
INTERNATIONAL TRAINING AND EQUIPPING MINISTRIES
Institute in the Foundations of Church Leadership
Dr. Steve Van Horn

NEW TESTAMENT THEMES (PT. 2)
IFCL 13 (Advanced Lecture 3)

1 THESSALONIANS

This might be Paul's first letter. Paul had established the Thessalonica church on his second missionary journey and was made to leave Thessalonica. From this city he went to Berea and to Athens. At Athens he had sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to help the Christians amid their persecutions (1 Thessalonians 3:1-3). Acts 18:5 records that Silas and Timothy rejoined the apostle at Corinth. It is clear, therefore, that the epistle was written from Corinth in A.D. 52 or 53.

Three special needs existed among the Thessalonians that required Paul's instruction: (1) They were careless about their daily work. They seemed to be under the impression that the second coming would very shortly take place. (2) There was concern among them that their Christian friends who had died would suffer loss at the coming of Christ. (3) Friction existed between church officers and those who possessed miraculous spiritual endowments.

The letter was written to urge the Thessalonians to worthwhile conduct and work in the light of the return of Christ; to comfort them concerning those who had died in the Lord; and to instruct them in the elementary truths of the Christian gospel.

Themes

1. 1 Thessalonians 1. The characteristics of a model church
2. 1 Thessalonians 2. Ministering with the qualities of a mother and a father
3. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. The rapture
4. 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11. The day of the Lord; thief in the night; not in darkness; not destined to wrath

2 THESSALONIANS

The second epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians was written to correct the wrong idea among the Christians at Thessalonica that the persecutions from which they were suffering were those of "the great and awesome day of the Lord" (Joel 2:31). They had been taught to expect deliverance by from that at "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him" (the rapture) (2 Thessalonians 2:1). The theme of this epistle is "The day of the Lord has come."

Second Thessalonians was written to instruct the Thessalonians concerning the day of Christ "and our gathering together to Him" (the rapture) (2 Thessalonians 2:1) and to settle them in their conviction that in the day of Christ would come to rapture the living saints and to raise the deceased ones. So Paul, in 2 Thessalonians 2:1, is arguing that the rapture will come before the tribulation.

Themes

1. 2 Thessalonians 2:1. Christ's coming could happen at any time.
2. 2 Thessalonians 2:2-10. The Day of the Lord, prophesied in the OT, will not arrive until the apostasy has set in and the "man of lawlessness" (the antichrist) has been revealed.
3. 2 Thessalonians 3:3-5. Be faithful while waiting for the Lord to return.

1 TIMOTHY

The first of three pastoral letters written by Paul to two of his young converts (1 Timothy 1:2; cf. Titus 1:4) who had accompanied him on many of his missionary journeys. They had been established as pastors of churches, and these epistles were directed to them to give them instructions for the orderly management of the organized congregations.

Apparently Paul was released from prison at Rome between A.D. 63 and 67. If this is true, it was during this interval that he composed this epistle. He also sent Titus an epistle at this time.

The central verse of the letter is probably 1 Timothy 3:15, "That you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth."

The approaching end of the apostolic period witnessed the increase of the number of the local churches and the consequent need of definite revelation concerning questions of order, creed, and discipline. At first these problems had been solved by the apostles themselves. But now definite instructions applicable to all occasions and periods were necessary.

The apostle had four main goals in writing this letter to Timothy: (1) to encourage him to oppose false teaching (1 Timothy 1:3-7,18-20; 6:3-5,20-21), (2) to furnish Timothy with written credentials authorized by himself (1:3-4), (3) to instruct him in the management of church's affairs (3:14-15), (4) and to exhort him to diligence in the performance of his pastoral duties (4:6-6:2).

Themes

1. 1 Timothy 2:1-8. The man's role in the church
2. 1 Timothy 2:9-15. The woman's role in the church
3. 1 Timothy 3:1-13. The qualifications of elders, deacons, and (maybe) deaconesses
4. 1 Timothy 4:1-5. Falling away in later times
5. 1 Timothy 5:17-20. The treatment of elders; honoring, and rebuking

2 TIMOTHY

This is the final message from the apostle. Although Paul is facing death, there is a theme of triumph. "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith" (4:6-8).

The following is a probable calendar of Paul's life during the closing years of his career: A.D. 58 he was arrested in Jerusalem (Acts 21); A.D. 61 he arrived in Rome (Acts 28:12); A.D. 61-63 mark his first Roman imprisonment (Acts 28:30); A.D. 64-67 he was released, during which interval he wrote 1 Timothy and Titus from Macedonia. This was after the end of the book of Acts. In A.D. 67, 2 Timothy was written from Rome, also after the end of the book of Acts. A.D. 67-68, Paul was arrested and put to death, also after the end of the book of Acts.

Themes

1. 2 Timothy 2:15. Accurately handle the Word
2. 2 Timothy 3:1-9. Difficult times will come
3. 2 Timothy 4:1-4. Preach the Word in season and out. People will want their ears tickled by teachers who tell them what they want to hear.

TITUS

Titus is an epistle of Paul wrote to his trusted companion Titus, who had been left as superintendent of the churches on the island of Crete. Like the first epistle to Timothy, the purpose of this letter was to give the young pastor instructions to aid him in his work.

Paul was led to write this letter because of the condition of Christian work on the island of Crete and Paul's need of Titus to help. The apostle himself had begun to organize the work in this mission field but had to leave before the task was finished. The entrance of false teaching in the form of legalism (trying to make people keep rules that are not in the Bible) necessitated a strong stand for the truth. Titus needed clear instruction as well as encouragement. Paul sent Titus this letter to help and encourage him (Titus 3:13). The date of its writing was about A.D. 65.

There were several reasons why Paul wrote this letter. But the main reason was that Paul wanted to ask Titus to finish the organizing the work in Crete (1:5).

Themes

1. Titus 1:1-9. Qualifications for leadership (elder, bishop, pastor, overseer)
2. Titus 1:10-16. Take a strong stand against false teachers
3. Titus 2:1-10. The conduct of older and younger men, and older and younger women
4. Titus 3:1-2. Good citizenship
5. Titus 3:9-11. Warning against false teaching

PHILEMON

Onesimus, a slave, had fled to Rome, and he seems to have cheated his master (Philemon) (v. 18). At Rome he was converted under the ministry of Paul and was encouraged by the apostle to return to his master. In this letter to Philemon, Paul recommends that Philemon (the slave owner) receive Onesimus back and forgive him for running away. Paul also urges that the new believer (Onesimus) no longer be considered only a servant but also a brother in Christ.

Philemon is closely connected with the letter to the Colossians. Onesimus delivered both of these letters. However, Tychicus is joined with Onesimus in the epistle to the Colossians (Colossians 4:9). Paul is named as a prisoner in both letters (Philemon 9; Col 4:18). It seems evident, therefore, that both epistles were written in about the same time and place; at Rome during Paul's first imprisonment. (A.D. 61 or 62)

Theme: Forgiveness

HEBREWS

This book clearly explains the transition that was taking place from the Old Testament religious system of sacrifices and laws to Christianity, a religion of freedom and grace.

The writer of the epistle does not mention his name, which is contrary to the habits of Paul. The style and vocabulary are not particularly Pauline either. So there is a big question as to whether or not Paul wrote this letter. Many believe it was someone else.

It seems clear that the Temple was still in existence and the ritual still continued. The readers had probably been Christians for a long time and had suffered severely. The date that it was written was probably between A.D. 67-69.

The writer tries to establish the supremacy of Christ and Christianity (1:1-10:18) and to warn those who accepted Christ of the dangers of apostasy (6:4-8; 10:26-31; 13:14-17). The writer encourages his readers to make a complete break with the laws and sacrifices of Judaism (12:18-13:17). To accomplish this purpose, the writer establishes the superiority of Christ over angels, over Moses and Joshua, and over OT priesthood and ritual.

Themes

1. Hebrews 1:8. The deity of Christ
2. Hebrews 2:4. "Signs" (miracles) characterized the apostles
3. Hebrews 6:4-8. Those who fall away weren't really saved. If they were, they could not be saved a second time.
4. Hebrews 10:11-18. Christ offered one sacrifice for all time
5. Hebrews 11. The definition of faith and the heroes of faith
6. Hebrews 12:1-3. Keep your eyes on Jesus who endured the cross
7. Hebrews 12:4-11. God disciplines us because He loves us, just like a father does
8. Hebrews 13:7, 17. Remember and follow your leaders, imitate their faith

JAMES

The book was written to Jewish Christians who are scattered abroad. The author's aim was to rally Christians from their worldliness to the practical privileges of their profession. It is an interpretation of the OT law and the Sermon on the Mount in the light of the Christian gospel.

James evidently wrote his letter for the large number of Christian Jews scattered throughout the Roman Empire. The book of Acts records that there were Jews in almost every city where Christianity was planted, just like on the Day of Pentecost at Jerusalem (Acts 2:9-11). Many of these were converted to Christianity and carried the message back home with them. It was to these Jewish believers that James addressed his letter.

The epistle of James may have been written very early. It might even be the first letter written to Christians. This is indicated by the early martyrdom of James, according to tradition, in the year A.D. 62.

The apostle seeks to deal with the needs of his fellow Christian believers who had been scattered by persecution.

Themes

1. James 1:2-18. The proper attitude towards testing and trials
2. James 2:1-13. Showing partiality is wrong.
3. James 2:14-26. The uselessness of faith apart from works. In other words, good works are the result (not the cause) of salvation.
4. James 3:1-12. The sin of an uncontrolled tongue
5. James 5:13-18. Instructions for those who are suffering

1 PETER

This is a letter of hope in the midst of suffering and testing. Peter was writing to those who were scattered because of persecution. The main subject of the book is suffering and glory.

The letter is probably dated about A.D. 65, and the persecutions by Nero are probably taking place at the time. The provinces of Asia also mistreated their Christian citizens and residents. It was probably written after the letters Paul wrote from prison.

Themes

1. 1 Peter 2:1-3. Desire the Word of God like a baby desires milk
2. 1 Peter 2:13-25. The principle of submission, and Christ's example of submission
3. 1 Peter 3:1-7. Wives can win an unsaved husband by their gentle and quiet spirit.
4. 1 Peter 3:8-16. Sanctify Christ as Lord in your heart and then be ready to answer the question, "Why are you different? Why don't you act like other people?"
5. 1 Peter 5:1-2. This is written to elders. They are told to give oversight. The Greek word also means bishop. Therefore, elders are overseers and bishops. They are also told to shepherd. The Greek word of shepherd is the same word for pastor. So the elder is a shepherd and pastor. Therefore, the words elder, bishop, overseer, shepherd, and pastor all refer to the same person. He is the leader of the church.
6. 1 Peter 5:1-5. Elders/pastors are to serve voluntarily, not act like a lord over the flock
7. 1 Peter 6:6-9. Humble yourselves; resist the devil who is like a roaring lion

2 PETER

Peter's second epistle may be viewed as a complement to his first. It deals with the second coming of Christ and the evils preceding this great event. The first epistle also speaks of the second coming but does not deal with the conditions prior to the second coming. A strong warning is given of a coming apostasy (when people will fall away from the true Christian faith). As a result, loose morality and general iniquity would increase. In chapter 1 Peter lists certain precious promises of God's Word; in chapter 2 he speaks against false teachers; in chapter 3 he deals with the certainty of the coming of the Lord.

An openness to tolerating sin among Christians and a belief that some had a deeper, spiritual knowledge had begun to show up among the believers. The false teachings spread with their immoral tendencies. The apostle wrote to correct this evil and to forewarn of conditions at the end of the age. There is no strong evidence to suggest that Second Peter was NOT written shortly after First Peter. Therefore, it was probably written in A.D. 66 or 67.

Themes

1. 2 Peter 1:4. We are partakers of the divine nature
2. 2 Peter 1:4-9. Add these qualities (listed in verses 4-9) to your faith
3. 2 Peter 2. A warning about the rise of false prophets
4. 2 Peter 2:20-22. One who professes to know Christ but returns to a life of sin shows he was probably not truly saved
5. 2 Peter 3:3-10. The coming day of the Lord

1 JOHN

The first letter of John is like a family letter from the heavenly Father to His "little children" who are in the world. The epistle was apparently written to compete with various forms of false teaching. False teachers had denied that Christ had come in the flesh. The writer also combated false mysticism that denied the reality of the potential for sin that remains in the Christian. First John is a moral and practical application of the Gospel of John. The time between the two could not have been long. It was probably written a little later than the gospel, about A.D. 90 or 95.

John shows the reality of the fellowship with the Father and that believers possess eternal life now in this world. He emphasizes the close connection of the possession of eternal life with the manifestation of love, right conduct, and sound morality. The apostle apparently does not develop this thought in progressive fashion but in what has been called a "spiral" manner. In other words, He repeats a number of topics several times.

Themes

1. 1 John 1:8-10. All who are truly saved realize they are still sinful and confess sin when they are convicted of it.
2. 1 John 2:3-6. All who are truly saved want to do what God says in His Word.
3. 1 John 2:9-11. All who are truly saved love other Christians.
4. 1 John 2:29. All who are truly saved practice righteousness.
5. 1 John 3:4-10. All who are truly saved practice righteousness.
6. 1 John 3:11-18. All who are truly saved love other Christians in word and deed.
7. 1 John 4:7-8. All who are truly saved love others.
8. 1 John 4:20. All who are truly saved love God and love other Christians.
9. 1 John 5:2. All who are truly saved love God and do what He says in His Word.
10. 1 John 5:13. This letter of 1 John was written to help us know if we have eternal life.
11. 1 John 5:18. All who are truly saved do not sin continually.
12. 1 John 5:18. The devil cannot touch the true believer.

2 JOHN & 3 JOHN

These two letters are extremely short. They were written in the province of Asia probably between A.D. 95 and A.D. 100.

2 John is addressed to a Christian mother and her family. John called them "the chosen lady and her children." 2 John, just like 1 John, gives the priority to the commandment of love.

It also warns against false teachers (v. 7). These false teachers were to be treated with sternness and were not to be shown hospitality. The key phrase of the second epistle is "the truth," by which John means the Scriptures.

3 John, like 2 John, was written by the apostle probably around A.D. 95. The apostle rebuked the church for permitting Diotrephes to exercise dominating authority. This domineering individual had rejected the apostle's authority. John does not write as an apostle but as an elder. He writes the letter to a faithful man in the church, and his purpose is to comfort and sustain those who were holding on to the simplicity of earlier times. This third letter of John stresses personal responsibility in a day of spiritual decline.

Themes

1. 2 John 5. Love one another.
2. 2 John 6. If we are living in the love of God, we do what He says.
3. 2 John 9. A true believer lives by the teachings of Christ.
4. 2 John 10. Do not show hospitality to a false teacher.
5. 3 John 3-4. They were living according to truth, the Scriptures (and we should also).
6. 3 John 5-8. Support those who take the Gospel to the unsaved (the unsaved are referred to as Gentiles)
7. 3 John 11. The true believer does good. Doing good is the natural result of salvation.

JUDE

This is one of the general letters. It is dealing primarily with false teachers (Jude 4-6). In this way it resembles 2 Peter because 2 Peter also has a warning about false teachers. Jude urges Christians to contend "for the faith which was once and for all handed down to the saints." His language is extremely strong toward false teachers. He doesn't debate with the false teachers. He rebukes and threatens them.

The general character of the letter seems to indicate that there is no certain location or destination in Jude's mind when he wrote the letter. It may be that the letter was intended for the same people as those to whom James addressed his letter.

The infiltration of false teaching and heresy motivated the author to write and to warn the faithful Christians against this danger. The author mentions important examples of some who turned away from God in the OT and what resulted. Some of the examples of those who turned from God were the Israelites when they came up out of Egypt; some of the angels turned away, evidently in connection with the flood (v. 6); and the apostasy of Sodom and Gomorrah. Jude gives a passionate argument against the false teachers (vv. 8-19). He concludes his epistle with comfort to Christians by reminding them of their first duty. We cannot be sure when this letter was written. It was probably written sometime between A.D. 66 and A.D. 75, or even A.D. 80. It is dated about A.D. 75.

Themes

1. Jude 3. We should fight for the faith which was delivered only once (which means that there will never be any other books added to the Bible and that revelation has ended).
2. Jude 4. False teachers will sneak in and we may not recognize them.
3. Jude 12-13. False teachers are as destructive as hidden reefs. They are like clouds without water, making promises they do not keep. They are like trees that should be bearing fruit but they never do.
4. Jude 20. Build up your faith and keep praying, letting the Spirit guide you as you do.
5. Jude 21. Keep yourself in the love of God.

REVELATION

The last book of the NT describes the future of the Jew, the Gentile, and the church of Christ. This great prophetic book deals mainly with the events preceding the second coming of Christ, the establishment of the millennial kingdom, and, finally, the eternal state.

The name of the book comes from the Greek word "apokalypsis" which means "the removing of a veil." It is "the Revelation of Jesus Christ" (Rev 1:1). That is, it is an unveiling of His future plan for the earth and for His redeemed saints both for time and eternity. A distinct blessing is promised to the person that reads and to those who hear the words of this prophecy (Rev 1:3).

Themes

1. Revelation 4:1-19:16. The Lord Jesus Christ's future triumph over evil, redemption of the earth, destruction of the ungodly, and establishment of His earthly kingdom are consummated at His second coming
2. Revelation 21-22. Christ's kingdom rule and His ministry in the eternal state
3. Revelation 2:1-3:22. The church, the Body of Christ
4. Revelation 4:1-19:21. The Great Tribulation

5. Revelation 12:7-12; 16:13; 20:1; etc. Satan and demon power
6. Revelation 13:1-10. The man of lawlessness
7. Revelation 13:11-18. The false prophet
8. Revelation 5:1-19:21. Destruction of gentile world power
9. Revelation 6-19. The redemption of the earth with the loosing of the seals, trumpets, and bowls
10. Revelation 19:1-10. The second advent of Christ
11. Revelation 20:11-15. The judgment of sinners
12. Revelation 20:4-6. The first resurrection and the kingdom age
13. Revelation 21. The new heaven and the new earth
14. Revelation 22. The eternal state