

CHAPTER 8

Prescription for New Believers (1 and 2 Thessalonians)

The city of Thessalonica was a large seaport city located in Macedonia (Northern Greece). Can you find Macedonia and the city of Thessalonica on the following map?



[The above map was taken from *The MacMillian Bible Atlas* by Yohanan Aharoni and Michael Avi-Yonah (map #238).]

Thessalonica was similar in many ways to the city of Corinth (see **Chapter 6**). Thessalonica was also a "city of sin." Most of the people worshipped idols (compare 1 Thessalonians 1:9). The city was filled with all kinds of wickedness and the sin of fornication was a great problem, just as it was in Corinth (see **Chapter 6** and compare 1 Thess. 4:3). God loves to reach down and save those who are lost in sin, and in 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 the Apostle Paul thanked God for the great work of salvation which He accomplished in the hearts of the Thessalonian Christians.

How did a church begin in this city? Who preached the gospel to these people? The answer to these questions is found in Acts 17:1-9. Paul came to the city of Thessalonica on his second missionary journey. As Paul preached *the good news of salvation* to these people, did some believe (Acts 17:4)? _____ Did everyone believe (Acts 17:5)? _____ Finally the unbelievers caused so much trouble that Paul and Silas were forced to leave the city (Acts 17:5-10).

Paul was very much concerned for these new believers that he left behind in the city of Thessalonica. Usually Paul would spend many months with new believers to teach them and to strengthen them in the faith. However, because of persecution he was not able to do this with the

Thessalonians. Did Paul want to return to Thessalonica and see these believers again (1 Thessalonians 3:6,10)? _____ Even though Paul was unable to visit these Christians, he was able to send Timothy (see 1 Thess. 3:2) on a dangerous mission to strengthen and encourage the Thessalonian Christians in their faith.

When Timothy finally returned to Paul, what message did he bring? Read 1 Thessalonians 3:6-7 and circle the correct answer.

- a. "Paul, the Thessalonians have turned away from the Lord and have gone back to worshipping idols."
- b. "Paul, I have bad news. The Thessalonians no longer love the Lord, and they never want to see you again."
- c. "Paul, I have good news. The Thessalonians are continuing to trust Christ even though they are still being persecuted. They really want to see you again!"
- d. "Paul, the unbelievers killed all the believers in the city of Thessalonica, and there are none left!"

Paul's heart rejoiced when he heard the good news which Timothy brought, and he sent these Christians a letter (**1 Thessalonians**) to remind them of the things he had taught them, to comfort them in all of their trouble and to help them to understand certain things about the coming of the Lord. Not long after this, he sent another letter (**2 Thessalonians**) to correct some wrong teaching that had come into the church (2 Thessalonians chapter 2) and to correct some wrong conduct among some of the church members (2 Thessalonians chapter 3).

Both of these letters to the Thessalonians were written very early, only about 20 years after the death and resurrection of Christ. These were two of Paul's earliest letters. They were written about 51 A.D. The only letter which may have been written earlier was Paul's letter to the Galatians which may have been written 48-49 A.D.

These two letters were written to new Christians. What are some of the things that new believers need to understand? What are some of the things that every Christian should understand? Let us now consider twelve things that every new Christian should be taught:

Instructions for New Believers

1) The new believer must realize that the Christian life is not a bed of roses.

When a person becomes a Christian, this does not mean that difficulties and troubles will cease. Did the Thessalonian Christians have much **affliction** (trouble, pressures, problems, trials) according to 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 3:3-4; 2 Thessalonians 1:4,6? _____ Did God allow them to suffer (1 Thess. 2:14; 2 Thess. 1:5)? _____ Did Paul tell them to expect an easy life, or did he tell them that they would suffer tribulation (1 Thess. 3:4)?

Did the Lord Jesus also tell His disciples to expect tribulation and trouble as long as they were in this world (John 16:33)? _____ Is the believer in the world (John 16:33; 17:11)? _____ Is the believer also in Christ (John 16:33)? _____ In the world there is tribulation but in Christ there is P_____ (John 16:33). In the middle of the trouble we can have **peace**, knowing that Christ has already won the victory!

2) The new believer must learn to rejoice at all times.

Not only did the Thessalonians have **affliction** (trouble and persecution) but they also had J _____ (1 Thess. 1:6). When Paul wrote to them, he reminded them of this and told them to R _____ evermore (1 Thess. 5:16). Believers should always be rejoicing! As we have seen, this was the same message Paul sent to the Philippians: "R _____ in the Lord _____: and again I say _____" (Philippians 4:4).

3) The new believer must have the right attitude towards God's Word.

When a person is saved, he **receives** God's Word into his heart and God's Word finds a home in his heart (see 1 Thess. 1:6 and compare Acts 2:41 and 17:11). After a person is saved, he should continue to receive God's Word. How did the Thessalonians receive God's Word according to 1 Thessalonians 2:13 (circle the correct answer)?

- They received it as they would receive any other piece of writing. They considered it to be only the words of men and not the words of God.
- They received it with much doubt and uncertainty. They were not sure it was really true.
- They received it, but they were also ready to listen to what other philosophers from Greece might teach about life and death.
- They received it as the Word of God and not as the word of men, and they believed it with all their hearts.

Have you really accepted the Bible as God's message to you?

4). The new believer must be conscious of God moment by moment.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:17 Paul gave the Thessalonians this important command: P _____ without _____. When a person really prays in the right way, he is very much aware of God's presence. As we go through the day, we are to remember that God is right there with us and able to help us. We can call upon Him at any time and in any place. Praying without ceasing does not mean that we are on our knees 24 hours each day, but it does mean that as we walk through each day, we are aware that the living God walks with us. We are conscious of His Person and His presence. We are learning to enjoy Him!

If we were walking along a roadside with a friend, would we be aware of his (or her) presence? Would we probably talk with this person frequently? Would we enjoy being with this person? So also as we walk with God, we can be aware of His presence (even though we can't see Him). We can talk to Him at any time as we enjoy that wonderful relationship and fellowship that we have with Him.

5) The new believer must be thankful in everything.

We would almost expect the Thessalonians to be filled with **complaining** because of all of the trouble and persecution that they were going through. But Paul told them to be filled with **thanksgiving**: "In _____ give _____: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (1 Thess. 5:18).

Every new Christian can say, "Thank you!" Even though times may be difficult, we can say, "Thank you!" Even though there are many things we do not understand, we can say, "Thank you!" God is in control, God knows what He is doing, and God does all things well! Because of this, everyday should be a Thanksgiving Day!

6) The new believer must let the Spirit of God work in his life.

What precious gift did God give to every believer the moment he or she was saved (1 Thess. 4:8)? _____ The Spirit of God wants to work in our lives, but sometimes we refuse to let Him do His mighty work in us! Paul told the Thessalonians: "_____ not the _____" (1 Thess. 5:19). Do not **quench** the Spirit! Just as a fire is quenched by water, so the Spirit is quenched whenever the believer says "NO!" to God. We must always say "YES!" to the Lord: "Yes Lord, I'll do whatever You want me to do! Yes Lord, I'll go wherever You want me to go! Yes Lord, I'll say whatever you want me to say!" We can also quench the Spirit when we say "YES" after God has said "NO!" When God says, "DON'T!" it is wrong for the believer to say, "YES I WILL!" We will not quench the Spirit when we yield to God's wonderful will and we submit to His commands as revealed in His Word.

7) The new believer must live a holy life, pleasing the Lord.

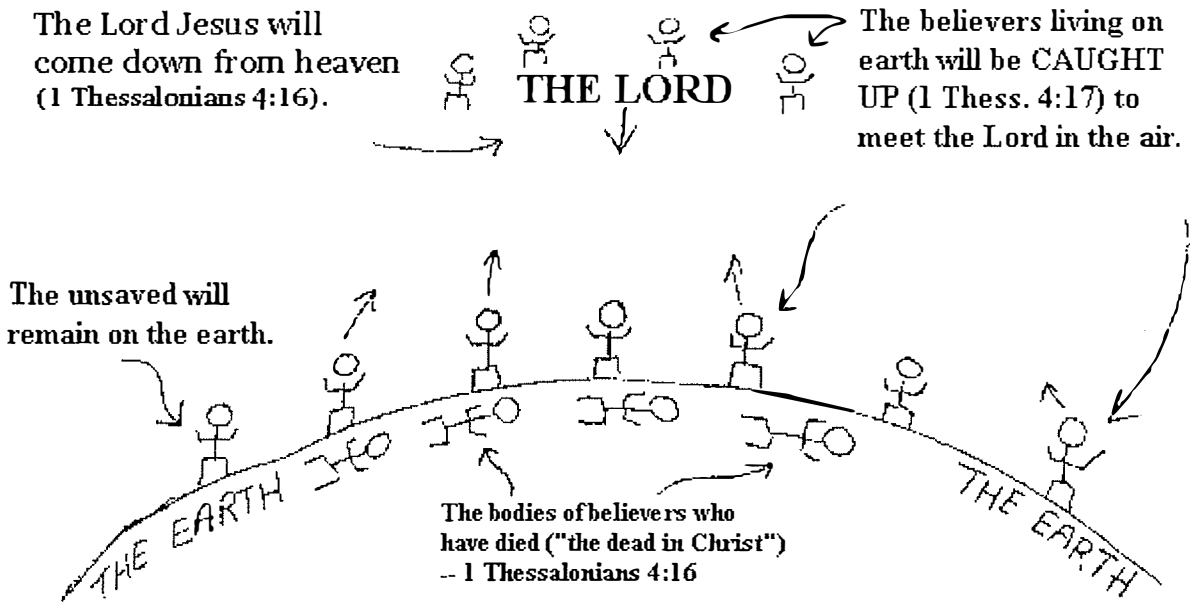
God has given us the Holy Spirit so that we can live a holy life. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians about holiness in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 (the word "sanctification" in verses 3 and 4 can also be translated "holiness"). Remember, these Christians lived in the middle of a wicked city where they were tempted every day to do wrong and to fall into sin. But the God who lived in them could help them to have victory and to live differently than those who "K _____ N _____ G _____" (1 Thess. 4:5).

8) The new believer must look for the coming of the Lord.

Paul helped these new Christians to get their eyes off their problems and onto the Lord Jesus Christ who was coming again for them. Every chapter in the Book of 1 Thessalonians ends by mentioning the coming of the Lord (or as some would call it, "the rapture"). Can you find these verses?

Chapter 1: _____
 Chapter 2: _____
 Chapter 3: _____
 Chapter 4: _____
 Chapter 5: _____

The most detailed section about the Lord's coming is found in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18:



9) The new believer needs to be taught about the devil.

Did Paul believe in a real devil who actually tempts people (1 Thess. 3:5)? _____ Second Thessalonians 2:1-12 reveals much about Satan and what Satan will try to accomplish in the future. As you read these verses, what are some of the things you learn about Satan, and Satan's man (the man of sin, the Antichrist) and Satan's power? What will happen to those people who love Satan's lie more than God's truth?

10) The new believer needs to be taught about his responsibilities to his daily work.

Satan is pleased when believers become lazy and fail to do those things that please the Lord and that are a good testimony to others. There were people in the Thessalonian church who were not working at all (see 1 Thess. 4:11; 2 Thess. 3:10-12). Paul had some strong words for these people and even said that if they did not work, neither should they _____ (2 Thess. 3:10).

When a person is saved, this should not make him or her a poor worker, a poor student, or a sloppy homemaker! The Christian should trust God to help him to be the very best worker or the best student he can possibly be for the glory of God. The Christian woman should trust God to help her to be the best homemaker and mother and wife that she can possibly be, just as the believing man should trust God to be the best husband, father and provider that he can possibly be!

11) The new believer should respect and love those whom God has put over him as leaders.

There were certain men in the Thessalonian church who were the leaders and who were responsible for the spiritual welfare of the flock (the believers). Paul told the Thessalonian Christians to be sure that they had the right attitude towards these men (see 1 Thess. 5:12-13).

Do you respect and love your Pastor and other church leaders? Do you pray for them as they

carry out their work day by day? Do you seek to help them in every way you can? What are some of the ways you can help them?

12) The new believer should never reach the point where he thinks he has arrived.

Even though the Thessalonians were new believers, they were doing very well. Paul remembered their faith, their love and their hope (1 Thess. 1:3). But even though they were doing well, Paul wanted them to do much better!

Was Paul thankful for the faith which these Christians had (1 Thess. 3:6)? _____ Was their faith all that it should have been, or did their faith need improvement (1 Thess. 3:10)? _____
 Was their love all that it should have been, or did Paul want their love to increase more and more (1 Thess. 3:12)? _____

Did these Christians love one another (1 Thess. 4:9)? _____ Did Paul want their love to stay the same or increase (1 Thess. 4:10)? _____

We must never think we have arrived, no matter how well we may be doing in some area of our Christian life. Whatever we are doing right, God wants us to do better and better, showing more and more love for God and for others! Whatever we might be doing that is good, God wants it to increase and reflect Him more and more!

Can a Christian ever say, "I've arrived! I no longer need to grow!"? _____

May God help us to go on and on, and have more and more of those things He wants us to have!

