

THE
DISCIPLESHIP
PLACE

Telling the New Testament
Story of God



SESSION 12

Galatians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians

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Galatians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians

SESSION OVERVIEW

**The Art of Letter Writing:
Galatians and Thessalonians**

The Letter to the Galatians: Letter of Rebuke

The Letters to the Thessalonians

Application

Exam

Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should:

- gain an understanding of the purposes and uses of letters in the first century.
- know the purpose and main content for Paul's letters to the Galatians and Thessalonians.

INTRODUCTION

Again, we will briefly review a selection of the types of letters learned in school and used by literate people of the first century. We will expand on the types reflected in Galatians and 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Following this examination, we will survey Galatians and 1 and 2 Thessalonians through the lens of Who, What, Where, When, and Why. These two letters further exemplify the wide range of problems and issues confronted by Paul in his missionary endeavors.

THE ART OF LETTER WRITING: GALATIANS AND THESSALONIANS

NOTES

An examination of Galatians and 1 and 2 Thessalonians according to the types of ancient letters presented by Stanley Stowers, reveals that Paul's letters to the region of Galatia and the city of Thessalonica demonstrate the traits of letters of exhortation and advice. Stowers subdivided these types into seven subtypes, five of which are included in Paul's letters to the audiences of Galatia and Thessalonica. These subtypes include: paraenetic letters, letters of admonition, letters of rebuke, letters of reproach, and letters of consolation.

Paraenetic Letters (Exhortation and Dissuasion). In a sample letter, the ancient scholar Libanius illustrated the need to provide a positive model of behavior the reader is either explicitly or implicitly urged to imitate. The author's own behavior may be given as an example.

Paraenesis concerns those basic and unquestioned patterns of behavior that are sanctioned by honor and shame. It is not supposed to teach anything new. Exhortation plays a major role in all the letters of Paul and the Pauline school, except Philemon. Second Thessalonians is an excellent example of a paraenetic letter.

Letters of Admonition. The gentlest type of blame was admonition. It is the instilling of sense in the person who is being admonished, and teaching what should and should not be done. The writer constructively criticizes certain aspects of the reader's behavior. Admonition is used very consciously and explicitly in the letters of Paul. Second Thessalonians 3:6-12 admonishes certain people in the community and 3:15 urges members to admonish one another.

Letters of Rebuke. Rebuke was considered harsher than admonition. Rebuke was directed at fundamental flaws of character or a basic pattern of immoral behavior. The rebuker tried to shame the sinner into stopping the misbehavior and often explicitly called for a change to an honorable way of life. Paul used rebuke in his letter to the Galatians (1:6-10, 3:1-5, 4:8-10). His expression, I am amazed, and his denunciation of them as fools is characteristic of rebuke.

Letters of Reproach. Reproach was a harsh blame that only the sternest sort of philosopher considered morally beneficial. Letters of reproach seem absent from the corpus of early Christian letters. Paul contrasts the gentleness of his own teaching to harsher methods (1 Thess. 2:6-7) and the Pastoral Epistles argue against harsh and quarrelsome teachers (2 Tim. 2:23-26).

**NOTES**

Letters of Consolation. Consolation was very important in the Greco-Roman world. It had an important place in both the philosophical and the rhetorical traditions. Consolation proper contains traditional materials such as quotations from the poets, examples, precepts, and arguments against excessive grieving. Giving consolation was considered one of the philosopher's chief functions.

Like many complex paraenetic letters, 1 Thessalonians contains a consolatory section (4:13-18). Paul's call for the Thessalonians to stop grieving is a formulaic expression in consolatory literature. Like Paul, writers of consolations eased the sting of death by calling it sleep.

THE LETTER TO THE GALATIANS: LETTER OF REBUKE



NOTES

The letter to the Galatians is unusual among Paul's letters because of the harshness of his tone. This tone is evidenced in Gal.1:6-7, "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel, not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ" (NRSV). These words follow another noteworthy aspect of Galatians.

As we learned in session 8, letters in the Greco-Roman world generally had five major sections. Following the salutation or opening in the first section, one would expect words of thanksgiving and greeting in the second. In this letter, the expected words of thanksgiving are absent.

It appears that words of thanks do not come to Paul's mind as he writes this letter. In this letter, Paul spends much time defending his own call and understanding of the gospel. In addition to its divine origins (1:11-12), it had been authorized by the church in Jerusalem (2:1-10). His understanding also corresponds with an example of Abraham in Galatians 3:6-9. This text reads: "For just as Abraham 'believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,' so you see, those who believe are descendants of Abraham. And the scripture foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you.' For this reason, those who believe are blessed with Abraham who believed." This unity between Jews and Gentiles in matters relating to faith and salvation is stressed in 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

While the difficulties facing the church in Corinth appear to have arisen within the community, the problems in the churches of Galatia came from without. After Paul had left the region of Galatia, others had come in to fill the vacuum. Precisely who these persons were is uncertain. They were trying to impose Jewish customs and practices on those who had accepted the gospel of Christ.

We do not have any other letters to this church or group of churches, but can assume Paul tried reminding them of what he had taught them and giving them strong advice, but none of that had worked. This church had known conversion and the filling of the Holy Spirit, but was now caught up in legalism (3:3). It no longer understood the freedom that comes in the Spirit.


NOTES
WHO?

Author: Paul, the apostle

Audience: Jewish and/or Gentile Christians who were being persuaded or had been persuaded by Judaizers to trust in the law for salvation.

WHERE?

Author: Paul probably wrote from Ephesus during his third missionary journey.

Audience: There are two main theories on the exact location for the audience.

North Galatian Theory: This theory currently has the least support.

- Some scholars think Paul is referring to the ethnic area, the Galatian country of Acts 16:6.
- This area is located in the central highlands of Anatolia where tribes of Celts had settled in Hellenistic times. Paul's O Galatians in Galatians 3:1 means, O Celts or O Gauls.
- Roman roads connected the three small cities in this area to cities like Sardis and Paul's hometown, Tarsus.

South Galatian Theory: This is currently the predominant theory.

- Acts 13:13-14:25 lists the names of several cities Paul visited in the South Galatian area during his missionary journeys: Perga, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra.
- The Galatian letter was written to give guidance on issues that came up after Paul and Barnabas were there. Galatians 1:11 and 4:13 indicate that Paul preached to these people. In 4:11, Paul comments he fears he has wasted his efforts on these people.
- The arguments for it being the audience location include:
 1. South Galatia is the location of the cities Paul ministered to according to Acts and Paul's letters. It is also the location of the largest cities in Galatia.
 2. Paul was sick when he went to Galatia (4:13). North Galatia would not have been a good place for him to go in this condition. It was considered wild and uncivilized.



WHEN?

AD 52-55 during his third missionary journey.

WHAT?

Thesis. For Paul, salvation comes only through faith in Christ (2:15-21). Verses 15-16 of chapter 2 read: “We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners, yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus so that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law” (NRSV). The primary teaching of Galatians, therefore, is justification by faith, the same concept Paul stressed in Romans.

Conclusion. Paul urges the Galatians to maintain their freedom in Christ (5:1-12). It must be remembered, however, that freedom from the law in terms of salvation, does not mean freedom to do as we please, answering to no one but ourselves. Paul’s understanding of freedom is not to be equated with twentieth-century understandings. For Paul, freedom involves liberation from the bondage of sin and the ability to live a life in the Spirit.

Ethical Applications. What does a life lived in the Spirit look like? Paul defines what freedom in Christ is not (5:13-21), and what it is (5:22-6:10). It is not characterized by “fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these” (5:19-21a, NRSV). It is characterized by the fruit of the Spirit evidenced in “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (5:22-23a, NRSV). It is important to note that Paul does not view the Christian life as simply a new type of legalism.

WHY?

- To remind the Galatians that salvation by faith brings freedom and not bondage.
- To clarify the issues being confused by the Judaizers, that Christians had to follow the dietary and ritual laws of Judaism to please God.
- To reestablish Paul’s authority and thus the authority of his gospel in their minds.
- To remind them they are all one and equal because they have been baptized in Christ.

THE LETTERS TO THE THESSALONIANS

NOTES

Paul's letters to the Thessalonians include friendship terms and praise used in introductory thanksgiving. These letters also use elements of paraenetic (exhortation and dissuasion), admonition, and consolation letters.

WHO?

Author: Paul is the unquestioned author for 1 Thessalonians, but some question his authorship of 2 Thessalonians due to slightly different vocabulary, more formal style, and reference to the lawless one. Those who do not think Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians would have the letter written by someone in the school of Paul sometime late in the first century. However, the changes in Paul's vocabulary, style, and reference to the lawless one can also be explained by a shift in his purpose based on the response he received from his first letter.

Audience: Gentile Christians in Thessalonica

WHERE?

Thessalonica. This proud Greek city was founded by Cassander in 315 BC. He was one of Alexander the Great's generals.

- One of the two most important centers of trade in Roman Greece. The other important city was Corinth. One of the most important trades in the city was the purple-dyeing industry.
- Thessalonica enjoyed special privileges because it sent troops to fight with the Roman ruler Octavian, who won the Roman civil war in 42 BC.
- Legally the Thessalonians were allowed to govern themselves, but in reality their elected officials were bound to Rome by an oath of allegiance.

Religion. As was true of most Greek cities, Thessalonica had worshipers of many different gods. The state religion was the Hellenistic ruler cult or emperor worship. Of the mystery religions, the Dionysiac mysteries were the most prominent.

- They were concerned with the ascent of Dionysos from the underworld and so reflected a strong interest in what happened after death.
- They looked after the burials of their members.
- They did not believe in the bodily resurrection of the dead.


NOTES

- Egyptian mystery cults of Serapis and Isis were popular in this city. The cult of Isis offered claims of salvation and eternal life. Humility, confession of sin, and repentance were a part of their initiation.
- Asklepios (healing god) was worshiped in Thessalonica along with Zeus, Aphrodite, and Demeter in temples, which included temple prostitutes.
- Some of the issues the common people prayed to the gods about were justice, health, beauty, relief from taxes, protection from natural disasters, safety, and wealth.

WHEN?

AD 50-52, assuming Paul wrote both letters. Acts 18:12 tells us Gallio was proconsul over Achaia when Paul was in Corinth. Since he was proconsul for only a short period of time, it is possible to date Paul's stay in Corinth.

WHAT?

1 Thessalonians. While in Corinth, Paul receives both good news and bad news from Timothy concerning the church he left behind in Thessalonica. Due to Jewish opposition, Paul only had three to four weeks to spend in this city. Timothy provides a positive view of the faith and love being demonstrated in the Thessalonica (3:6). He also learns some troublesome news about the church. The church is facing persecution, and the Thessalonians are deeply trouble over the deaths of some of their members. This concern over these members goes beyond the normal stages of grief. Due to a theological misunderstanding, they feared that persons who died before the return of Christ would also lose out on their eternal salvation. Dying before the return of Christ was related to some type of spiritual deficiency. If their faith was strong enough, then they would have remained alive when Christ returned in the near future.

Paul writes to counter such a perspective (4:13-18). The Christians at Thessalonica are to remain alert and live lives that are in accord with their future hope for the return of Christ (*the parousia*) and resurrection from the dead (5:1-11). They are called to lives of holiness (4:1-12). Paul also provides exhortations concerning Christian relationships and attitudes (5:12-24).

2 Thessalonians. Scholars who recognize a close relationship between 1 and 2 Thessalonians, view the second letter as treating some misunderstandings that had arisen from the first letter or from some false letters that were circulating in Paul's name. In 1 Thessalonians, Paul had stressed the need for the community to remain steadfast in its hope for Christ's return (the day of the Lord) which will


NOTES

occur like a “thief in the night” (1 Thess. 5:2). It appears that some persons in Thessalonica had come to the conclusion Christ had already come or His coming was so imminent that there was nothing left to do but await His arrival. They had abandoned their work and had an unhealthy fixation on the end of the world. In 3:6 Paul writes: “Now we command you beloved, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from believers who are living in idleness and not according to the tradition that they received from us.”

In 2 Thessalonians, Paul presents teaching relating to preparation for and information about the true nature of the *parousia* (1:3-2:12). He exhorts the Thessalonians to stand firm in the gospel of salvation and sanctification (2:13-17). As just indicated, he warns against the rebellious idle and speaks of how to deal with the disobedient (3:6-15).

Special Verses:

- 1 Thess. 4:1-3: How do we please God?
- 1 Thess. 4:3: It is God’s will that you be sanctified.
- 1 Thess. 4:3-8: What does holiness look like in our private/intimate lives?
- 1 Thess. 4:9-10: How does holiness affect our relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ?
- 1 Thess. 4:11-12: What does holiness look like to those outside the Church?
- 1 Thess. 4:15-18: How does Paul describe the *parousia* or second coming of Christ?
- 1 Thess. 4:16-18: Description of the *parousia*.
- 1 Thess. 5:1-11: What does Paul say about the timing or date of the second coming of Christ?
- 1 Thess. 5:23-24: Sanctification benediction.
- 2 Thess. 1:5-10: How does Paul describe the *parousia* or second coming of Christ?
- 2 Thess. 2:1-12: What does Paul say about the timing or date of the second coming of Christ?
- 2 Thess. 2:16-17: Encouragement benediction.
- 2 Thess. 3:6-15: What is Paul’s attitude toward the idle and how should they be treated?



WHY?

1 Thessalonians.

- Paul wants to help these Greek Christians understand persecution is part of being a Christian. In their former life, problems were associated with wrongdoing as defined by their pagan culture.
- Paul encourages the believers by praising their faith and by reminding them of his instructions.
- Paul encourages them by giving them insight into the last things, an issue their city was very concerned about, but viewed in a very different way than Christianity did.

2 Thessalonians.

- This letter is similar to 1 Thessalonians in its content, but narrows the topics to those Paul understands them to be dealing with, specifically the nature of and preparation for the *parousia* or second coming of Christ.
- As discussed above, Paul corrects a misunderstanding about the end times. Apparently, some in the church thought the end times had already come. He also gives a strong warning against the *ataktoi*. This Greek word is best translated the rebellious idle. Paul has taught that Christians need to prepare for the end times. These idle Greeks were following their ancient teachings of fatalism and so felt there was nothing to be done to prepare for the end.

APPLICATION



NOTES

1. Read Galatians and 1 and 2 Thessalonians in two different translations. Look for answers to the five hermeneutical questions Who, What, Where, When, and Why. How do your findings correspond with those presented in this session? Any new insights?
2. In Galatians 5, Paul addresses the issue: What does a life lived in the Spirit look like? As indicated in this session, Paul characterizes the fruit of the Spirit in terms of “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (5:22-23, NRSV). Using information from this session and study Bibles, Bible dictionaries, or Internet websites (Biblical Studies Foundation <http://www.netbible.com>; Blue Letter Bible <http://www.blueletterbible.org>; Crosswalk.com Bible Study Tools <http://bible.crosswalk.com>), research and study these descriptive terms. Reflect on and be able to describe how these types of traits might appear in our relationship with other believers and the world at large.
3. As indicated in this session, it appears that some persons in Thessalonica had concluded that Christ had already come or His coming was so imminent that there was nothing left to do but await His arrival. They had abandoned their work and had an unhealthy fixation on the end of the world (2 Thess. 3:6). Using information from this session and study Bibles, Bible dictionaries, or Internet websites (Biblical Studies Foundation <http://www.netbible.com>; Blue Letter Bible <http://www.blueletterbible.org>; or Crosswalk.com Bible Study Tools <http://bible.crosswalk.com>), learn as much as possible about this group. Is the danger evidenced by this group, one that is a part of the modern world? If so why? What might Paul say to our present generation? Relate your ideas to recent and current events.

EXAM


NOTES

1. In terms of ancient letters, Galatians may be classified as a letter of _____.
 A. mediation
 B. advice
 C. friendship
 D. rebuke

2. In terms of the general pattern for letter writing in the Greco-Roman world, Paul's letter to the churches in Galatia is noteworthy for its lack of _____.
 A. an introduction
 B. a thanksgiving
 C. closing commands
 D. a conclusion

3. Second Thessalonians is an excellent example of a paraenetic (exhortation and dissuasion) letter.
 A. True
 B. False

4. The primary teaching of Galatians is _____, the same concept Paul stressed in Romans.
 A. the importance of dedicating oneself to God
 B. justification by faith
 C. the importance of the law
 D. the need to develop one's spiritual gifts

5. The mystery religions in Thessalonica stressed the hope for a future resurrection from the dead.
 A. True
 B. False

6. As described by Paul in Galatians, living a life in the Spirit primarily involves the avoidance or practicing of certain types of behaviors.
 A. True
 B. False

**NOTES**

7. In Galatians, Paul refers to _____ in his argument for being justified by faith in Christ.
 - A. Isaac
 - B. Abraham
 - C. Moses
 - D. Jacob

8. Second Thessalonians was, in part, written to address a theological misunderstanding about dying and the return of Christ.
 - A. True
 - B. False

9. First Thessalonians was written to those who believed that the return of Christ was so imminent that they quit working and simply waited for it to occur.
 - A. True
 - B. False

10. In terms of the audience for Galatians, the North Galatian theory has the least support.
 - A. True
 - B. False

11. Paul taught that Christians have no need to prepare for the end times.
 - A. True
 - B. False

12. Problems facing the churches in Galatia were from internal rather than external opponents to Paul's understanding of the gospel.
 - A. True
 - B. False

13. In _____, Paul indicates that the coming of the Day of the Lord will be like a thief in the night.
 - A. Romans
 - B. Galatians
 - C. 1 Thessalonians
 - D. 2 Thessalonians

14. Paul's understanding of Christian freedom recognizes the right of the individual to live as he or she pleases and not be bound by the law.
 - A. True
 - B. False

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT

**NOTES**

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. What are some of the issues new Christians face in our time? How do these issues relate to their cultural conditioning and knowledge of the Bible?
2. Compare the issues of these growing Christians in Galatia and Thessalonica with new and growing Christians of today. How are they similar? How are they different? What principles can we apply to our current time?
3. Does a Christian life focusing on faith differ from one focusing on works? If so, how?
4. Do your views on the second coming of Christ affect how you live? If so, in what way?
5. For some of the believers at Thessalonica, dying before the coming of Christ was seen as being the result of a spiritual deficiency, one that could lead to the loss of salvation and a future life with Christ. We see an “if only” your faith was strong enough perspective. Do such perspectives ever appear today? If so, describe. What might Paul have to say?
6. Which one of these three books (Galatians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians) speaks to issues you are facing in your spiritual walk?