

**FIRST THESSALONIANS
SECOND THESSALONIANS
FIRST TIMOTHY
SECOND TIMOTHY
TITUS
PHILEMON**



Holmes Photography

A modern Macedonian shore

With this lesson we conclude our look at the letters of Paul. First we will look at the two letters written to the church in Thessalonica. These letters are perhaps some of the earliest of Paul's writings. Edward P. Blair describes the first of these letters in an accurate and very telling way. His statement is worth quoting in full.

1 Thessalonians is Paul's most solicitous, affectionate letter. Here the great apostle appears not as a warrior doing battle for the truth (as in Galatians), or as a lawyer arguing a case (as in Romans), or as a fireman rushing to extinguish a devastating blaze (as in 1 and 2 Corinthians). Here he is a tender shepherd of newborn lambs—a pastor—who lovingly feeds, protects, and encourages the young. To use the letter's own figures of speech, Paul is a nurse caring for children, . . . a father gently encouraging his little ones.*

FIRST THESSALONIANS

Paul begins First Thessalonians with a word of thanksgiving that extends through Chapter 3. Paul reminisces about the founding of the church and his later relationship with the congregation. He remarks that the church's faith in God has gone forth everywhere. The church is an example of all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.

In the last two chapters of First Thessalonians, Paul exhorts the members to grow in the Christian faith and to develop in the new life they have begun. He then raises one matter of faith that troubles the congregation later. This matter is the issue of the resurrection and the return of Jesus. He states that those who have died will be raised to life at the return of the Lord. He gives his opinion on Jesus' return in some detail. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17.

In the first part of Chapter 5 Paul talks further about the return of the Lord. He warns that one cannot be certain of the time since "the Lord will come like a thief in the night." What one can do in anticipation of the day is to live prepared for his coming.

The question of what will happen at Jesus' return seems to be the uppermost concern in the church at Thessalonica. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17, and answer the following questions.

- a. When the Lord comes, what will accompany his descent from heaven?

- b. What will happen to those who are dead in Christ?

- c. What will happen to those who are alive?

SECOND THESSALONIANS

Paul writes a second letter to the Thessalonians to clarify matters about the return of Christ. The congregation has been caught up in this topic, which Paul had raised in his first letter. In 2 Thessalonians 2:2 Paul warns the members "not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as though from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord is already here." This verse suggests some of the church's anxiety about the matter. It also indicates that persons were quoting or circulating letters in Paul's name, but the letters were not actually written by him.

In 2 Thessalonians 1:5-12 Paul speaks of the return as a time of great judgment and vengeance upon those who are not obedient to the gospel. Read 2 Thessalonians 1:9-12.

In Chapter 2 Paul writes of developments and events that will precede and signal the coming of Jesus. He speaks of a rebellion that will come and of a "lawless one" who will be revealed. This "lawless one," whom

* From *Abingdon Bible Handbook*, by Edward P. Blair (Abingdon Press, 1975), pages 295-96.

the one destined for destruction supports, will oppose and exalt “himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, declaring himself to be God.” Scholars have tried to decipher Paul’s images here. None has met with success, and even Paul says he is speaking about a mystery. He assures his readers that “the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will destroy with the breath of his mouth, annihilating him by the manifestation of his coming.”

In 2 Thessalonians 3 Paul reprimands some members of the church for their idleness. He charges them with “living in idleness and not according to the tradition.” He does not say why some are given to idleness, but some may have decided that with the imminent return of Jesus, working made no sense. Paul uses himself and other disciples as examples of persons to be imitated. They had worked with toil and labor, night and day. Finally, he reminds them of the command he gave while he was with them: “Anyone unwilling to work should not eat.”

Paul concludes Second Thessalonians by telling them that he writes this letter in his own hand. He did the same thing in the Galatians letter. Usually Paul dictated his letters, and a scribe wrote them down.

Second Thessalonians also contains a discussion of what will happen when Christ returns. Read 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12, and answer these questions.

a. What does Paul say must happen before the coming of Christ? (verse 3)

b. What will the lawless one do? (verse 4)

c. What will happen to the lawless one? (verse 8)

d. Who will be condemned? (verse 12)

FIRST AND SECOND TIMOTHY, TITUS

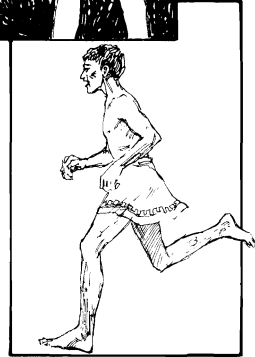
Persons often refer to the letters of First and Second Timothy and Titus as the Pastoral Epistles. They are so designated because the letters are primarily concerned with the life and work of pastors and ministers. They read more like ministers’ manuals than letters.

In modern times scholars have raised questions about whether Paul wrote these letters. The reasons for doubting Paul’s authorship are numerous. Words and ideas appear here that are not found in Paul’s other writings. The letters refer to events about which we have no other information. For example, Titus 1:5 refers to a mission of Paul and Titus on Crete. We have no other information about such a mission. Some scholars doubt Paul’s authorship of the Pastorals because the organization in the church seems more developed here than in Paul’s other writings.

No one can say for certain whether Paul wrote the Pastorals. Perhaps disciples of Paul wrote these letters. Or, perhaps notes written by Paul to Timothy and Titus were later expanded to give the Pastorals their present form and content.

The Pastorals reflect three basic interests. These interests are concern with preserving the true faith of the believers, repudiation of false or unacceptable faith and life, and instructions about officials and their functions in the church.

Charles Shaw



2 Timothy 2:3-6

FIRST TIMOTHY

In 1 Timothy 1 the writer warns Timothy against persons who are more concerned with myths, endless genealogies, and speculations, than with divine training in the faith. The writer then charges Timothy to be a faithful minister of the gospel so that he can live in good conscience and not shipwreck his faith.

Chapter 2 and the first thirteen verses of Chapter 3 discuss matters of worship and qualifications of good church leaders. The writer encourages intercessory prayer for persons in high positions, advises women to be submissive and live modestly, and outlines the qualities of a good bishop and a good deacon.

With 1 Timothy 3:14 the letter returns to describing Timothy's responsibility for teaching the Christian faith and life. The writer admonishes him to "let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity." After describing the role of widows and elders in the church in Chapter 5, the writer again stresses the nature of true ministry in Chapter 6. He also warns against false teachers who are often dominated by a love for money.

In 1 Timothy 4:11-16 to Timothy is urged to faithful service. After reading this passage, answer the following questions.

a. How is Timothy to be a good example to believers?

b. To what public responsibilities is Timothy to attend?

c. Why is Timothy to take heed especially of his life and teaching?

SECOND TIMOTHY

The Second Letter to Timothy sounds almost like a last will and testament. Second Timothy 4:6-8 speaks of the writer's interpretation of his approaching hour of death: "I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

Second Timothy begins with personal reflections on the maternal line of Timothy's family. Writing in Paul's name, the writer tells the young minister not to be ashamed of either testifying to the Lord or to Paul. Paul remains unashamed of the gospel, but mentions many Christians who have turned away from him, shamed by his chains. Second Timothy 2:1-13 calls Timothy to accept suffering as a good soldier, confident that God will not deny him. The rest of Chapter 2 warns the young minister to avoid disputing about words. Rather, he is to make himself a vessel fit for noble use.

In Chapter 3 the writer warns Timothy that stressful times will come in the last day. Persons will become lovers of self and inhumane to others, while the outward form of religion will be very popular. Again the writer holds up the pattern of Paul as a model to be imitated. Chapter 4 opens with a charge to Timothy. Read 2 Timothy 4:2-5 aloud. These verses closely resemble an ordination charge.

Read 2 Timothy 2:20-26, and answer the following questions.

- a. How can one be a vessel for special use?

- b. How should a young person handle youthful passions?

- c. How should a Christian deal with opponents?

TITUS

The final Pastoral Epistle is the Letter to Titus. Paul frequently refers to Titus in his letters. Titus was a Gentile who was converted to Christianity and often accompanied Paul. Like the books of First and Second Timothy, this letter offers instruction for a younger minister. Chapter 1 deals with the qualifications and appointment of elders in the church. Chapter 2 advises Titus about the proper approach to various groups in the church: older men, older women, younger men, and slaves. The final chapter offers ethical advice on the art of living in the light of the faith.

PHILEMON

The final letter in this lesson is the Letter to Philemon. Paul wrote it while awaiting trial in Rome. There a runaway slave came under Paul's influence and was converted to Christianity. Paul sent the slave back to his master with this letter.

In the Letter to Philemon, Paul does not attack the institution of slavery, but he does ask Philemon to receive Onesimus back as someone more than a slave: "no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother—especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord" (verse 16). For Paul, the common bond of Christians transcends the master-slave relationship. Read Philemon 17-20.

Persons often wonder why this short letter of personal correspondence came to be in the Bible. The early church claimed a bishop named Onesimus. One scholar has suggested that this was none other than the slave of Philemon. In this theory, Onesimus collected the letters of Paul from various churches and included the one to his master, Philemon, which described the connection between Paul and Onesimus.

Read Philemon 8-20, and answer these questions.

a. How does Paul feel toward the runaway slave Onesimus? (verse 10)

b. Paul did not keep Onesimus with him, even though Onesimus was very useful to him. Why did Paul send the slave back to Philemon? (verse 14)

c. How does Paul want Philemon to receive Onesimus? (verses 16-17)

d. What is the relationship between Paul and Philemon, as Paul understands it? (verse 20)

SUMMARY

Four main parts of this literature are important to remember.

- (1) Paul's discussion in First Thessalonians about the Resurrection and the return of Christ (1 Thessalonians 4-5)
- (2) Paul's words in Second Thessalonians about the events just before the coming of Christ (2 Thessalonians 2)
- (3) The advice in First Timothy about worship and good church leadership (1 Timothy 2-3)
- (4) The ethical advice to Titus about how to live a life of faith (Titus 3)

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. The members of the church in Thessalonica were evidently concerned about the events surrounding the second coming of Jesus. Are we as concerned about this event as the Thessalonians were?

Why or why not? Think about this event as Paul describes it to the Thessalonians. Do you picture the Second Coming in a similar way? If not, how does your view differ from the picture Paul portrays?

2. Think about the advice given to Timothy on the appropriate behavior of women. If you need to refresh your memory, read 1 Timothy 2:8-15. Use a commentary to gain more insight on the culture and context of this instruction. How has the church's view of women changed since this letter was written to Timothy? If you could speak with the writer, how would you respond to this advice about women?

3. Titus 2:11-14 provides a model for developing Christian maturity: "a people of his own who are *zealous for good deeds*" (italics added). What attitudes should we be developing toward ourselves in relationship to the world, to our lifestyle, and toward others? How would you characterize Christian maturity? Give examples.

4. We are told in 1 Timothy 6:10 that "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil." However, many persons think of money as the most important thing in their lives today. Have you read about or do you know of someone who has loved money but is miserable? someone who has fallen into evil? How should Christians deal with the problem of the attraction of money?

DAILY READINGS FOR HEBREWS; JAMES; FIRST AND SECOND PETER; FIRST, SECOND, AND THIRD JOHN; AND JUDE

Day 1: Hebrews 1:1-14

Day 2: James 1:16-27

Day 3: 1 Peter 5:1-14

Day 4: 2 Peter 1:1-21

Day 5: 1 John 4:1-12

Day 6: 2 John 1-13, 3 John

Day 7: Jude 1-16