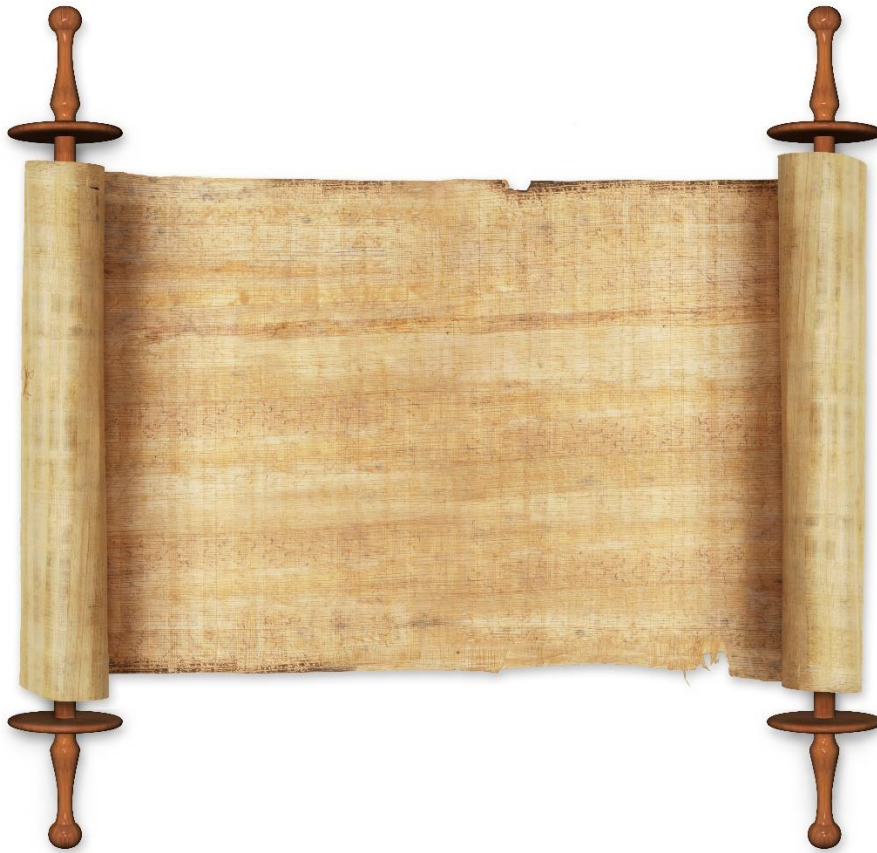


Discovering 1 and 2 Thessalonians

A Church Under Fire



by John Edmiston

Search the Scriptures for yourself and arrive at your own conclusions!



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Introduction

You will learn about salvation, persecution, faith, love, the End Times, the Resurrection, and the Man of Lawlessness as we study Paul's two epistles to a church under fire from persecution!

Each week you will answer nine questions about a Bible passage, which takes most groups about 45 minutes (five minutes per question). It is good to discuss the questions thoroughly with all members participating.

These questions are designed to get you to observe, reflect on, and then apply the truths of the Bible passage. It is important to also look at the reference verses, which are in brackets.

About 1 and 2 Thessalonians

Both letters were written by the apostle Paul, around AD 51, probably from Corinth. It was written to a relatively small, persecuted group of Christian believers in the large, wealthy Greek port city of Thessalonica, which lay on the Egnatian Way, a major Roman highway connecting Rome to Byzantium. Thessalonica was the largest city in Macedonia, with a population of around 200,000. For this reason, Thessalonica was a strategic evangelistic hub (1 Thessalonians 1:8).

The Thessalonians were mainly Gentiles and Paul says that they "turned from idols to serve the Living God" (1 Thessalonians 1:9). These epistles do not discuss the tensions between Law and Gospel, or the differences between Jews and Gentiles. This indicates an all Gentile church.

These are epistles of pastoral comfort and exhortation to holiness. Paul was acutely aware of the suffering this church was going through at the hands of local Jewish anti-Christian radicals (Acts 17:1-9).

This persecution had, as it often does, aroused a sense of the apocalyptic among the Thessalonian believers. As a result, they seem to have had many questions about the End Times, so we get some great insights into the Man of Lawlessness and the chronology of events around the Day of the Lord.

Spiritual reassurance was provided by emphasizing positive theological themes. Including the fact that the Thessalonian church was chosen, called and loved and the object of God's grace and favor, and would be established and rewarded on the day of Christ's return. They had little to look forward to in this life, but a great reward "on that Day"!

Someone once said that the goal of good preaching is to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable. Epistles such as those of James and 1 Corinthians were written to afflict the way-too-comfortable Christians in those places, but the two epistles to the Thessalonians were written to comfort the most afflicted church of that time. As such, it is full of praise and encouragement for the spiritual progress that they have achieved and for their remarkable faith and love.

However, Paul firmly rebukes idleness, immorality and several other issues where things were getting out of line. The Thessalonians do not get a free pass from apostolic exhortation. The importance of having a solid Christian work ethic is brought to the fore. The apostle does not let them dwell in a holy huddle, persecuted and afraid, unable to go out the front door. He exhorts them to work, to participate in life and to be active.

1 Thessalonians Chapter One - An Exemplary Church

1. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1 - Who wrote this epistle? And who was it written to? What was the earthly location of this church? And what was the heavenly location of this church? How are churches both a local community and a heavenly community?
2. What was Paul's: a) emotional response and b) his spiritual response to this church (1 Thessalonians 1:2)? Why should we pray for the churches we are involved with?
3. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:2,3 - What was Paul thankful for? What made Paul, Silas and Timothy proud of the church in Thessalonica?
4. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:4,5 - What were the sure signs that God had chosen them for salvation? How can a merely intellectual "in word" faith be insufficient for someone to be fully born-again?
5. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:6,7 - Paul says that the Thessalonians were an example of faith to the other churches and "imitators of us and of the Lord". This is a very high commendation. What caused Paul to say this about them?
6. How is the joy of the Lord our strength in the midst of trials and afflictions? (1 Thessalonians 1:6, Nehemiah 8:10) How can we experience God's supernatural joy?
7. People are watching our faith. They are observing how we react under stress. What was the effect of the supernatural level of faith possessed by the persecuted church in Thessalonica? (1 Thessalonians 1:7)
8. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:9 - What massive change happened in the lives of these believers? How did other people notice this change? How can we have a glorious testimony for the Lord Jesus Christ?
9. What were the Thessalonians waiting for (1 Thessalonians 1:10)? How is Jesus our Heavenly Savior?

1 Thessalonians Chapter Two – Exemplary Apostles

1. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-6 How did Paul, Silas and Timothy demonstrate truth and integrity as they preached the gospel? What suffering did they undergo at Philippi just before they went to Thessalonica (Acts 16:16-24)?
2. How can seeking approval and glory be a trap for ministers of the Gospel (1 Thessalonians 2:4,6; Galatians 1:10; John 5:44, 7:18, 8:40)
3. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12 How did Paul and Silas and Timothy demonstrate genuine affection and deep concern for the new believers? How was this reflected in their conduct as ministers of the gospel?
4. Why is it important that we “walk worthy” (1 Thessalonians 2:12, Ephesians 4:1-3, Colossians 1:10, Revelations 3:4-6)
5. Why did Paul present the gospel free and without charge when, in fact, he had every right to earn his living from the gospel? (2 Thessalonians 2: 9, 1 Timothy 5:17,18; 1 Corinthians 9:6-18)
6. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:13 - How did the Thessalonian church regard the Word of God? What should be our attitude to the Scriptures? (2 Peter 1:16-21, Hebrews 4:12, 2 Timothy 3:16,17)
7. What experience did the Thessalonians share with the church in Judea (1 Thessalonians 2:14-16)? What was going to happen to the disobedient Jews in Judea because of their persecution of those who are of faith? What is the wrath of God?
8. In what ways does Satan hinder the work of the gospel? (1 Thessalonians 2:17,18)
9. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:19,20 What does Paul rejoice in? How is Paul’s boasting different from worldly boasting (2 Corinthians 10:13-18)?

1 Thessalonians Chapter Three – Survivors of Persecution

Note: The word for afflictions here is “thlipsis” and it was originally used for a death sentence where the prisoner had a huge rock placed on their chest which slowly crushed them to death. In time, it came to mean an overwhelming, crushing and destructive burden. It is a very strong term that goes beyond ordinary levels of suffering.

1. Read 1 Thessalonians 3:1-5 – Why did Paul send Timothy to the Thessalonian Church? How intense was his concern, and why was Paul concerned?
2. In the light of this passage, why should we be genuinely concerned about the faith of other Christians, particularly Christians undergoing persecution for their faith?
3. How true is the common saying that “God will not give you any more than you can bear”? Or rather, does God give us the means to bear it, especially when other believers pray and help us through? (see also 1 Corinthians 10:13, 1 Peter 1:6,7)
4. What was Paul’s perspective on the inevitability of our suffering for Christ Jesus? (1 Thessalonians 3:4,5; 2 Timothy 3:12, Acts 14:22)
5. What was Paul’s reaction to the good news that the Thessalonians were standing firm in their faith (1 Thessalonians 3:6-8)? How do strong Kingdom values, like those of the apostle Paul, give us entirely different priorities and motivations from that of the world?
6. Read 1 Thessalonians 3:9,10 – What was Paul giving thanks for? What was Paul joyful about? What was Paul praying for?
7. How does God direct our paths? (1 Thessalonians 3:11, Proverbs 3:5,6; Isaiah 45:13, 61:8; Jeremiah 10:23, James 4:13-17)
8. What does it mean to increase and abound in love for one another? (1 Thessalonians 3:12, 2 Thessalonians 1:3, 1 John 3:11-19)
9. Read 1 Thessalonians 3:13 – What does it mean to have our hearts established blameless in holiness? How important is holiness (Hebrews 12:14)? Who accompanies Jesus when He returns in glory?

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12 - Leading A Holy Life

1. "If something works, then do more of it! If something does not work, then stop doing it!" How is this also a useful rule for the Christian life (1 Thessalonians 4:1,10)?
2. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1,2 -" For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus" – How is apostolic authority directly derived from the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ? And how much of this authority belongs to church leaders today?
3. Sexual immorality is rampant today, even among some Christians. What does God say about it (1 Thessalonians 4:3-7)? What is God's purpose for us and for our bodies?
4. God avenges sexual immorality, especially adultery (1 Thessalonians 4:6, Hebrews 13:4, Ephesians 5:5,6). Have you seen this happen in real life? Why should Christians fear God and adopt a holy lifestyle?
5. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:8 – How do people disregard God?
6. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:9 – How did God teach the Thessalonians to love one another? (John 14:26, 1 John 2:20-27, Jeremiah 31:34, Hebrews 8:10-11)
7. How can we become sensitive to the anointing and instruction of the Lord through the Holy Spirit?
8. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:10-12 – What kind of Christian lifestyle is being portrayed here? How is it different from an ego-driven worldly lifestyle? What is it like to be a "good neighbor"?
9. Why should Christians be independent, good providers, and self-sufficient? (1 Thessalonians 4:11,12; 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12, Acts 20:35, Titus 3:14)

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 - The Resurrection of the Saints

1. Why does the Bible refer to the dead as those who have "fallen asleep" in contrast with the living, who are "awake"? (1 Thessalonians 4: 13-15, 5:10; 1 Kings 2:10, Daniel 12:2, Matthew 27:52, John 11:11-13, Acts 7:60, 1 Corinthians 15:6,18; 2 Peter 3:4)
2. Do the souls who are now in Heaven have some form of consciousness? (2 Corinthians 5:8, Philippians 1:20-24, Romans 8:38,39; Revelation 6:9-11, 7:9-17)
3. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:14 – How is Christian hope different from worldly grief? (1 Corinthians 15:19-22, Ephesians 2:12, Job 19:25-27, 1 Peter 1:3)
4. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 - Does the Rapture of the living saints occur:
 - a) Before the Resurrection of the Dead
 - b) At the same time as the Resurrection of the Dead
 - c) Just after the Resurrection of the Dead
5. What will the Last Trumpet be like? (Matthew 24:29-31, 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 1 Corinthians 15:50-54) Does this occur before or after the Tribulation (Matthew 24:29)?
6. What happens to those who are still alive at the coming of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:17, Matthew 24:31)?
7. How does Jesus come with the clouds (1 Thessalonians 4:17, Matthew 24:30, Mark 14:62, Revelation 1:7)? For more on this interesting topic see my article: https://www.globalchristians.org/articles/clouds_of_heaven.html
8. "And so, we will always be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:17). What will the eternal state be like (Revelation 7:14-17, 21:1-8, 22:1-5)?
9. How can the Scriptures comfort and encourage us during our times of grief? (1 Thessalonians 4:18, Romans 15:4, 2 Corinthians 1:3,4)

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 Like A Thief In The Night!

1. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1,2 - The Day of the Lord will come "like a thief in the night" (see also Acts 1:6-8, Matthew 24:36-44, 25:13; Mark 13:32-37, 2 Peter 3:10, Revelation 3:3) What are the implications of this for:
 - Those who set dates for the End Times?
 - The rebellious World System that does not fear God?
 - Slack and apathetic Christians who have lost their spiritual zeal? (Matthew 25:1-13)
 - Bible-believing, born-again Christians who are waiting on the Lord?
2. What will be the attitude of the sinful world at the time of the return of Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:3)? How will this be like the days of Noah and of Lot? (Luke 17:26-30)
3. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:4-8 - What does it mean to be "children of light" who are not in darkness? (John 8:12, Ephesians 5:8-14, Colossians 1:12, 13; 1 Peter 2:9, 1 John 1:5-7)
4. Read both 1 Thessalonians 5:6,8 and Romans 13:11-14 – What are some ways that Christians can reject spiritual apathy and live a holy, awake and sober lifestyle?
5. What is the armor of God and how can we put it on (1 Thessalonians 5:8, Ephesians 6:10-18, 2 Corinthians 6:7, 10:4,5; Isaiah 59:17)?
6. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:9 - How are Christians delivered from the eternal wrath of God (2 Thessalonians 1:9) and destined for salvation (1 Thessalonians 1:10, Romans 8:1,2; John 3:36, 5:24-29, Ephesians 2:1-7)?
7. Do Christians experience the wrath of Satan (persecution) (Revelation 12:12,17; Matthew 10:16-25)? Why are we not to be afraid if this happens (Matthew 10:26-33)? What is the difference between the wrath of Satan, which kills the body, and the wrath of God, which destroys the soul (Revelation 20:6, 21:8)?
8. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:10 – How does the death of Jesus Christ on the Cross guarantee that Christians will experience eternal life in the presence of God? (Romans 6:23, 8:5-8, 14:8,9; 1 Peter 2:24)
9. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:11 – How does spiritual encouragement help us to remain awake, holy and zealous in Christ Jesus? How can we encourage one another in Christ?

1 Thessalonians 5:12-28 Final Instructions

1. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12,13 How are we to treat our pastors, teachers and elders?
2. Some folk need a bit of a nudge along in life (1 Thessalonians 5:14) how are we to exercise both grace and exhortation?
3. How should we react when a brother or sister in Christ wrongs us? (1 Thessalonians 5:15, Romans 12:17-21, Matthew 5:43-48, 18:15-17, 1 Corinthians 6:1-7)
4. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 – What are three things that believers are to do on a continual, ongoing basis? How would they strengthen Christians undergoing persecution or living in a very sinful world?
5. What does it mean to quench the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19)? How can we be more open the Holy Spirit moving in our midst? How does our fear of the unusual sometimes cause us to miss out spiritually?
6. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:20-22 – **Explanation:** Old Testament prophecy (Hebrew: *nabi*) resulted in Scripture, and came to an end with John the Baptist (Matthew 11:11-14). In contrast, New Testament prophecy (Greek: *prophetes*) is a spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 12:10) of great impact (1 Corinthians 14:3,25) but which is non-authoritative (did not write Scripture). It is a revelatory experience (1 Corinthians 14:30) common to believers (Acts 2:17,18) who may all prophesy one-by-one (1 Corinthians 14:24,31). These revelations are not to be despised (1 Thessalonians 5:20), but they are to be tested (1 Corinthians 14:29, 1 Thessalonians 5:21). As part of this testing we are to hold fast that which is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21) and abstain from and reject that which is evil (1 Corinthians 5:22). Since prophecy was a messy spiritual gift that required so much testing and discernment it tended to be despised (1 Thessalonians 5:20). How can we correctly implement Paul's instructions for congregational prophecy as a spiritual gift?
7. What are the three parts of the Christian person (1 Thessalonians 5:23)?
8. How is God faithful to sanctify Christians (1 Thessalonians 5:23,24)?
9. If an apostle can ask for prayer (1 Thessalonians 5:25) shouldn't we also ask for the prayers of our brothers and sisters in Christ?

2 Thessalonians Chapter 1 – The Righteous Judgment of God

1. Read 2 Thessalonians 1:1,2 - this greeting is very similar to that of 1 Thessalonians and most commentators agree that it was written shortly after 1 Thessalonians, to fill in some of the specific timing questions concerning the Lord's Return and other matters. Have you ever written something and then had to send a "follow-up email" because your first email raised so many questions? What do you think it was like being an apostle in the first century?
2. Read 2 Thessalonians 1:3,4 – What were the signs that their faith was growing abundantly? How can our faith grow from strength to strength?
3. Read 2 Thessalonians 1:4,5 – What does it mean to be worthy of the Kingdom of God? (2 Thessalonians 1:11, Matthew 10:34-39, Philippians 1:27, Revelation 3:4)
4. Read 2 Thessalonians 1:5-7 – What will happen to a) believers and b) unbelievers when the righteous judgment of God is revealed?
5. Does God take revenge (Isaiah 34:8,9, 35:4)? What are the two types of people that the Lord will take vengeance on in the day of wrath (2 Thessalonians 1:8)?
6. Read 2 Thessalonians 1:9 – What is eternal destruction? (Isaiah 33:14, 66:24; Daniel 12:2, Matthew 25:41-46, Luke 16:23-26, Revelation 14:10-11; 20:13-15, 21:6-8)
7. "When He comes to on that day to be glorified in His saints" (2 Thessalonians 1:10,12) How will God be glorified when we are resurrected from the dead, holy, blameless and undefiled? (Romans 8:17-23,30; 1 Corinthians 15:35-58)
8. Read 2 Thessalonians 1:11,12 - What is Paul praying for? Have you ever prayed a prayer like this? How should we pray for our fellow Christians?
9. Review 2 Thessalonians 1:10-12 What are your sources of earthly and worldly glory (money, sex, power, beauty, social prestige)? What are your sources of heavenly glory (love, fruit of the Spirit, holiness, patient endurance, faith)? How should a Christian set their priorities?

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 The Man of Lawlessness

1. Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1 – What is this section about? Does it seem that the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him, are the same event, or two different events?
2. Read 2 Thessalonians 2:2 – What rumor was Paul trying to address? What was the effect that the rumor was having on the Church? Why should pastors specifically address false teaching affecting their congregation?
3. Read 2 Thessalonians 2:3 – What event has to happen before Christ returns? Can Jesus return “at any time” (Matthew 24:14)?
4. Read 2 Thessalonians 2:3-5 – Is the Man of Lawlessness religious or non-religious (2 Thessalonians 2:4, Daniel 11:36-38, 1 John 2:18-22, 4:3; Revelation 13:6,7)? What are some of his attitudes and characteristics? Where does he set up his throne?
5. Read 2 Thessalonians 2:6,7 – Why hasn’t the Man of Lawlessness appeared yet and made himself known?
6. Read 2 Thessalonians 2:8 – What is the eventual fate of the Man of Lawlessness?
7. Read 2 Thessalonians 2:9 – What deceptive tricks are used by the Man of Lawlessness? (see also Matthew 7:21-23, 24:24; Mark 13:22, Revelation 13:11-15, 16:14,19:20)
8. What kind of people are deceived by the false signs and wonders (2 Thessalonians 2:10)
9. How does God bring into judgment those who refuse the truth and who “have pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 Thessalonians 2:11,12; Romans 1:18-32)?

2 Thessalonians 2:13-17 Chosen, Called and Loved

1. Read 2 Thessalonians 2:13,16 and 1 John 4:7-21 – Paul calls the Thessalonians “brothers beloved by the Lord”, and the apostle John tells us that “we love because He first loved us”. How does this amazing truth that God loves us serve as a foundation for the way we: a) regard other Christians and b) love other Christians?
2. How does it challenge you to learn that we did not earn our salvation, but rather God chose us to be saved (2 Thessalonians 2:13, Romans 8:29,30; Ephesians 1:3-5, John 15:16,19; Colossians 3:12) and His choice was not according to human standards (1 Corinthians 1:26-31)?
3. Read 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 – How do sanctification, belief in truth and the gospel work together as part of the process of salvation?
4. Read 2 Thessalonians 2:14 – What are we called to obtain? (John 17:22-24, Romans 8:17, Ephesians 1:18, 2 Timothy 2:10, 1 Peter 5:10) How does this change your ideas about the purpose of your life?
5. Read 2 Thessalonians 2:15 – Why is it important to hold fast to established truth and not run after “every wind of doctrine” (Romans 16:17, Ephesians 4:13,14)?
6. Read 2 Thessalonians 2:16 – Do you gain “eternal comfort and good hope” by your own good works and deeds or by God’s grace (Ephesians 2:8-10, Romans 11:5,6)?
7. Read Ephesians 2:16,17 – The word “comfort” is used twice. Why is God’s comfort of our hearts important to persecuted churches such as the Thessalonian church? How can God’s inner comfort get us through the trials of life?
8. Even though we are saved by grace we still need to be established in every good deed and word (2 Thessalonians 2:17, Ephesians 2:8-10, 1 John 3:16-20). How can we live life outwardly as a reflection and manifestation of how we have been transformed inwardly (1 Peter 2:12, Revelation 14:13)?
9. How does the fact that you are “chosen, called and loved” change your self-concept and self-esteem and give you godly assurance?

2 Thessalonians 3:1-5 Steadfast Saints in an Evil World

1. Read 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5 – What thoughts, emotions and truths is Paul trying to convey in this Bible passage?
2. Read 2 Thessalonians 3:1 – How should we pray for the spread of the Gospel? Do you personally know any missionaries?
3. Read 2 Thessalonians 3:2 – What kind of dangers do missionaries face? Why do wicked and evil people oppose the teaching of Jesus Christ? What will they resort to in order to prevent the spread of the Gospel?
4. “For not all have faith”. (2 Thessalonians 3:2) - How does this statement refute the false doctrine of Universalism, which is that God saves everyone through the Cross of Christ?
5. Read 2 Thessalonians 3:3,4 – How does God’s faithfulness protect obedient believers from demonic attack?
6. Read 2 Thessalonians 3:4 – Why does the apostle Paul insist on spiritual obedience? Why is compliance with the teaching of Christ and the apostles essential for every believer?
7. Read 2 Thessalonians 3:5 – Why does the Lord need to “direct our hearts” (1 Samuel 7:3, 1 Chronicles 29:16-19)? Why aren’t we just naturally good (Jeremiah 17:9,10)?
8. Why should we focus our hearts on the love of God (2 Thessalonians 3:5, Ephesians 3:19, James 1:12, 2:5; 1 John 2:3-6)?
9. What does it mean to be “steadfast” through the storms of life with the steadfastness of Christ (2 Thessalonians 3:5, 1 Corinthians 15:58, Colossians 1:23, Hebrews 6:19)?

2 Thessalonians 3:6-18 Work Matters

1. Read 2 Thessalonians 3:6 – What is Paul’s opinion of idle and lazy people? What is wrong with being lazy (Proverbs 19:15, 21:25-26; 26:13-16; Matthew 25:26-30)?
2. Read 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9 – How did Paul demonstrate a good Christian lifestyle to the Thessalonians during his short time of ministry among them (about three weeks)?
3. Read 2 Thessalonians 3:10 – What is meant by the phrase “not willing to work” and how does that differ from “unable to work”? Should Christians have a “handout mentality”? What about adult Christians living in basements playing video games and not getting a job that pays a decent wage?
4. Read 2 Thessalonians 3:11-12 and 1 Timothy 5:13 – Why are lazy busybodies a nuisance? What should they do instead? What does a responsible lifestyle look like? Why do some people always avoid responsibility?
5. Does the Christian life sometimes seem laborious (2 Thessalonians 3:13, 1 Corinthians 15:58, Galatians 6:9-10, Hebrews 12:3)? How does God comfort us (Matthew 11:28-30)?
6. Read 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15 – What does Paul instruct the Thessalonians to do with lazy, immoral or disobedient Christians (2 Thessalonians 3:6,14; 1 Corinthians 5:9-13, 2 Timothy 3:1-5, Titus 3:10, 2 John 1:10,11)? Will this work if there is more than one local church in a city? How do all the different denominations make church discipline difficult?
7. How is God the “Lord of Peace” (2 Thessalonians 3:16, Romans 15:33, 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:11, Hebrews 13:20,21)? How do we obtain the peace of God (Romans 5:1-5, 14:17, 15:13; Philippians 4:6-9)?
8. Most of the epistle would have been written down by a paid scribe or amanuensis but Paul appended his personal handwritten greeting at the end (2 Thessalonians 3:17, 1 Corinthians 16:21, Galatians 6:11, Colossians 4:18) as Paul may have had poor eyesight (Galatians 4:15). Why would Paul have been concerned about fake epistles and scams (2 Thessalonians 2:2)?
9. Read 2 Thessalonians 3:18 – Why do we still need grace even after we have been saved (Romans 16:20, Galatians 6:18, Philippians 4:23)?