

The Book of 1Thessalonians

[Sun. Oct. 26, 2014] 1Thessalonians Series, 1Thes. 1.1a - Craig A. Thurman

Factoids:

The first person singular pronoun 'I' is used 8 times in 1Thessalonians (2.18; 3.5 twice; 4.9, 13; 5.1, 23, 27) But even more remarkable to me is that the Greek ἐγώ (καὶ γώ) is used but twice. (2.18; 3.5) **'We' is used 48**; 'Us' 21; **'You' 55**; 'Ye' 38, 'Our' 27.

The very focus of the book is, 'You.' You are who we are living for.

1Th 2:19 For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?

We (the 24th time used) and Ye (the 19th times used) both converge at 1Thes.3.4.

*1Th 3:4 For verily, when **we** were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and **ye** know.*

There are 5 chapters, 89 verses, 1, 837 words that make up this book, *The Bible in the Making*, Geddes MacGregor, Copyright 1959, p. 429, as compiled by the Gideons. [Gideons count includes the title and the postscript: 1857 words] Chapter 1, 253 words; Chapter 2, 479 words; Chapter 3, 295 words; Chapter 4, 396 words; Chapter 5, 414 words.

With 89 verse total in the book, **the central verse is 4.2**: *1Th 4:2 For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus.*

With 1,837 words in the book, the central word is 'we.' The first occurrence in 3.9 is the 919th word of the book. *For what thanks can **we** render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God ...*

The Context of This Book: The Who, What, Where, When, Why of the letter.

Biblical Hermeneutics, Milton S. Terry, p. 210, 'The word **context**, as the etymology intimates (Latin, *con*, together, and *textus*, woven), denotes

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something that is woven together, and, applied to a written document, it means the connexion of thought supposed to run through every passage which constitutes by itself a whole. By some writers it is called the *connection*. The immediate context is that which immediately precedes or follows a given word or sentence. The remote context is that which is less closely connected, and may embrace a whole paragraph or section. The **scope**, on the other hand, is the end or purpose which the writer has in view. Every author is supposed to have some object in writing, and that object will be either formally state in some part of his work, or else apparent from the general course of thought. The **plan** of a work is the arrangement of its several parts; the order of thought which the writer pursues.'

So, we are setting out for the next few moments to establish, perhaps a remote context, which would involve the scope. The plan of the letter will probably be dealt with incidentally as we study through the chapters. First let's establish the context and scope of the book by asking these important questions. And these are all important if we are going to come to sound, biblical conclusions of faith (doctrine) and practice.

By whom was this letter written?

The opening verse tells us who is greeting the Thessalonian church: Paul, Silas and Timothy (Luke is most always silently at work in the background. To realize his presence we have to really pay real close attention to the Scriptures.) Most of this letter is the expression of their minds toward the Thessalonians. We can pick up this sense quickly as we notice the plural personal pronouns throughout the book. Paul's authorship is implied in 2.18; but it is not established until 4.9 *But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you ...* And again in 5.1 *But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you.* Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit wrote this book, or had it dictated for him.

To whom is the letter written?

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This letter was written *to the church of the Thessalonians*. (vs.1) In this we would note this peculiarity: they had no church officers. This will be discussed in more detail as we begin our study. (cf. vs. 1) One other point: Paul does not mention his apostolic office with this church. This account for the willingness of this church to do the will of God from the heart.

Where was the letter written from?

Only opinion can be offered on this point. The postscript states that the letter was written from Athens. However, it is also probably that it was written from the city of Corinth. We know that Paul was in Corinth for some 18 months. Judging from the account of the travels of these missionaries in Acts 17.15 & 18.5 it is difficult to say with any certainty. Paul left Silas and Timothy and was hurried to Athens. These two do not rejoin Paul until he is in Corinth. It may be that they had gone back to Athens for a time, and from there Timothy went back to the Thessalonians to help them in their faith.

When was this letter written?

The Thessalonian epistle ... Gill, vol.9, p.212, '... is the first of all the epistles he [Paul] wrote ...' which is said to have been written about A.D. 51. It was written during Paul's second missionary journey, which is recorded in Acts beginning at 15.41, and ending at 18.22.

Albert Barnes' chronology of Acts indicates that the whole episode from landing in Macedonia and traveling through to Corinth transpires within the same year. (A.D. 51)

What is the occasion, purpose for the writing of this letter? Why.

Historically, this marks the first occasion among the Gentiles when such young saints immediately endured physical assaults against them by their own countrymen, after being incited by the Jews of the city. (Acts 17.5-9; 1Thes.2.14) They had no sooner believed than that they began to suffer.

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Paul, Silas, & Timothy have great concerns for their continuance in the faith of Christ in face of such heated persecution. (1Thes. 3.1-5)

How long was Paul's initial visit to Thessalonica?

Anywhere from 15-21 days. He reasoned in the synagogue three Sabbaths. (Acts 17.2)

A Brief History of the Missionary Expeditions unto the Writing of This Book

Paul's first missionary journey was a relatively brief one that covers the southern territory of what is now the nation of Turkey. The Lord had sent Barnabas and Saul from Antioch, Syria. (Acts 13.2) John Mark joined went with them. They took ship from the coastal city of Seleucia for the nearby Island of Cyprus. After preaching from one end to the other they set sail for the mainland. . John Mark returned home as they prepared to leave the island. Paul and Barnabas reaching the port city of Perga, Pamphylia proceed inland and northward to Antioch, Pisidia, then eastward through the southern portions of Turkey almost jutting back full circle to Paul's hometown of Tarsus. (Acts 13.2-14.26) At this point, reaching Derby, they retraced their steps and sailed back to Antioch from Attalia.

Just a side note: we take for granted that there was a response to the gospel ministry everywhere that these men went, but is not correct. These men covered the whole island of Cyprus without any notable actions taking place, no mention of souls coming to Christ; they preached in Salamis in the first synagogue they found and nothing is said of believers being added to the Lord. Not until they reach all of the way over to the nether side do we read that one man came to Christ. (Acts 13.7-12) Nothing is said of Perga as they went into the mainland, nor of Attalia as they left it again to return home.

Paul's second journey employs new faces and new places. Judas and Silas, had been commissioned to return with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch to bear witness to the truth of the conclusions reached at the Jerusalem Law conference. (Acts 15.34) After they had done so Judas and Silas were released to return to Jerusalem, but Silas choose to stay. As a result, when Paul desired to take his next missionary journey, Silas was chosen to go alone with him. (Acts 15.40) This time,

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however, they take a different route via land, and punch northward confirming the churches of Syria and then west into Cilicia. Now these churches we know absolutely nothing of their origin in the Scriptures.

My opinion the mysterious origin of these church is that while Paul was in Tarsus he was preaching Christ to these gentiles already. He knew full well what God had called him to do, even if the Jewish saints had yet to learn this for themselves through the Cornelius event. (cf. Acts Series at 11.25, 26)

Continuing in a westward direction they enter into the familiar territory of present-day Turkey and establish those earlier churches in the Word of God. Timothy joined with Paul and Silas relatively early being his home town, Lystra, was among the first revisited as they traveled. (Acts 15.41; 16.1-5)

Once confirming these churches they take a course deeper into the country (still Turkey) to a region called Phrygia, and then to the furthest western, coastal town of Troas, on the Aegean Sea. (Acts 16.8) Luke, the physician, evidently joins with them at this place as they prepare to leave Asia and set sail for the European continent, coming into Macedonia. (Acts 16.10 we includes the writer of the book of Acts, Luke) Crossing the northernmost part of the Aegean Sea they land at Neapolis, then jut a little distance inland to the city of Philippi, then along the coast to Amphipolis, inland some to Apolonia, and then west through a pass that connects the area to the city named Thessalonica. Thessalonica is another coastal town of Macedonia still served by the waters of the Aegean Sea. (Acts 16.12; 17.1)

Let's consider again the occasion and purpose of this letter. Read Acts 17.1-12. (Goes on into Athens, then Corinth.)

(Review what we just read)

Once the brethren reach Thessalonica we see that the custom is to preach first in the synagogue. In this case some believed and turned in faith to Christ. (Acts 17.2-4) But the unbelieving Jews for envy made an assault on the house of Jason trying to apprehend Paul and charge him with sedition. (Acts 17.5-7) But these **young** Christians hurried Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke off to Berea in the night.

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(Acts 17.10) However when the Jews of Thessalonica discovered that they had fled to Berea they followed after them (That is the greatest sense of what persecution means: to pursue.), and as they did in Thessalonica, they incited the people against them. Again, these newborn babes in Christ whisked Paul, and probably Luke as well, away by sea to Athens, a city of Achaia. (Note: the whole area, Philippi to Thessalonica to Athens, and Corinth is present-day Greece.) Silas and Timothy remain in Berea, but once Paul arrives in Athens he sends word back for them to come to him with haste. And their reunion takes place in the city of Corinth. (Acts 18.5) Whether they went back to Athens is hard to say, but it does appear that they did shortly after this to send Timothy back to Thessalonica to strengthen their faith by teaching them the Word of God, as best I understand it. (1Thes.3.2)

Paul remains in Corinth for 18 months. (Acts 17.13-15; 18.5, 11) During this time, Timothy returns to Corinth and gives him the good news of their continuance in the fellowship of the gospel. (1Thes.3.6-8) This is the letter now that Paul sends to them. All of this could have transpired in just a matter of just a few months after they had originally departed from Thessalonica. We have now established a context and scope of this letter.

Again, this is important to the interpretation and application of the truths that are to be revealed in this letter, and all such letters. The things written in this letter belong, first of all, immediately to the Thessalonians. Truths, comforts, and warnings may be applied only to those churches who are of equal standing with her before the Lord Jesus Christ. The application of those truths, comforts, and warnings in this letter cannot be made to believers outside of this context without distorting the truth.

Chapter 1

1 ¶ *Paul, and Silvanus,*

Concerning *Silvanus*, he was a faithful brother in the Lord to the apostles. (1Pe. 5.12) We know that after he has served with Paul in the gospel for some time, he will join with Peter and serves as his amanuensis to write the first letter that bears his name.

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and Timotheus,

We have already mentioned enough of Timothy's joining with Paul and Silas in the introductory remarks. Now, let's not miss this salutation.

As John Gill points out, it is just Paul's *bare name* that is used to greet the saints. No titles, no office, no credential to give force to their word. It is as if to say, 'It's us, your equals, your brethren.' The term *brethren* is used 17 times in this short letter. Great emphasis is placed on their relationship to one another in Christ through the new birth. That is what brethren are in Scripture, is it not? The first and last times they are used:

*1Th 1:4 Knowing, **brethren** beloved, your election of God.*

If we are truly brethren it is because we have been elected to salvation by the grace of God. (Ro.11.5)

*2Th 2:13 But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because **God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation** through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:*

14 Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1Co 1:27 But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;

1Co 1:28 And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:

*29 **That no flesh should glory in his presence.***

*1Th 5:27 I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy **brethren**.*

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While every brother in Christ is so by God's election of grace, so also, every brother in Christ has a right to and should read the Holy Scriptures.

Only once in this letter, and never in the second, is apostolic authority cited. (1Thes. 2.6) And then that single mention is to show that they refrained, as the apostles of Christ, that is, Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke, from being burdensome to them.

In light of this it is worth mentioning that John's gospel, the Philippian epistle, and second letter to the Thessalonians, none of these cite the apostolic office and the authority that it did possess. Only four letters, including the first Thessalonian letter.

unto the church of the Thessalonians

Since our Lord's resurrection the local aspect of the church became clearly defined. Acts 8.1 marks the first place where Scripture points to the truth that a church is local. Here are 19 such places where this is so.

*Ac 8:1 And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against **the church which was at Jerusalem**; Ac 13:1 Now there were in the church that was **at Antioch** ...; Ac 11:22 Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was **in Jerusalem** ...; Ro 16:1 I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of **the church** which is **at Cenchrea** ...; Ro 16:5 Likewise greet the church that is **in their house**; 1Co 1:2 Unto the church of God which is **at Corinth** ...; 1Co 16:19 The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with **the church that is in their house**; Col 4:15 Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and **the church which is in his house**; Col 4:16 And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in **the church of the Laodiceans** ...; 1Th 1:1 Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto **the church of the Thessalonians** ...; Phm 1:2 And to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, and to **the church in thy house** ...; 1Pe 5:13 **The***

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church that is at Babylon ...; Re 2:1 Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus ...; Re 2:8 And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna ...; Re 2:12 And to the angel of the church in Pergamos ...; Re 2:18 And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira ...; Re 3:1 And unto the angel of the church in Sardis ...; Re 3:7 And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia ...; Re 3:14 And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans ...

Here is an excerpt from the study presented on **[Wed. Apr. 24, 2014]**
Acts Series, Acts 4.31-37:

‘This church [referring to the church at Jerusalem] is a living organism that we see being empowered by the Holy Spirit of God (endued, clothed, Lk.24.49; Acts 1.8; 2.1-4), growing and perfecting in the things that she does. While the Lord Jesus was with them bodily, everything was done under His direction. The focal point was He, and rightly so. But now that He has ascended to the right hand of the Father the Holy Spirit begins to establish the church in a number of fundamental and distinctive ways. The apostles begin their proactive role in leading the church. The nature of the church [that one and only church then] becomes altered from a previously transient state; in other words, everywhere in the country of Israel that the Lord Jesus went with the apostles and disciples, there was the church; but now since Christ’s resurrection the church begins to take a much more restricted, localized personality; **she becomes the church at Jerusalem**; a church located in one place with one people in a locality that now clearly constitutes her membership there.

This really should dissolve any notion of a universal church entity. Acts 2.44 ‘were together’ means ‘into one place,’ ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό [cf.2.1 with one accord *in one place*], 47 *the Lord added to the church.*

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What are we saying? During our Lord's earthly ministry this same church becomes more defined ... [she is called for the first time the] ... *church which was at Jerusalem*. (Acts 8.1) As we progress into the book of Acts ... [she receives officers appointed as only hers] ...; her gifts more pronounced, and her doctrine established and her practice defined. When Christ was with her she had little in the way of substance. Judas carried about all that they had in a bag. (Jn.12.6) She depended on the hospitality of others along the way to rest, eat, and teach; even looking to a fish to give them the necessary *piece of money* to pay their tribute. (Mt.17.27) Then they took nothing for their travels. Yet at His anticipated departure He directs them to take things sufficient for their journey. (Lk.22.35, 36) ... After the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ this church morphed from a travelling church throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria [during our Lord's earthly ministry] into a stationary body located in the city of Jerusalem. From this same church now located in Jerusalem, even before the first missionary journey of the apostle Paul, many other churches, just like her, spring up in Judaea, Samaria, Syria and Cilicia [from her scattered members during the persecution that arose about Stephen]. (Acts 9.19; 31; 11.26; 15.41)

The Sudden and Sufficient Constitution of the Lord's N. T. Church:

Why preachers and missionaries refuse to acknowledge this truth I cannot tell, but it is the truth nonetheless. In the three Sabbaths that Paul was with them, (In as little as 15 days, and no more than 21.) where there had never been a N.T. church, **there became one**. She was by no means perfected in holiness, matured in their faith, or established upon the truth of the Word of God when Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke hastily fled to Berea. **But they were as much a church at that time as we are now after these 52 years!** (This church was established in 1962 by Wilbur Wright.) When this epistle was written this church could have been less than a year, and at the most two years of age.

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Who were they that constituted the first members of this church?

It is obvious that the Jewish influence had reached extensively throughout the habitable parts of the world. The Scriptures indicate that synagogues were in almost every place that Paul went to in his missionary travels. He went into the synagogues to preach Christ to the Jew first (Acts 17.2), of whom were also Gentile proselytes. (Acts 17.4) Whether Paul had the opportunity to preach to the Gentiles during that visit is hard to say, being they had to flee in the night to Berea. But this is who constituted the first membership of this church, plain and simple.

This is the gist of biblical, church constitution. It wasn't after they'd been catechized for a subjectively determined period of time; it isn't that they have to wait until their numbers grow (any more than 2 or 3); it isn't that they have to be a mission for umpity-ump months or years; or that they must achieve a certain level of financial stability; and it isn't even based on whether they ever have an officer (a pastor or deacon.) All that is needed is the will of God to call people together into this special, corporate service. First they organize, then teach them the commandments. Isn't that what Mt.28.19-20 teaches. Many of us have it all backwards. It is thought they can't be a church until they've first been taught. But isn't the biblical pattern Yes, there is Bible to support it, and there is a pattern established for us to follow. Preach the gospel, baptize them, and assemble them together as a habitation of the Holy Spirit, and then instruct them. (Acts 8.25 the Samaritan church; 10.48 the Caesarean church; 11.26 the Antioch church; 14.22 churches of Derbe; 14.22 churches of Iconium, Lystra, and Antioch Pisidia 14.22; et al.) **Organize the church, then teach them.**

Emphasis again upon 'to whom the letter was written':

Let us magnify the importance again at this place of context: the components of this letter; the addressees, the encouragements, the admonishments, the commandments, the blessings, the promises, the hope, the whole lot has to do with a N.T. church. While some things within the Scriptures might have slight, incidental relevance to believers outside of a N.T. church relationship, the true interpretation of everything in them belongs to the N.T. saints. (church people) These things cannot be properly applied to believers at large. In other words this letter has this

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scope; it rests upon this fixed context. It is written to a true N.T. church. To miss this point is to fail in the basic science of biblical exegesis. A preacher brother and friend asked me some time ago on a similar subject, 'What hat did you pull that one out of?' Of a truth, if we miss this point we've missed too much to be able to apply anything in this letter properly. It would be equivalent to taking the Constitution of the United States of America and trying to teach young ladies how to cook supper. The Constitution is a wonderful document, but it has a context. It can't be applied as a Betty Crocker cook book. It won't work. Taking church letters and applying them to believers outside of a church relationship is a misapplication of the Word of God, and that cannot be done without having lost some significant truth in the process.

Brethren, we cannot explain the enigmas of believers at large in Christendom. They have to be in one of the most precarious places for one who professes Christ, that there is. There is no Word for them in Scripture aside from perhaps for Mt. 5.1-10, which is called the Beatitudes. Anyone paying attention to the change in pronouns from 3rd person (1-10) to second person (ye, vs.11) misses too much in the way of interpretation.

This church had no officers:

While the point of a church has been somewhat dealt with in length at this time, please allow me to press upon all of us one last issue. It would be good to notice that there are no pastors or deacons in this church. We have in the city of Thessalonica a very young, yet fully functional church. This letter pointedly speaks to the membership. They are called upon to act, more so than in the other letters perhaps, to do the work. Recall how that the letter to the Philippians addressed the bishops and deacons as well. Ephesus, churches of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, those that James addressed in his letter, all of them were addressed as having pastors or elders. (Acts 20.28; Eph.4.11; Ja. 5.14; 1Pe.5.1) Colossae might have had a pastor. (Col. 4.17) But in Thessalonica there is no such distinction made within her membership. There are some in the that church who are doing the work as such, but they are not called pastors or deacons, for whatever reason. (1Thes. 5.11.24) But whatever the reason, we know that churches are churches even when they haven't pastors and

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deacons. The membership is encouraged to follow those who are faithful in their service to Christ. Whether it is an house church, or a church that rents or owns a place to meet, every church can do this. I'd ask that we do our best to remember this peculiarity of the Thessalonian church as we study through this letter.

which is in ἐν God the Father and [in] the Lord Jesus Christ: