hard for many of these Greeks to adjust to that totally different mentality, especially, of course, even Christians have a sex drive. It's just that before they were Christians, they never had to say no to their sex drive.

And now they do, which is a lot of times hard for people even today converted out of a pagan background. Now, the Corinthians, for example, had continuing problems with fornication when he wrote to them. They were making excuses for it.

They were saying all things are lawful to me, including fornication. And Paul had to correct them when he wrote first Corinthians later on. But the Thessalonians, we only we only know that Paul had to tell them to avoid fornication.

We don't have him saying that they were doing it. But I'm sure that new Christians out of pagan culture had to be reminded of that a great deal. And so Paul's first concern that he mentions, and this comes up in chapter four, because he doesn't mention any concerns until that chapter.

But the first thing in the church he concerned about when he wrote first Thessalonians was fornication. Now, interestingly, by the time he wrote second Thessalonians, he didn't mention again. It must have not continued to be a concern.

They must have taken this, taken that to heart. And it wasn't a problem or a concern by the time he wrote second Thessalonians. However, there are two other issues in Thessalonica when Paul wrote the first epistle that continued to be problems of a sort when he wrote the second.

One of those had to do with misunderstanding and maybe misapplication of beliefs about the end of the world, the second coming of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, things like that. Paul spent a lot of time in first Thessalonians, especially chapter four and five, kind of clarifying things that they had gotten wrong about this. I remember Paul had only been among them for a short time before he left town.

It's probably remarkable that he even got around to talking about the second coming of Christ to brand new Christians who he's trying to disciple out of paganism in that short time. But they knew something about it, but they were confused about it and they were misunderstanding. They didn't know, for example, about the resurrection of the righteous and the rapture of the church, which Paul had to bring up in chapter four.

And he also had to clarify some things for them in chapter five. By the time he wrote second Thessalonians, there were other confusion and problems still related to that. Some people were telling them that the coming of Lord had already taken place.

And Paul said, no, it hasn't happened yet. Before that happens, these other things have to happen. So he spent some time, especially in chapter two, most of chapter two of second Thessalonians, clarifying that.

So issues of eschatology, issues about the second coming of Christ are big, dominant issues in both of those epistles, given their size. Relatively, Paul spent more space on those subjects than any other epistles that he discussed. And the third problem they had when Paul wrote first Thessalonians, it seems to have been a small one when he wrote first Thessalonians, became a big one by the time he wrote second Thessalonians.

In fact, almost certainly he wrote second Thessalonians because this one had become larger in the time since he wrote the first letter. And that is the problem of people not pulling their weight, not working, people becoming leeches on others. In those days, the Christian church had a great habit and policy of sharing with people in need.

In the book of Acts in chapters two and four, we read that there were no no one in the church in Jerusalem, for example, who lacked anything because those who had houses and lands were selling them and distributing them to the poor who didn't have anything. So that there was more of an equality. There was everyone was taken care of.

And because of that, there must have been a great temptation for those who didn't want to work, say, well, I could just not work. I can just, you know, they'll feed me, you know, and that was something Paul was concerned about in Thessalonica for some reason. And therefore, in first Thessalonians chapter four, he makes a brief reference to the need for them to work with their hands, live a quiet life and be, you know, dependent on no one else.

But by the time he wrote second Thessalonians chapter three, this had become a major issue. He speaks at great length on the subject. And he's very emphatic.

He's so emphatic that he says, if someone will not work, they should not even be they shouldn't be fed. Let him not eat. And then he went so far as to say, anyone who won't listen to these words of this epistle have nothing to do with them.

It was a matter for being subject to church discipline if you were not working and yet living on the generosity of others. So it was it was a big issue by time he wrote second Thessalonians, a smaller one, apparently first. So there's three issues in the first epistle fornication, confusion about the second coming and people not working.

It's interesting, by the time you wrote the second letter, the fornication issue was off the table. It was not in there anymore. The matter of confusion about the second coming that was still there, but different confusion about different subjects he had to address.

And then, of course, the matter with the people not working had become worse by that time. So that's how these two letters are very similar to each other. They obviously it'd be difficult in a broad sweep or introductory thing not to take them both together at the same time.

So when Paul went to Corinth before he wrote these epistles, he had left Athens and gone to Corinth alone. And Timothy and Silas had been left in some of the other cities and they rejoined him when he came to Corinth. He actually spent 18 months in Corinth.

And while he was there, Timothy and Silas came back to visit him there. And he makes reference to that in First Thessalonians. And so just so you have that background.

Now, what I'm going to do, as I've been doing lately with these books, I'm going to actually read the book. And I'm not going to comment on every verse, but I'm going to come back after reading them and dip in and talk about important things that need more consideration. First Thessalonians, Chapter one, Paul, Silvanus, which is Silas and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians and God, the father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace to you and peace from God, our father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We give thanks to God always for you, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. In

the sight of our God and father, knowing beloved brethren, your election by God for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit.

And in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake. And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word and much affliction with joy of the Holy Spirit so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe for from you. The word of the Lord has sounded forth not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place.

Your faith toward God has gone out so that we do not need to say anything 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. I've just made a decision to stop at the end of each chapter and talk about it instead of reading the whole thing.

So the first chapter is basically reminiscing, looking at the past. Now, he's going to be talking about the future, the end times eventually, too. But now he's looking at the past and the past was not very far in their past.

As I said, it was not so long earlier, probably not six months since they the first of them were converted. So there were baby Christians. They're brand new converts.

And he says in verse four, he says, knowing beloved brethren, your election by God. Now, of course, Calvinists talk about election as something that, you know, God elected some individuals to be saved before the foundation of the world and others not. I don't think that's how Paul thinks of election.

Paul thinks of election as a corporate thing. God has chosen a corporate entity called the body of Christ. All who are in Christ in Ephesians one for Paul says Ephesians one for the all who are in Christ are elect in Christ.

Christ is the one who's elect. And if you are in Christ, then in him, you also share in that status of being God's chosen part of the part of the chosen group, the body of Christ. And he's already said at the outset that these are the church who's in the Lord Jesus Christ, any of the God, the father.

And and they are elect. This is a real church, not a fake church, not a phony church or a cult. He knows that these are the true elect these Christians here.

And how does he know that? Because he says, I still remember the remarkable way in which the gospel was received by you. Now, Paul had known preaching that he had done in some cities which didn't. The tender didn't catch the spark, didn't catch.

In fact, after he left them and before he wrote this, he'd been in Athens and nothing

happened there. He went up on Mars Hill and preached the gospel, preached his heart out. And they laughed him out of the out of the podium.

And he went kind of, you know, somewhat discouraged from there to Corinth. Now, that being so. He was reminiscing about how different it was with them.

I'm not I'm not sure anything happened in Athens. But when I came to you, it was different. I know you guys really are an elect church of God.

Why? Because he says, because our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance. As you know, what kind of men we were among you for your sake. He's going to talk more about what kind of men they were in chapter two.

And remind them of that. But he says, the reason I know you guys are the real deal is because the way I preach to you, it wasn't like some other places where the word just came in word. And then it fell down and no one accepted it.

The word just kind of flopped when when I preached to the gospel, the gospel didn't come only in word, but also in power. And anointing in the Holy Spirit and much assurance. In other words, God owned the preaching in a way that was remarkable.

I didn't have I couldn't I couldn't convince you of this anywhere that I could. The people in Athens. But God did.

God, through his Holy Spirit, anointed the word, touched your hearts, opened you up in a way that not everybody has opened up. And it's so remarkable. I see that much assurance.

By the way, this is an important thing about having much assurance. And I might just say as a side, when I was taught to evangelize, when I was a young Christian, I was always told, you need to make sure that the person you talk to after you evangelism has assurance. A salvation, make sure you give them assurance of salvation.

And in case you weren't sure how to do that, they said, we tell you what you do. You show them first John 5:13. Well, why first John 5:13? Because after they've said a sinner's prayer, you read to them first John 5:13, which is these things I've written to you who believe on the name of God that you may know that you have eternal life.

In other words, if you've got them to believe and say a prayer, make sure that they know they have eternal life. If they don't know it, they might fall away. And therefore, make sure you show them that verse.

And I remember and I was taught this in more than one place where they taught us to win souls. Make sure after they've said this, read John 5:13 and say, do you have eternal

life? And most people were expected to say, I hope so. Because after all, they've just heard the gospel for the first time.

They've prayed a prayer. You know, they're kind of not so sure of things. And you expect to hear them say, I hope so.

Then you say, well, look at this verse. These things I've written to you that believe on the servant that you may know that you're eternal life. Do you know that you're eternal life? Very typically, the answer would be, I hope so.

Still, a lot of people had reluctance to say they know they have it. And so you're not supposed to let them go home until they say, yes, I know. So you have to read the verse over and over again until they get it.

They might be a little slow on the uptake, you know, and so you got to make sure make it clear. You have to know that you have eternal life. Finally, whether they really did know or not, they'd say they did so they can go home.

And and you send them off happy that they now have assurance of salvation. Well, Paul's readers didn't have assurance of salvation because he pointed a Bible verse to them and kept driving it home until they would agree to it. When he preached the gospel, it came to him in much assurance.

It says in First John, Chapter five, he that believes on the son of God has the witness in himself. In Romans, Chapter eight, Paul said, the Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirits that were the children of God. In other words, if you're converted, God himself bears witness with you, with your spirit, that you're a child of God.

He gives the assurance of it. And by the way, I think that if God doesn't give some assurance, you're a fool to try to give it to him, because if they don't have assurance, they're probably not converted. And just because you go through the Romans road or the four spiritual laws and get them to bow and say a prayer, repeating words after you or whatever, that doesn't mean they've done any business with God in a real way.

They might be just trying to please you or get you off their back. And if they are really converted, there will be assurance. The Holy Spirit will bear witness with their spirit that they are children of God.

Now, I realize that that might not be extremely strong instantly. I, I think of it in terms like when I got baptized in the spirit. Lonnie first we put hands on me and he wanted me to speak in tongues and I didn't.

But I didn't want to displease him. So I kind of mumbled under my breath, hoping he would mistake that for speaking in tongues. And he eventually left the room and I left out to it.

But I had an awareness in my heart that was it took a while for me to realize it was there. I could tell. I mean, as I left the room, I could tell.

There's a difference in my knowing God than there was a few minutes ago. There was a sense of the reality of God that wasn't just me psyching myself up to it at all. I mean, I'd always believed in God.

I'd always I'd come to the Lord as a child. I always believed in God, always believed the gospel. But I remember I had at that time a certain assurance of that event of the filling of the spirit.

But it became stronger as time went on as I realized, well, this is not just a feeling I have for a few minutes. This is something has changed. So it's very possible that somebody you lead toward won't have an extremely strong sense of assurance that they're saved.

But I don't think it helps if you just try to convince them by driving a Bible verse home until they submit to it. You know, I mean, the truth is, if somebody gets converted, when they wake up the next morning, they should know something's different. There should be something different.

If there's something different, the different thing should be significant enough to notice it. I mean, when the creator of the whole universe comes to dwell inside of you, it should be noticeable. His his entrance is his self announcing as he comes.

And if somebody says, well, I said the prayer, but I don't know if I ever really felt like anything happened. I'm not sure anything. I don't really see any change.

I'm just trying to live the Christian life. That's I know how there might. It's possible in some cases that.

That conversion hasn't really happened. And I like I said, when I was taught to evangelize, they made it sound like the worst thing in the world. If the person who prayed with you doesn't have assurance of salvation, I now think it's far worse if they do.

And they're not saying because I've seen so many people who say the sinner's prayer and someone gives them assurance of salvation. But there's nothing in their life that would give anyone assurance that they were converted. I'd much rather have someone really saved and not be sure that they're safe than not really saved, but pretty convinced that they are.

It's much better to know God and not be sure of whether what you know is what it's supposed to be. Not that I want to own to lack assurance, but I mean. I mean, you you might easily when you come to Christ, feel wonderful things happen and not be sure how real it is.

It might be, in fact, real. I'd be a while before you know it's real or it's just an emotional experience or what? But wondering about that is not the problem. The problem is thinking something happened when it didn't.

And conversion is dramatic. And Paul said, I know you guys were really saved because when I preach the gospel, it wasn't just words in your ears, not just so much information being accepted. It came with assurance and power and the Holy Spirit.

And that's that's a pretty glowing recommendation of these people. Paul's pretty happy with what had happened with them. And he says in verse six that you became followers and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction with joy in the Holy Spirit.

Now, he's going to say more about that in chapter two, how that they have experienced the same thing that Paul and other Christians have experienced in terms of persecution and affliction. But he said, this is even another reason I know that it's real for you because it costs you something and you did it anyway. This was in an environment of persecution, an environment of affliction.

And yet you did it anyway. That's that's another reason I know you're real. Because you did that.

Receive the word in much affliction and joy and all these. When you have affliction and joy. That's an evidence that the Holy Spirit really has come to be in you because joy is a fruit of the spirit.

And so you had joy in the spirit, even though you're in affliction. Most people who aren't Christians are not happy when they're in affliction. They.

I mean, even Christians aren't entirely happy about being afflicted. We'd much rather that we weren't. But at the same time, there's a certain joy in the Holy Spirit that a real convert has, even in trials.

Like the apostles in Acts four or five, when they left the council, they've been beaten. It says they were rejoicing that they've been counted worthy. To suffer for the name of Christ, suffer shame for the name of Christ.

So that's a supernatural. That's a work of the Holy Spirit. And Paul said, you guys demonstrated that.

And he says in the remaining verses that what happened to you is so dramatic that when I go to other places in a kayak in Macedonia, they already know. I don't even have to tell them about you. Your reputation is spread.

They tell us. I show up in a new city and they say, hey, did you hear about the

Thessalonians? And he says, yeah, I was there. You know, it's tremendous.

So they became a witness. Now, by the way, if you're not for a kayak in Macedonia, he mentions there if the geography is not familiar to you. Greece is a peninsula.

And in the Roman times, it was divided into two provinces. The southern province of the southern tip was called a kayak. And the northern part of the Grecian peninsula is called Macedonia.

And so Philippi, for example, was in Macedonia as he moved south. Thessalonica and Bria, I believe, were both in Macedonia also. When he got down to Athens and Corinth, that that was in a kayak.

So he says, you know, your reputation is spread all through the Greek peninsula. And I, you know, that's exciting. I don't I don't even have to give the testimony about your conversion.

They tell us about it. That's great. Now, notice he says what they testify about is how you, verse nine and ten, turn 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 delivers us from the wrath of hell. It mentions there the second coming of Christ. You'll find in First Thessalonians, every chapter ends with a reference to the second coming of Christ.

Sometimes it's just a passing reference. But it's definitely on Paul's mind when he writes these epistles more than we find it necessarily in some of his later epistles. That might be, as some people think, that Paul was thinking Jesus would come back real soon.

It might have been something more obsessively on his mind at the time. We don't know. I'm not I can't speak for Paul.

Many commentators and preachers think they can. They say, well, Paul thought Jesus was going to come back any moment. You know, the early Christians thought that.

Well, they might have. We don't actually have anything in the Bible that tells us that they did. And certainly if they did in Second Thessalonians, chapter two, Paul tamps down their enthusiasm a little bit, says, listen, it's not going to come until the great falling away comes first and the man of sin is revealed.

So don't think it's happened. You know, you know, it may be coming in our lifetimes, but it's not happening like tomorrow. But nonetheless, there are some reasons to believe that they probably thought the coming of Christ would be in their lifetime.

And as he grew older, maybe he wasn't. Maybe he was growing to realize. Maybe not.

Maybe maybe it'll be a longer time than I thought. But he was all about it when he wrote

first and second Thessalonians. So he mentions it at the end that they they turn from the idols to serve God and to wait for Jesus to come back.

Now, in chapter two, he reminds them not of them, but of him and Silas and how how they behave. I'm not going to go into this in detail. But he says, you know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain.

It was not fruitless. Even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated in Philippi, as we read in Acts 16. As you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel in much conflict.

So it's not a lot of people. If they get in a lot of trouble for saying something, they might be a little gun shy about saying it next time. You know, you go to a pagan city and you preach the gospel.

They throw you in jail, they beat you and put you in stocks and drive you out of town. You might be the average person, a little gun shy next time. You know, maybe I won't be quite so bold.

Maybe I'll just kind of be a little more subtle. He says, no, we were treated badly in Philippi, but we we still preach boldly to you. You know, we were not intimidated.

Our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit. This is why we could be confident even when there's opposition. You'd be confident when you know that you're not lying, when you know that the truth is on your side.

Our message was not error. It was not badly motivated. We didn't have, you know, secret agendas and nor was it in deceit.

Now, when you know that you're telling the truth and you're not trying to hide anything, you frankly can be very bold. You know that no one's going to be able to prove you wrong. I sometimes told how years ago in the 70s, I heard Dr. Gish, one of the creation scientists from San Diego, one of the best debaters.

He was speaking at a conference in San Jose. And in a Q&A time, someone says, Dr. Gish, you are like most creationist scientists, not as well known as some of these guys you debate. You're debating some of the big heavyweight evolution of scientists out there.

And they said, are you ever at all intimidated to go up against these guys on stage before audiences? And he said very humbly and very sincerely, I really love Dr. Gish. He says, well, you know, when you know you have the truth, you're not intimidated. You know, you know, he knows these people are going to come at him with the best scientific evidence they have against him, but he knows they're wrong.

He knows he's got better evidence. He knows he's got the truth. And that's what Paul says.

We came to you without any any qualms with that. We we were not an error. We didn't have bad motives and we weren't deceiving you.

So we could be bold, even though we might get thrown in jail again for all we knew. But as we've been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak. So it's our stewardship here.

We've been entrusted with this gospel. We can't back down. We have to speak boldly no matter how hard it is, no matter what we suffer.

It's our stewardship. And we do so not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. In Galatians 1 10, Paul said, Am I now pleasing God or men? He said, If I yet was pleasing man, I would not be the servant of Christ.

It's really great to have that perspective as strongly as Paul had. I mean, we kind of know that's true. But sometimes we're still intimidated by people.

And we have to realize that we are a little bit intimidated by the idea of being rejected. Someone laughing at us or just thinking we're weird and not wanting to talk to us again. Or, you know, because we do want to please men.

We I mean, it may not be our only priority or top priority, but it's something in us still would rather not be rejected and ridiculed. There's something in our pride, our ego. It's a natural thing, but it can be a bad thing.

If it keeps us from doing what would make us unpopular. So Paul says, Well, we did it because we've been entrusted with this by God. And we're not pleasing men, not interested in pleasing men by God.

In Proverbs, it says the fear of man brings a snare. You get trapped if you're hoping to keep people happy. You'll be trapped.

There'll be things you cannot say because it will not be popular. And you don't want to be in that snare. Paul was not.

He says 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 for men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.

Now, he says we, which was Paul, Silas and Timothy, could have made demands as apostles. He kind of includes Silas and Timothy under that rubric apostle. But Silas and Timothy were not the same kind of apostles that Paul was.

Paul everywhere described himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ. The word apostle means one who's sent. So he said, Jesus personally sent me like he sent Peter, James and John.

There's apostles of Christ. They are sent by Christ. But in other places like Second Corinthians eight and in Colossians, he refers to persons as apostles of the churches.

In Colossians, he refers to a paper or maybe Philippians. He talks about that for days as that church's apostle, meaning that was sent out by the church, not by Christ, like like Peter and Paul were. But people were sent out by an apostle of the church is one who's sent out by the church.

In Second Corinthians eight, Paul says, if anyone inquires about my partners here in ministry, they are apostles of the churches. So Timothy and Silas were sent out. Well, Silas was sent out by the Church of Antioch when Paul went on to begin his second missionary journey.

And Timothy left Lystra. Apparently the church there sent him out. So they're they're apostles, too, but not of the same order as Paul.

But there's still he says as apostles of Christ, we could have demanded more from you. I mean, after all, we do have kind of an authoritative position in this movement, but we're not of that mind. We're not interested.

We're not seeking glory. We're not seeking money. We're not seeking anything for ourselves.

We're not here for us. We're here for you. That's what he said.

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 our own lives.

So we had a product for you of great value, the gospel of God. And we're willing to give you that for free. More than that, we're willing to give our lives for you if necessary.

I mean, we're not just here as, you know, marketing a message. We're here to lay our lives down if necessary. So that this message is across because you had 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 preach to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses.

And God also how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behave 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 walk worthy of God who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. Now, notice, he said we were like a nursing mother, tender

and gentle with you.

And we were also like a father. We kind of did the father thing and the mother thing for you. Because he said in verse seven, we were gentle among you as a nursing mother cherishes their own children.

And then he says down here, as you know, we exhorted and comforted and charged you, every one of you as a father does his own children. So we kind of had to play the father role. But we also did the mother role.

We were both parents for you while we're there. And you know that like parents simply sacrifice themselves for the kids. That's what we were like.

And he says that you might walk worthy of God who calls you to his own kingdom and glory. We are called to two things. Paul says he's going to say it again in second Thessalonians.

He calls us to his kingdom, which is being part of Christ's movement, having surrendered to Christ as king and living as subjects in that realm under Christ and to glory. Now, glory comes at the end. The Bible indicates that we will be in Colossians chapter four or three.

Paul said when Christ shall appear, we will also appear with him in glory. Paul said in First Corinthians 15 that in the resurrection, our bodies, which were sewn or buried dead in dishonor. We raised in glory.

Paul said in Second Corinthians 3:18, we are being changed now from glory to glory into that same image. The image of Christ is the glory that we're called to. We're called to glory.

That is to be like Jesus. That's the goal. That's why it says in Hebrews, it behooved God in bringing many sons to glory to make the captain of their salvation perfect through suffrage.

God was bringing many sons to glory in Romans chapter eight in verse twenty nine. Jesus said whom he foreknew, he also did predestinate to be conformed into the image of his son, that he might be the firstborn of many brethren. God wants many sons in glory, many brethren of Jesus.

In Romans, he says that what God is predestined will be conformed to Christ's image, the image of his son. In Hebrews, it says he's called many sons to glory because glory is the image of Christ. Being like Jesus is the glory.

It is the destiny that we come for. We're not Paul never says we're called to heaven. He doesn't deny we're going to heaven.

I believe we'll go to heaven, but that's never ever mentioned as the goal for the Christian

is heaven. The goal is a to live in Christ's kingdom and to eventually be changed into his likeness. That's that's the glorious privilege of the church.

Yeah, when you die, you go to heaven. OK, we're not denying that it was just never the focus of any of the apostles teaching. It's the focus of most evangelism today and most Christian preaching today.

It's all. Oh, you get to go to heaven when you die. Well, true.

It's just strange that none of the writers of the New Testament ever happened to talk about that. They talked about something else. But you see, because the monitors confuses the kingdom with heaven and they confuse glory with heaven.

I've got a home in glory land way beyond the blue. Yeah. I mean, somehow all the words in the Bible that talk about our destiny have been just re-recast as heaven in popular Christianity.

But in the Bible, the kingdom never is a synonym for heaven and glory is not a synonym for heaven. It just is in popular religion. The kingdom is where we come into now.

In Colossians 1, 13, Paul said that God has delivered us from the power of darkness and has translated us into the kingdom. Obviously, that happened when you were converted. And we are sharing in his glory a little at a time from glory to glory until we're like him, until we have the complete glory of God manifest in us as Jesus did.

So those are the things that it does not cancel out the hope of heaven. It just eclipses it. It means that heaven is not the focus of New Testament teaching glory and the kingdom of God are.

And so that's what Paul says. We're called to now in verse 13 for this reason. Also, we thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

Now, Paul thought of the word of God as a living thing. It's God. It is the second person of the Trinity, the word, and who became flesh and dwelt among us.

But before he became flesh and dwelt among us, he was the word. And it says in John 1, in him was life, and that life was the light of men. This is before the incarnation.

God's word was his manifestation of himself, even at creation and all through, through the prophets and so forth. The word of God came. That's how the book of Hebrews opens in Hebrews chapter one, verse one through three.

It says, God, who at sundry times in diverse manners spoke to our fathers in time past through the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by his son. He spoke to our

fathers through the prophets. His word came through the prophets.

Now he speaks through his son who is his word. And so when you receive the word, you receive it for what it is. Now, I think this is why they had much assurance and so forth.

When they heard the word, they said, you didn't receive it as the word of men, but as the word of God. Somehow you discern somehow the Holy Spirit, you know, made the lights go on. But you're not hearing a message of human origin.

You're hearing from God. This is the word of God. Nothing less than that.

I have to say, I can relate with that from my childhood. I was not always a good Christian. I was certainly not always a spiritual Christian, but I was a believer from the time I was young.

And I remember all someone had to tell me was the Bible says this. And I said, oh, I'm all in. I mean, it was like I thought, oh, I have to do that.

That's that's important. That's what God wants. You know, it's not like I had God on my mind all the time.

I had carnal things on my mind much of the time when I was a young person. I was not a very spiritual Christian. But there was never a time when you could have told me the Bible says this.

I thought, who cares? Or, well, I'll consider it. Now, you say the Bible says and that would that's the word of God. You know, I always know the word of God.

I had a friend who was saved during the Jesus movement. And he got saved, you know, as a in his late teens. And he says, you know, before I was a Christian, I used to watch Billy Graham on TV.

He said, I was no believer. But every time he said, the Bible says, I just knew that's that's the word of God. He just knew it.

And then later, some eventually got saved. But that's just like they received. It wasn't just the word of God.

They knew that's the word of God and takes the Holy Spirit to make that impression. And he says he did on you. And he says, he says that word is at work in you.

Just like that word was at work in Genesis one, creating the universe, creating everything in the universe, creating everything. Each day, God's word was doing that. It says that in Psalm thirty three six, by the word of the Lord, the heavens were made and the host of them by the breath of his mouth.

That's the word of God that's working in you. When you have received the word of God as the word of God and you're a believer and you embrace that, it goes to work in you, it changes you. It read it recreates you.

You're a new creation that's working in a powerful way for you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God, which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. Now, some of the Jewish churches. This is a Gentile church in a pagan town.

So you became imitators of the Jewish churches. Now, in what way did they start being Torah observant? They start keeping the festivals. No different than that.

A different way. You became imitators of them for you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans. So they suffered persecution from their townsmen and countrymen, just like you are suffering from your countrymen.

In that respect, there's nothing original about your experience. Don't think you're the Lone Ranger. The original Christians in Judea have suffered that from the beginning, from their countrymen.

You have suffered it, too, from your country. But then speaking about the Jews who persecuted the church. Now, remember, Paul is a Jew.

His next words are going to sound very anti-Semitic, but a Jew can't be anti-Semitic. It's like a black man being a white supremacist. It's just not possible.

Jesus was a Jew. Paul was a Jew. The apostles were all Jews.

The first thousands of Christians were all Jews. These were not anti-Semites, but many Jews were not faithful to God. Many Jews rejected the gospel and they persecuted.

The Sanhedrin was the Jewish court. They had Jesus killed. They stoned Stephen to death.

They sent Saul of Tarsus out to persecute Christians far and wide. He got saved to their chagrin. Then they sent people out to kill him.

This is the unsaved Jews of the time who resented the Christian Jews. And he says of them, he says, who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets. And they have persecuted us.

They do not please God and are contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the gentiles that they may be saved. So is also to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.

This statement, wrath has come upon them to the uttermost, he's almost certainly

saying they're doomed very quickly to go down. And this is true. I mean, within a decade or so, actually probably closer to two decades after he wrote this, the Romans destroyed Jerusalem, destroyed the Jewish state, slaughtered 700,000 of them, and then took the rest of them into captivity.

That was the wrath coming on them to the uttermost. Paul said it's already resting over them. And he says, but we brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, but endeavoring more and more eagerly to see your face with great desire.

Therefore, we wanted to come to you, even I, Paul, time and again. But Satan hindered us. For what is our hope or joy or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For you are our glory and joy.

Notice he said at his coming again, referring to the coming of Christ once again at the end of chapter two. Now I'm going to read quickly without much comment because there's not much to say about chapter three. Then we're going to take a break and we'll come back after break and take the rest.

And that's where we get into the particular concerns he had. The three things I mentioned earlier arrive in chapters four and five. And then, of course, the reappearance of second Thessalonians.

We'll look at both. Chapter three. Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to let be left in Athens alone.

And I sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God and our fellow labor in the gospel of Christ to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith. Now, the churches Paul established before he got to Athens were Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea. He had three traveling companions.

He left Luke in Philippi. He left Timothy and Silas in Berea. And apparently he gave instructions for Timothy to go back and check on the Thessalonians, too.

So all three of the churches he'd been to before Athens, he had one of his workers checking on them, trying to nurture them and make sure they didn't fall away. So these guys were able to follow up in Paul's absence. So he says, I just decided to be alone in Athens and sent Timothy back to you in Thessalonica.

Now, I want to say this. I didn't comment on verse 18 of chapter two, which says, I wanted many times to come back to you, but Satan hindered us. That's not very encouraging.

Can Satan hinder Paul? Is not he that is in us greater than he that is in the world? Can't Paul defeat Satan? Well, what he's referring to here is the Jews who drove him out of

town. We're still preventing him from coming back to town. He sees them as the agents of Satan.

They are the ones who are being used by Satan. Stop. So it's not that, you know, Paul tried to get there and the devil is standing there on the road.

So you're not going to pass me, Paul. It's more like the people that Satan was using that they were still opposing him. So he was it wasn't safe to come back yet.

So anyway, that's what he said there. Now, he says, I sent Timothy chapter three, our brother and minister of God, our fellow labor in the gospel to establish you and encourage you, that no one should be shaken by these afflictions for you yourselves know that we are appointed for 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 as I sent Timothy, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you and our labor might be in vain. So he said, I hadn't heard any news.

I knew I left you in bad circumstances for all I knew you might have all fallen away and all my work could have been in vain. But I sent Timothy back and then he's going to say, but when Timothy came back, he gave good news. So I'm excited.

Now, I will say this. He says, remember when I was with you, I told you that we would suffer tribulation. Now, that's an interesting way to evangelize people, because many modern church I go to try to win.

People are saying we won't go through tribulation. In fact, before tribulation comes, we'll be raptured out of here and then we'll miss the tribulation. I heard I've heard preachers say God would never allow his bride to go through tribulation.

Well, I'm not sure what God they're talking about or what Bible or what bride. But Jesus said to his disciples in John 16, 33, in the world, you will have tribulation. But in me, you'll have peace.

But in the world, you're going to have tribulation. But be a good share of overcome the world, Jesus said. And Paul says, when I was with you, I said we're going to have tribulation.

Now, maybe we wouldn't get as many converts or many people going to church if we told people that. But it's the truth. It's what Jesus told the disciples.

Paul told his conference, we're going to have tribulation. If they're told that right up front, they can count the costs like Jesus said one should do. And they can say, I'm not in

on this.

I'm not signing up for that. But if they say, oh, OK, well, that's not too good news, but still it's worth it. So I'm going to follow Jesus anyway.

Well, then when the tribulation comes, they're not surprised. Like Peter said in 1 Peter chapter four, don't think it's a strange thing when fiery trials come upon you as if some strange thing was happening to you. If people aren't expecting tribulation and the tribulation comes, which it does in every life.

Then it's not a strange thing. But if they're not expecting it, it seems strange. I didn't sign up for this.

I'm out of here. Paul says you did sign up for this. Remember, I told you about this and this is what you signed up for.

But I was afraid you still might have been afflicted too much. So I sent Timothy. But he says, 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 the by your faith. For now we live if you stand fast in the Lord.

For what thanks can we render to God for you for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God night and day, praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect that which is lacking in your faith. Now, may our God and father himself and our Lord Jesus Christ direct our way to you. And may the Lord Jesus.

Sorry, just made the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all just as we do to you. 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. Again, a reference to the second coming in the closing part of the chapter.

Now we're going to take a break in the next chapter. He introduces the three concerns he has and deals with them. And then and when we look at those, we'll also see how second Festo does.

But we'll we'll take a break right now for about 10 minutes and we'll take the rest.