

1 Thessalonians

The Church at Thessalonica was in many ways a model church. Paul had many things to commend the followers of Jesus for: their exemplary faith, diligent service, patient steadfastness, and overflowing joy. But in the midst of his commendation, Paul voices a word of caution. Abounding in the work of the Lord is only one step away from abandoning the work of the Lord through complacency. So, Paul encourages them to excel in their faith, to increase in their love for one another, and to give thanks always for all things. In short, Paul encourages them to “stay on target” as they labor together for the Lord.

INTRODUCTION

Paul has many great memories of the days he spent with the Thessalonian church. Their faith, hope, love, and perseverance in the face of persecution are exemplary. Paul’s labors as a spiritual parent to the infant church have been richly rewarded, and his affection is visible in every line of his letter.

Paul encourages them to excel in their new-found faith, to increase in their love for one another, and to rejoice, pray, and give thanks always. He closes his letter with instructions regarding the return of the Lord, whose coming signifies hope and comfort for believers both living and dead.

AUTHOR

The external and internal evidence points clearly to Paul as the author.

Because this is the first of Paul’s two letters to the church at Thessalonica, it received the title *Pros Thessalonikies A*, the “First to the Thessalonians.”

DATE & SETTING

In Paul’s time, Thessalonica was the prominent seaport and the capital of the Roman province in Macedonia. This prosperous city was located on the main road to Rome within sight of Mount Olympus, legendary home of the Greek pantheon. Its strategic location assured it of commercial success, and it boasted a population of perhaps 200,000 in the first century.

Thessalonica had a sizable Jewish population, and the ethical monotheism of Judaism attracted many Gentiles who had become disenchanted with Greek paganism. These God-fearers quickly responded to Paul’s reasoning in the synagogue when he ministered there on his second missionary journey (Acts 17:10). The Jews became jealous of Paul’s success and organized a mob to oppose him and his fellow Christian missionaries. After a time, the Thessalonian Jews raised an uproar which caused Paul to depart for Athens where he met with Timothy (1 Thessalonians 3:1-2). Paul then sent Timothy to Thessalonica and he returned to Corinth (Acts 18:5; 1 Thessalonians 1:1). There he wrote this epistle in A.D. 51 as his response to Timothy’s good report.