

NEW TESTAMENT LETTERS: WISDOM FOR THESSALONICA

After visiting the city of Thessalonica to share the message of Jesus (Acts 17), Paul, Silas, and Timothy followed up with the Jewish and Greek people who believed in Jesus and became the church in Thessalonica. Because the news of Jesus's death and resurrection was seen as controversial, the Christians in Thessalonica faced persecution and rejection.

Paul wrote two letters to the believers in Thessalonians, encouraging them to remain steadfast in faith despite persecution and trials. Paul also provided clarity around his message, specifically around the unknown timing of Jesus' eventual return. While they anticipated Christ's return, Paul urged them to be sanctified (made more like Jesus) by the work of the Holy Spirit. Paul deeply loved the people in Thessalonica and desired to see them again.

MAIN IDEAS: REMAINING FAITHFUL UNTIL JESUS RETURNS

- **Despite facing persecution, the Thessalonians became faithful imitators of Christ.** (1 Thess. 1:6)
- **Paul challenged the Thessalonians to remain spiritually awake and aware.** (1 Thess. 5:6)
- **God faithfully directs believers, protecting them from evil.** (2 Thess. 3:3)
- **While anticipating Christ's return, believers are called to perform good works.** (2 Thess. 3:13)

EXAMPLE OF GOD'S PROVISION: SANCTIFICATION

The idea of God's will for humanity can be confusing and complicated. Does God have ultimate sovereignty? Does humanity have free will? How do these two live in tandem? Although we cannot fully understand God's mysterious ways, God reveals His character and purposes throughout Scripture. 1 + 2 Thessalonians clarifies that God's will is for believers to be sanctified. Everyone who has placed their faith in Christ has been justified, meaning they are made right before God. Sanctification is the process of being made more like Christ through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

1 Thessalonians 4:3 states that It is God's will for believers to be sanctified. The following verses give practical examples to follow for living a pure, holy life. Later in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, Paul teaches believers to "rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." When discerning God's will, asking, "What kind of person does God want me to be?" is a better question than, "What is God's will for my life?" God answers this question clearly: He wants believers to be made into the likeness of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Until Jesus returns, believers are called to live by the Spirit and walk with Christ.



JESUS IN 1 + 2 THESSALONIANS: FUTURE RETURN + REDEMPTION

Paul explained the news of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection to the people of Thessalonica. The Thessalonians responded with belief and became devout followers of Jesus. As new believers who were eager to share the gospel, the Thessalonians were concerned about the future return of Christ. What if they missed it? What if they died before it occurred? What should they do in the meantime? Paul answered these questions throughout the two letters, providing comfort and clarity.

Paul explained that believers were not meant to fear the return of Christ, but to anticipate His arrival with hope. 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 instructs believers to receive comfort, hope, and grace through Christ as they are established in good works. Paul consoled the believers who were concerned about those who died, letting them know that death does not remove someone from God's chosen family. Those who died in faith will be reunited with Christ - even before those who are alive upon His arrival (1 Thessalonians 4:13-15)! When Jesus eventually arrives, He will finish the redemptive work of God and restore the world to its perfect, sinless form.