

=THE EPISTLES=

Lesson 8

Paul's First Epistle to the Thessalonians

AIM: to teach my pupils the basic teachings and the story in I Thessalonians.

POINT OF CONTACT: Read carefully Acts 17:1-9. You will be able to understand this letter far better if you have the foundation first. As a point of contact, explain that Paul went to the synagogue of a city if at all possible. There it was his custom to preach on the Hebrew Messiah and how that this Messiah had to suffer and then rise from the dead. He then showed that Jesus fulfilled these conditions and was the long-awaited Messiah of the Jews. Since Paul, we think, was a member of the Sanhedrin, he usually had an open door into the synagogues. It was their practice to stand up to read the Scriptures and then sit down to expound them. (This can be acted out by the pupils. Some little child in the class can be the one in charge. He can stand up to read the Scriptures, sit down to expound the Scriptures, etc.)

Still another point of contact would be to have the pupils learn the order of the writing of the Epistles. The Apostle Paul wrote at least thirteen books of the New Testament and perhaps another. We should know the order of their writing. Why not list them as follows, then scramble them and have the class put them back in order.

Proper Order:

I Thessalonians
II Thessalonians
Galatians
I Corinthians
Romans
II Corinthians
Colossians
Ephesians
Philippians
Philemon
I Timothy
Titus
II Timothy

Example of Scrambled Order:

Romans
I Timothy
Galatians
Titus
I Thessalonians
II Corinthians
Philemon
Ephesians
II Timothy
II Thessalonians
Philippians
I Corinthians
Colossians

(There may be some difference of opinion as to the exact order. It is important, however, to remember this: I and II Thessalonians are his earliest Epistles. Then come the four doctrinal books—Romans, I and II Corinthians, and Galatians. Then come four prison Epistles—Colossians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon. Then come three pastoral Epistles—I and II Timothy and Titus. This is the most important grouping.)

INTRODUCTION: Thessalonica is a seaport town situated on what was called the Thermaic Gulf and was anciently the capital of Macedonia. It was first visited by Paul about A.D. 52. It had many Jews at that time; they had a synagogue where Paul preached the Gospel to them.

- I. THE FOUNDING. On Paul's second missionary journey, he established this church. He reasoned in the synagogue three Sabbath days with them, Acts 17:2. Maybe he stayed a few days later; we do not know, but from Acts 17:5-10 we know that he was not there long. We do know, however, that in his brief visit he did a tremendous job of indoctrinating the saints concerning the doctrines and the work of God. We find glimpses of this in I Thessalonians 4:2; 5:2, 4; II Thessalonians 2:5, 15, and 3:10. When Paul preached, the Scriptures say that some believed, Acts 17:4. Some of these were Jews, some were Greeks, some were women, and a church was started. However, the Jews became envious. Those who rejected Paul's message started a riot and charged Paul with some base things, Acts 17:5-9. This led to the brevity of his visit. Shortly after he left, he wrote them back to try to strengthen them in the things of God.

II. A LEADER'S RELATIONSHIP TO HIS FOLLOWERS. We find this in I Thessalonians 1:1-4. This could be applied to a pastor and his church, a superintendent to his department, a teacher to his class, officers to followers, etc. Let us notice some of these characteristics of a leader:

1. Is kind.
2. Recognizes other leaders. He mentions Silvanus, who is probably Silas, and Timotheus, who no doubt is Timothy. These brethren had accompanied Paul on many of his journeys.
3. Thanks God for followers.
4. Prays for his followers.
5. Remembers his followers.
6. Loves his followers. One can hardly go through these verses without finding the heartbeat of love that Paul had for his people. This, of course, is a necessary characteristic for leadership.

III. FACTS ABOUT THE CHURCH AT THESSALONICA.

1. They received the Word of God in much affliction. (I Thessalonians 1:6) In spite of their affliction, however, they had joy. This persecution was, no doubt, continued after Paul left; and their suffering was caused by the opposition that Paul experienced.
2. They turned from idols. (I Thessalonians 1:9) The pagan culture of Thessalonica was bathed in idolatry. They had idols of all colors and designs. These believers deserted the heathen temples, idols, etc. and left the heathen rites.
3. They were examples. (I Thessalonians 1:7) Their lives were changed, and they were certainly a good testimony for Jesus Christ. This is always a good sign of one's sincerity.
4. They had a testimony. (I Thessalonians 1:8) Notice the words, "from you sounded out the word of the Lord." These words, "sounded out," are very interesting. They imply an audible impact of musical instruments. The same root word is used in I Corinthians 13:1 when it speaks of the "sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal." In other words, these people made noise about the Gospel. Their lives were changed first, however; then the noise was made. They certainly were not timid. They advertised the Gospel; they announced the Gospel; they demonstrated the Gospel; they declared the Gospel. What a church!
5. They served. (I Thessalonians 1:9) Notice the words, "to serve the living and true God." They held their positions and filled them properly. They did their jobs. They worked hard.
6. They were looking for Jesus to come. (I Thessalonians 1:10) They had a hope, and they waited for this hope!

IV. EXPLANATION OF THE SECOND COMING. Perhaps this is the main purpose of the writing of this book. Paul had mentioned the coming of the Lord while he was with them. How interesting this is! He was there only a few weeks, and yet he was careful to tell them of the coming of the Lord. This hope began to beat in their hearts. They became disturbed regarding those who had died. They were afraid that those who had died would have no part in the Second Coming or the Rapture. They supposed it to be near and were wondering about those who had fallen asleep or had died in Christ. Paul writes them to assure them that the Rapture is not only for those who are alive but also for those who have died in Christ. Notice the order here:

1. The Lord descends from Heaven.
2. There is the resurrection of the dead in Christ.
3. Then the bodies of the living saved are changed and they rise to meet the Lord in the air.
4. The whole company, living and dead, are raised to meet the Lord in the air.
5. From then on, we are ever with the Lord.

(Teacher, it might be wise here to give a little outline of the future of the believer after the Rapture. Teach about the Rapture, the seven years we are in the air, the Marriage of the Lamb, the Judgment Seat, our coming back to the earth at the end of the seven years with Christ, our reigning with Him for a thousand years, our helping Him judge the unsaved dead at the Great White Throne, and then our entrance into the New Jerusalem. Even a little child in our classes should know these basic things.)

- V. SOME SUGGESTIONS AS TO HOW TO LIVE IN VIEW OF HIS IMMINENT RETURN. In I Thessalonians 5 is a list of things a Christian should do because Jesus' coming is imminent.
1. Be sober, verse 8.
 2. Learn to comfort each other, verse 11a.
 3. Edify each other, verse 11b. The word "edify" means to "build up." Paul said that this church was already doing it, but should continue to do so.
 4. Know the spiritual leaders, esteem them highly, love them, and be at peace with each other, verses 12 and 13.
 5. "Warn them that are unruly." What this means is to "admonish the disorderly." Then he says to "comfort the feebleminded," which means to "encourage the weak." Then he tells us to be long-suffering and "patient toward all men," verse 14.
 6. Be not vindictive or retaliatory, verse 15.
 7. Rejoice all the time, verse 16.
 8. Always be praying, verse 17.
 9. Give thanks, verse 18.
 10. Never quench the Spirit; always follow His leadership, verse 19.
 11. There are other things listed one after the other such as, abstaining from the appearance of evil, etc. The coming of the Lord Jesus Christ should find us doing all the above-mentioned things. May we each be that kind of Christian!