

**OVERVIEW OF THE BIBLE**  
**1 THESSALONIANS**

**January 2, 2019**

**Answers to Lesson 35 – Colossians**

*Purpose of the Writing*

His primary objective was to refute some false teachings that were threatening the church.

*Gnosticism*

Gnostics taught dualism (the belief that the spirit was entirely good whereas matter was evil). God is spirit and therefore is good. Humans are matter and so are inherently evil. Their beliefs led to harsh treatments of the body (constant fasting and self-mutilation). Since matter is evil then Christ could not have been human. Christ only seemed to have a real body but was actually only spirit. Salvation was achieved by enlightenment (a special hidden knowledge by which humans could escape from their sinful bodies).

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*Hymn of Christ*

Christ is the image of the invisible God.

God was pleased to have all of his fullness dwell in his Son.

*Christ as the firstborn over all Creation*

By him all things were created. He is before all things.

He is the head of the body which is the church.

He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead.

Christ created everything – things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible.

Nothing is outside his control. He is the fullness of God.

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*Other Teachings*

To those being tempted by the Colossians' heresy, Paul tells them not to look to some mystery religion to somehow be made perfect or complete. Only Christ is sufficient to affect the completeness, wholeness and perfection in the lives of his people. Gnostics claimed that Christians were deficient but Paul said Christians were complete in Christ.

*Put Off*

Sexual immorality, impurity, lust, greed, anger, and rage

Malice, slander, filthy language, and deceit

*Put On*

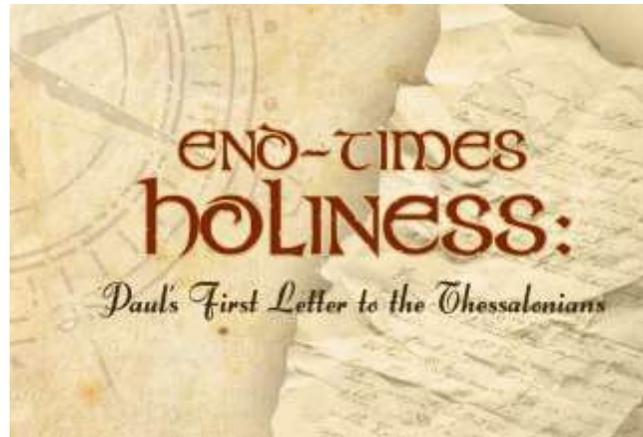
Put on the new self, which is being renewed (in knowledge) in the image of its Creator.

Characterized by forgiveness, love, unity, peace, and thankfulness

Be reliant on the Word of God and do everything in the name of the Lord.

### *Final Instructions*

Here we learn that Paul sent Tychicus to the Colossians for the express purpose of informing them of his circumstances in Rome. He encouraged them to have it affirmed that Christ is supreme and sufficient. Paul mentioned Onesimus who returned to Colossae with Tychicus. The people were to stand firm in the will of God. The letter was to be read to the Laodiceans since the heresy was prevalent there too. And at the end of the chapter he instructed them to see to it that they complete the work they received in the Lord.



Through the revelation made known to him by Christ, Paul was called to preach to the Gentiles. Not only did he establish churches but his letters witnessed to his profound love for the people. He planted house churches in strategic locations so he could send them these letters. Letters strengthened their solidarity and corrected any problems that occurred in his absence.

Both 1 and 2 Thessalonians are powerful witnesses to the struggles of the early church. Thessalonica was part of the Roman Empire. It was named for Alexander's half-sister, Thessaloniki, and was founded in 316 BC. City was a commercial and cultic center. Construction of the Via Egnatia in 130 BC made the city accessible to travelers. Thessalonica became a key trading center in the region.



Thessalonica enjoyed the status of a free city and had an independent government. People erected a statue of Augustus as one of several honors given to the Romans. Paul visited the city sometime between 41-54 AD. It is likely that the glorification of Christ precipitated the conflict within the communities. For Christians, Jesus (not Augustus) was the benefactor and inaugurator of a new age. In the eyes of the Thessalonians, support for Jesus weakened their support for Rome. Rome brought tangible benefits to them and their community. Christianity was also subversive to the basic religious practices of the Gentiles.

Apocalyptic thought made a fundamental distinction between the forces of good and evil. In his letters Paul struggled with the tension between the *already* and the *not-yet*. The *already* referred to the things God accomplished through Jesus' death and resurrection. The *not-yet* referred to those things yet to be accomplished at the Parousia. Hostilities Christians were experiencing were signs of the *old age*.

### **1 Thessalonians 1:1-5**

Paul offers a powerful message of thanksgiving. He speaks to God about a richness and productivity in the lives of the believers. Paul wanted for the people a life that was good and provided meaning. Believers had responded positively to the loving initiatives of God. They welcomed and accepted the leaders who monitored their growth. Paul commended their work of faith.



### **1 Thessalonians 1:6-2:16**

Paul begins to describe events in the more distant past. He recalls them as critical elements in the foundation of the church. It is the Word of God that the Thessalonians received in spite of persecutions. As a result the Thessalonians became an example to other believers. Paul also describes the echoing effect on other parts of Macedonia and in Achaia.

A shift takes place from the church to the foundational leaders. Paul uses the image of the parent / child relationship. Parents give advice and aid suited to the particular disposition of each child. Central to this practice was the ability to know the differing needs of each child. Not all believers are at the same place. Not all grow at the same pace. All deserve nurture and patience.

Paul then recalls the church's acceptance of the Word of God.  
That same word is at work even now among the believers.  
End result of this opposition was the separation of the leaders from the church.  
Description also shares an apocalyptic hope.  
Paul believes the volume of persecution is an indication of the imminence of the end.  
It also describes the survival of the Thessalonian church despite constant opposition.

### **1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13**

Paul now centers on the more recent period (from their departure to the timing of the letter).  
He describes the distress of the abrupt forced separation of the leaders from the church (Acts 17).  
He is less interested in naming the exact cause of the separation than indicating its toll.  
Leadership team became orphans.  
However he will persist in his efforts to return to the church.  
It is not known what blocked his way but it is described as an effort of Satan.  
Ultimately he is suggesting that the leaders and the church will reunite in spite of Satan's plots.  
He shares his joy as he thinks about the church in light of that reunion.  
Satan has blocked his way but not his joy!

In this section we learn about the stresses of leadership and the importance of trustworthy people.  
There is value in teamwork in the midst of trials that affect the ministries of the church.  
Timothy is pictured as a valued ally and unselfish minister of the Word.  
He showed an acute perception of both the needs of the leaders and the needs of the church.

Paul also includes a wish-prayer as his love for the church is expressed.  
He praises the Thessalonians for their steadfastness in the face of trials.  
He appreciates their continuous expressions of mutual support and comfort.  
At the same time Paul speaks of his desire to restore whatever is lacking in their faith.



### **1 Thessalonians 4:1-5:22**

Paul made another shift to urge the church to persist in its apocalyptic life. Christians were to be different from the larger society but they were not to isolate themselves. They were to conduct themselves as children of God. Paul challenged the Thessalonians to extend love to all. They were to come to understand the comprehensive nature of Christian morality. It takes into consideration the individual, others, and God. Morality devoid of consideration of God leads to a static form of social relations.

Verses are also filled with apocalyptic imagery that again suggests an imminent end. However it also inspires hope and gives comfort. Worship of God is the context for all of life (not just the part we devote in the sanctuary). We are to move to a depth of being so that we can give perpetual thanks. It is both possible and necessary to give thanks in everything.

### **Assignment for January 9**

Complete the Exercises from Lesson 36 on Pages 189-192  
Read 2 *Thessalonians* or the portions outlined on Page 192