The City
The modern day city of Soloniki, it was a free city, with its own government, and it also was the capital city of Macedonia. Thessalonica stood on the important Egnatian Way, Rome’s greatest highway.

The Church
In the city was a large group of Gentile proselytes (“devout Greeks,” Acts 17:4) in the synagogue, and they responded enthusiastically, along with some of the Jews. This kind of success enraged the orthodox Jews, and they engineered a mob scene to embarrass the Christians and hinder Paul’s ministry. The believers thought it best for Paul and his party to leave, which they did, going first to Berea. Paul left his associates at Berea and went alone to Athens. When Timothy joined Paul at Athens, the apostle promptly sent him back to Thessalonica to encourage the new church (1 Thes. 3:1–3). The men finally met together at Corinth (Acts 18:5). Timothy reported on the state of the infant church in Thessalonica. It was from Corinth, about the year A.D. 50, that Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians. Second Thessalonians was written just a few months later.¹

The Correspondence
The first letter had several purposes behind it: (1) to encourage and confirm the new believers in the things of Christ; (2) to answer false charges made against Paul and his ministry, 2:1–12; (3) to explain that the Christian dead would participate in the second coming of Christ; (4) to warn the Christians against pagan immorality, 4:4ff; (5) to remind the church members to honor and follow their spiritual leaders, 5:12–13; and (6) to warn believers who had given up their jobs and were idle because they thought Christ would soon return, 2:9.

Second Thessalonians was written a few months later. The persecutions against the church were getting worse (2 Thes. 1:4–5) and the people needed encouragement. The “idlers” in the church had not gone back to work (2 Thes. 3:6–12). To make matters worse, the people were confused about the Day of the Lord (the Tribulation), thinking that they were already in it! It is possible that the church had received a counterfeit epistle, claiming to be from Paul (2:1–3) and teaching that the Day of the Lord had already begun. (Note that the phrase “day of Christ” in 2 Thes. 2:2 should be “Day of the Lord,” referring to the tribulation period on earth that follows the rapture of the church.) Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians to: (1) encourage the church to persevere in spite of testing; (2) explain the events leading up to the Day of the Lord; (3) warn the busybodies to get back to work. Note that in 2 Thes. 3:17–18, Paul gives his personal “trademark” so that the people could easily detect any forged letters in the future.²

1 Thessalonians

A Suggested Outline of 1 Thessalonians

I. Personal: “We give thanks remembering ...” (1–3)

A. How the church was born (1)
   1. An elect group (1:1–5)
   2. An exemplary group (1:6–7)
   3. An enthusiastic group (1:8)
   4. An expectant group (1:9–10)

B. How the church was nurtured (2)
   1. A faithful steward (2:1–6)
   2. A gentle mother (2:7–8)
   3. A concerned father (2:9–16)
   4. A loving brother (2:14–20)

C. How the church was established (3)
   1. Through the Word (3:1–5)
   2. Through prayer (3:6–13)

II. Practical: “We beseech you ...” (4–5)

A. Walk in holiness (4:1–8)
B. Walk in love (4:9–10)
C. Walk in honesty (4:11–12)
D. Walk in hope (4:13–18)
E. Walk in light (5:1–11)
F. Walk in gratitude (5:12–13)
G. Walk in obedience (5:14–28)

• Each chapter of this epistle ends with a reference to the second coming of Christ. Paul relates His coming to: salvation (1:9–10); service (2:19–20); stability (3:13); sorrow (4:18); and sanctification (5:23). 3

1:2 – 3:13 Thanksgiving and Encouragement. It is typical for Paul to include a thanksgiving near the beginning of his letters (Galatians is a striking exception). – ESV Study bible

1:1 – 5 3 We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. 4 For we know, brothers and sisters[b] loved by God, that he has chosen you,

Paul thanks God that the Thessalonians are evidencing the essentials of the Christian life – faith, hope & love. Paul doesn’t mention his apostleship in his opening, why? It appears there are no false teachers challenging his authority in the church and no need to.

1:6 – 7 6 You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. 7 And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.

Paul speaks of the Thessalonians as an exemplary group of Christians.

1:8 – 10 8 The Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere.

The enthusiasm and living testimony of the Thessalonians spread throughout Macedonia and Achaia. What does this say about the importance of the reputation of a church?

Vs 10 the committed Christian serves in anticipation of the deliverance by Jesus from the coming wrath. Theologians differ on whether the present tense of “rescues” or “delivers” refers to the Thessalonians being delivered from the wrath at the final judgment, or all Christians being spared from the Tribulation.

Chapter 2 - Chapter 1 describes the ideal church; chapter 2 provides a picture of the ideal pastor or Christian servant. Paul has told us how the Gospel came to Thessalonica; now he tells us how he ministered to the young believers. This is an outline of Paul’s “Follow-up Program,” and it explains why most of his converts stayed true to the Lord and why his churches grew. He gives us four pictures of the ideal Christian worker. 4

2:1 – 6 3 For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. 4 On the contrary, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts. 5 You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness.

The faithful steward – lives to please God, not man. He makes God’s appeal in the face of strong opposition and does not shrink back just because of “a little suffering”.

2:7 – 8 Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, 8 so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.

The Gentle Mother - It seems odd that Paul would compare himself to a nursing mother, but the picture of nurturing love is powerful.

2:9 – 16 11 For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, 12 encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God,

which is indeed at work in you who believe. 14 For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of God’s churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own people the same things those churches suffered from the Jews 15 who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out.

The Concerned Father – He works to provide for, not be a burden to his children. His responsibility is to educate them and when they hold on to his instruction and put it into practice, it pleases him.

2:17 – 20 17 But, brothers and sisters, when we were orphaned by being separated from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. 18 For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, did, again and again—but Satan blocked our way. 19 For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you?

The Loving Brother – In the two letters to the Thessalonians, Paul uses the word “brethren” 21 times (including sisters). Paul saw himself as part of the extended family and was “orphaned” when he was away from them. Paul shows us that it’s important to behave well when one is away from the family and not just when he’s with the family.

Vs 19 – Paul saw the saints in light of Christ’s coming and it made it easy to minister with the future in mind.

Chapter 3 - The key word in this chapter is “establish” (vv. 2–3, 8, 13). New Christians go through times of testing and affliction (vv. 3, 5); and unless they are established in the Lord, they will be upset by the devil. Paul was not satisfied just to have these people saved (chap. 1) and nurtured (chap. 2); he wanted to see them established in the faith (chap. 3), able to walk (chap. 4). After all, little children must learn to stand before they can learn to walk. What means did Paul use to establish these believers in the faith? 

3:1 – 5 1 So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. 2 We sent Timothy, who is our brother and co-worker in God’s service in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, 3 so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. For you know quite well that we are destined for them.

Paul’s motive for sending Timothy was to strengthen the persecuted Thessalonians. Christians are destined to suffer for their faith (Rom 8:17-18; 2 Tim 3:12; Mark 10:30; 1 Pet 4:12-13). Apparently the Thessalonians were taken aback by the unremitting persecution. – ESV Study bible One of Paul’s biggest fears was that the churches he planted would not hold firmly to the gospel he preached to them. He had a right respect for the evil one. He knew his power, and did not underestimate it, or overestimate it.

3:6 – 13 6 But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you

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long to see us, just as we also long to see you. Therefore, brothers and sisters, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord.

Timothy’s good report encourages Paul. It’s kind of helpful to know he needed it too. Their report of faith stimulates his prayers for them and makes him long to see them again, and to really live! (for Paul to live is Christ).

Vs 13 The recurring theme of Christ’s return is mentioned here as motivation for the church to live upright and holy lives, so that we will be found blameless and holy when Jesus returns with all his holy ones! Does knowing He’s coming back motivate you in your Christian walk? How?

Chapter 4 - We move now into the second half of the letter dealing with the practical instructions for these new believers in Christ. The key word is “walk” (4:1, 12), and Paul beseeches them to obey the Word (4:1, 10, 12, 14). The Christian’s behavior is compared to a walk for several reasons: (1) it demands life, for the dead sinner cannot walk; (2) it requires growth, for a little baby cannot walk; (3) it requires liberty, for someone who is bound cannot walk; (4) it demands light, for no one wants to walk in the dark; (5) it cannot be hidden, but is witnessed by all; and (6) it suggests progress toward a goal. Paul describes the kind of walk the believer should have.

4:1 – 8 It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister. The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.

Walk in Holiness – The Thessalonians lived in a large pagan city where lust and selfishness would have prevailed before the gospel reached it. The Christians there had a huge responsibility to model a Godly family to that city. Sexual sin comes at a great price which we see in the lives of David, Samson, Judah, and others in scripture.

4:9 – 10 Now about your love for one another we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. And in fact, you do love all of God’s family throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more,

Walk in Love – Love is the circulatory system of the body of Christ. They don’t need teaching on this so their example must be for others (us). What they are good at; Paul wants them to do all the more! (1 Peter 1:22)

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4:11 – 12 11 and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, 12 so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.

Walk in Honesty -

4:13 – 18

Walk in Hope –

Chapter 5 - The final chapter gives a series of admonitions instructing the Christians how to live in the light of Christ’s coming. As we read these many exhortations, we see that there were some definite problems in the infant church. Christians were living carelessly; some were not respecting their church leaders; others were abusing the public services; and there was a general need for love and harmony among the saints. These admonitions point out how the local church can live in harmony and purity. 7

5:1 – 11

5:12 – 13

5:14 – 28

Comparison of the themes of 1 and 2 Thessalonians

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<td>1. The coming of Christ to the earth with His church</td>
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<td>2. The present age of grace</td>
<td>2. The future day of the Lord</td>
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<td>4. Reminded them of what he had taught</td>
<td>4. Corrected false teachings they had heard8</td>
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2 Thessalonians

A Suggested Outline of 2 Thessalonians

Greeting—1:1–2

I. Encouragement in Suffering (1)
   A. Suffering helps us to grow (1:3–5)
   B. Suffering prepares us for glory (1:6–10)
   C. Suffering glorifies Christ today (1:11–12)

II. Enlightenment about the Day of the Lord (2)
   A. The apostasy must take place (2:1–3)
   B. The temple must be rebuilt (2:4–5)
   C. The Restrainer must be removed (2:6–12)
   D. The church must be completed (2:13–17)

III. Establishment in Christian Living (3)
   A. Prayer and patience (3:1–5)
   B. Working and eating (3:6–13)
   C. Hearing and doing (3:14–15)

Farewell—3:16–18

Chapter 1 - The church was going through persecution (1:4–7), and some of the believers thought they were already in the Day of the Lord, that time of tribulation in which the whole world will be judged. It is possible that a letter, supposedly from Paul, had come to the church (2:1–2), or that one of the church prophets had given this false message during a public meeting. At any rate, Paul writes to explain God’s program for the age and to encourage these suffering Christians to remain true to the Lord. He points out three purposes behind their suffering.

1:3 – 5

1:6 – 10

1:11 – 12

Chapter 2 - Paul comes in this chapter to the heart of his letter, his explanation about the Day of the Lord and the Man of Sin. The Christians were “shaken” instead of established (1 Thes. 3:2, 13) because they had been told (falsely) that the Day of the Lord was already upon them. “At hand” in v. 2 should be “already present.” Paul explains that certain events must take place before this day of wrath and judgment can come to the world.¹¹

2:1 – 3

2:4 – 5

2:6 – 12

2:13 – 17

Chapter 3 - The second coming of Christ is more than a doctrine to examine and study; it is a truth to grip our lives and make us better Christians. It is not enough to know about His coming or to believe it; we must practice it in daily life. Unfortunately, some of the believers at Thessalonica were abusing the doctrine of Christ’s return. In this final chapter, Paul exhorted them to change their ways. There are three practical admonitions here.¹²

3:1 – 5

3:6 – 13

3:14 – 15

Farewell

3:16 – 18

Works Cited


