

ACTS 17

REAL. SIMPLE. DISCIPLESHIP.

THE LETTERS TO THE CHURCH AT THESSALONICA

FROM MACEDONIA TO ACHAEA

“From Jerusalem to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ.”

- ▶ From Philippi, Paul and his missions team traveled west on the Via Egnatia through Amphipolis and Appollonia to Thessalonica (capital of the second district in Macedonia and seat of the Roman provincial government) where he engaged in bi-vocational ministry. Some of the Jews, a large number of Greeks, and numerous prominent women came to faith in Christ as the Messiah (Acts 17.1-4) and a second church was established—
. . . explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. “This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ.”
- ▶ Forced to abruptly leave Thessalonica, Paul and his team traveled to Berea where he preached the gospel and established his third church in Europe (17.5-12).

- ▶ When Jews from Thessalonica followed Paul to Berea and social agitation again ensued, Paul was escorted to Athens by men of the Berean church (17.13-15). While waiting in Athens for Silas and Timothy, he “prayer-walked” the city, which culminated in a presentation of the gospel to the Areopagus Council, with two notable conversions: Dionysius and Damaris (17.16-34).
- ▶ From Athens, Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica because of the team’s anxious concern for the spiritual wellbeing of the newly established church (1 Thessalonians 3.1-5).
- ▶ From Athens, Paul traveled to the large, influential, and notoriously immoral city of Corinth (capital of the Roman province of Achaia), where he met recent arrivals and fellow Jewish Christians, Aquila and Priscilla, with whom he worked and ministered bi-vocationally (18.1-4). When Silas and Timothy arrived, Paul was able to devote himself to full-time ministry through the financial support of the churches in Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea) for a year and a half (18.5-11). It was from Corinth that Paul wrote his two letters to the church at Thessalonica.

PAUL, AN APOSTLE TO THE CHURCH AT . . .

- ▶ Paul authored 13 of the 27 writings in the New Testament:
 - ▶ Nine letters were written to churches, 4 were written to individuals.
 - ▶ His first letter to the Thessalonian church was his second letter and the first to a specific church (Galatians was a "circular" letter, written to a group of churches and meant to be circulated among them); his second letter to Timothy was his last, written at the end of his ministry, just before his death.
- ▶ The typical format of Paul's letters:
 - (a) Greeting (b) Affirmation (c) Teaching (d) Application (e) Closing instructions
- ▶ Every sentence of the letters of Paul is saturated with revelation of Jesus and essential spiritual truth for Christ followers. You cannot know the heart of God or know how to live as a follower of Christ without studying and internalizing the truth of these letters.

- ▶ As we have already seen with his letter to the Galatian churches, many of Paul's letters were occasioned by problems or false teaching that had infiltrated the churches, leading people away from a sincere devotion to Christ. Paul was contending for the gospel of Christ; thus, some of his letters were combative because of the adversarial attitude of those trying to undermine his ministry and the gospel that leads people to faith in Christ. Others were deeply personal and affectionate like his letters to his son in the faith, Timothy, and those to the churches at Philippi and Thessalonica.
- ▶ When Paul writes to "the church at such and such" he is addressing a group of believers in a city who meet in a home or several homes. As a church, an *ekklesia*, they are ⁽¹⁾ distinct as God's holy and chosen people, ⁽²⁾ called out of the world that is under God's judgment, ⁽³⁾ through faith in the work of Jesus Christ, ⁽⁴⁾ that they might represent the gospel of Christ in their locality as they ⁽⁵⁾ live toward the return of Jesus Christ. The letters of all the apostles embody these fundamental premises. This enables us to understand whether we are a true church of Jesus Christ and whether we are true and faithful followers of Christ.



Dear brothers and sisters, after we were separated from you for a little while (though our hearts never left you), we tried very hard to come back because of our intense longing to see you again. We wanted very much to come to you, and I, Paul, tried again and again, but Satan prevented us. After all, what gives us hope and joy, and what will be our proud reward and crown as we stand before our Lord Jesus when he returns? It is you! Yes, you are our pride and joy.

Finally, when we could stand it no longer, we decided to stay alone in Athens, and we sent Timothy to visit you. He is our brother and God's co-worker in proclaiming the Good News of Christ. We sent him to strengthen you, to encourage you in your faith, and to keep you from being shaken by the troubles you were going through. But you know that we are destined for such troubles. Even while we were with you, we warned you that troubles would soon come—and they did, as you well know. That is why, when I could bear it no longer, I sent Timothy to find out whether your faith was still strong. I was afraid that the tempter had gotten the best of you and that our work had been useless.



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 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. How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith. Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you.

1 THESSALONIANS 3.6-11

DISCIPLESHIP

“a master-apprentice relationship”

“To be a disciple of Jesus is not merely to be a listener of his words but to be “with him” . . . to submit to Jesus’ discipline (way of life) and through obedience and imitation to resemble him in every aspect of life. According to the NT, whether one becomes a disciple of Jesus will be of huge importance for every individual at the judgment.”

- ▶ The biggest obstacle for you in following Jesus: you!

“If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even one’s own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

LUKE 14.26-27

- ▶ Jesus prayed, “Yet not my will, but Your will be done by me.”

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”

MATTHEW 7.21

REAL. SIMPLE. DISCIPLESHIP.

▶ Live to please God.

“we instructed you how to live in order to please God” (4.1).

- ▶ How do we know what pleases God? We imitate the life of Jesus in *living by the paradigm of God’s will and not the paradigm of self or society.*
 - ▶ A sanctified (holy, set-apart) life is God’s will (4.3).
 - ▶ A life of worship (continuous Spirit-ual expression) is God’s will (5.16-18).
- ▶ Live distinctly as a follower of Christ: a “set-apart” life, a Spirit-enabled life; imitating Jesus—not following the desires of self or living as those who are not followers of Christ.

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

▶ Live a “more and more” life.

“Yet we urge you to do so more and more” (4.10).

- ▶ Being a disciple means “more”—knowing more about Christ, being more like Christ, doing more for Christ. When “more” does not characterize my life, it means that I’ve stopped following Jesus.

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. . . . This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

JOHN 15.5-6, 10

The more you grow like this, the more productive and useful you will be in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But those who fail to develop in this way are shortsighted or blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their old sins. So, dear brothers and sisters, work hard to prove that you really are among those God has called and chosen. Do these things, and you will never fall away.

2 PETER 1.8-10

▶ **Live toward Christ's return.**

“But you are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief.” (5.4)

- ▶ If we are true followers of Christ, we live with total awareness of God's plans.
 - ▶ Jesus is coming (1.10; 3.13; 4.16; 5.23)
 - ▶ God's wrath is coming (1.10; 2.16; 2 Thessalonians 1.6-10)
 - ▶ The Day of the Lord is coming (5.1; 2 Thessalonians 2.3-12)

So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.

1 THESSALONIANS 5.6-8

Let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

HEBREWS 10.25

A REAL OR MAKE-BELIEVE CHRISTIAN?

People everywhere are telling about the way you accepted us when we were there with you. They tell how you stopped worshiping idols and began serving the living and true God. And you wait for God's Son, whom God raised from the dead, to come from heaven. He is Jesus, who saves us from God's angry judgment that is sure to come.

1 THESSALONIANS 1.9-10 NCV

▶ Real Christians—

- (1) Live distinctly as a follower of Christ; people can see it and they talk about you.
- (2) Everything you do is to serve God and His purposes.
- (3) The return of Jesus is connected to everything you say and do.

▶ Make-believe Christians—

- (1) No one knows or can tell from how you live that you follow Jesus Christ.
- (2) You like and talk about the same things as non-Christians.
- (3) You show no interest in Christ's return or concern for God's coming judgment.