

# Study Notes on I Thessalonians

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## Author:

### *Events of Paul's Life*

A.D. 34	Conversion
A.D. 36	To Tarsus for "silent years"
A.D. 46	To Antioch
A.D. 47-48	First missionary journey
A.D. 48	Jerusalem council (Acts 15)
A.D. 49	Writes Galatians
A.D. 50-51	Second missionary journey
A.D. 53	Third missionary journey
A.D. 59	Journey to Rome
A.D. 64	Martyrdom



A second-century document describes Paul as “a man of small stature, with bald head and crooked legs . . . with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked.” Yet this man, who was “unimpressive” in person (2 Cor. 10:10), was a bold defender and preacher of the Gospel and at the same time a tender, loving friend to new converts (cf. 1 Thes. 2:11-13).<sup>1</sup>

## Setting

The revelation of God as a Person who loves came as a jolting surprise in the first century. W.W. Tarn, in *Hellenistic Civilization* (London, Edward Arnold), notes that two vital elements in the new religion, quite apart from the figure of the Founder, had no counterpart in Hellenistic thought. The first was the revelation of personal immortality and resurrection. The second was the fact that:

Of all the Hellenistic creeds, none was based on love of humanity; none had any message for the poor and the wretched, the publican and the sinner. Those who labored and were heavy laden were to welcome a different hope from any which Hellenism could offer.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Bible Readers' Companion

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in The Teachers' Commentary

THE GROWING CHRISTIAN  
Thessalonians

Turning from idols

Serving the True God

Waiting for His Son



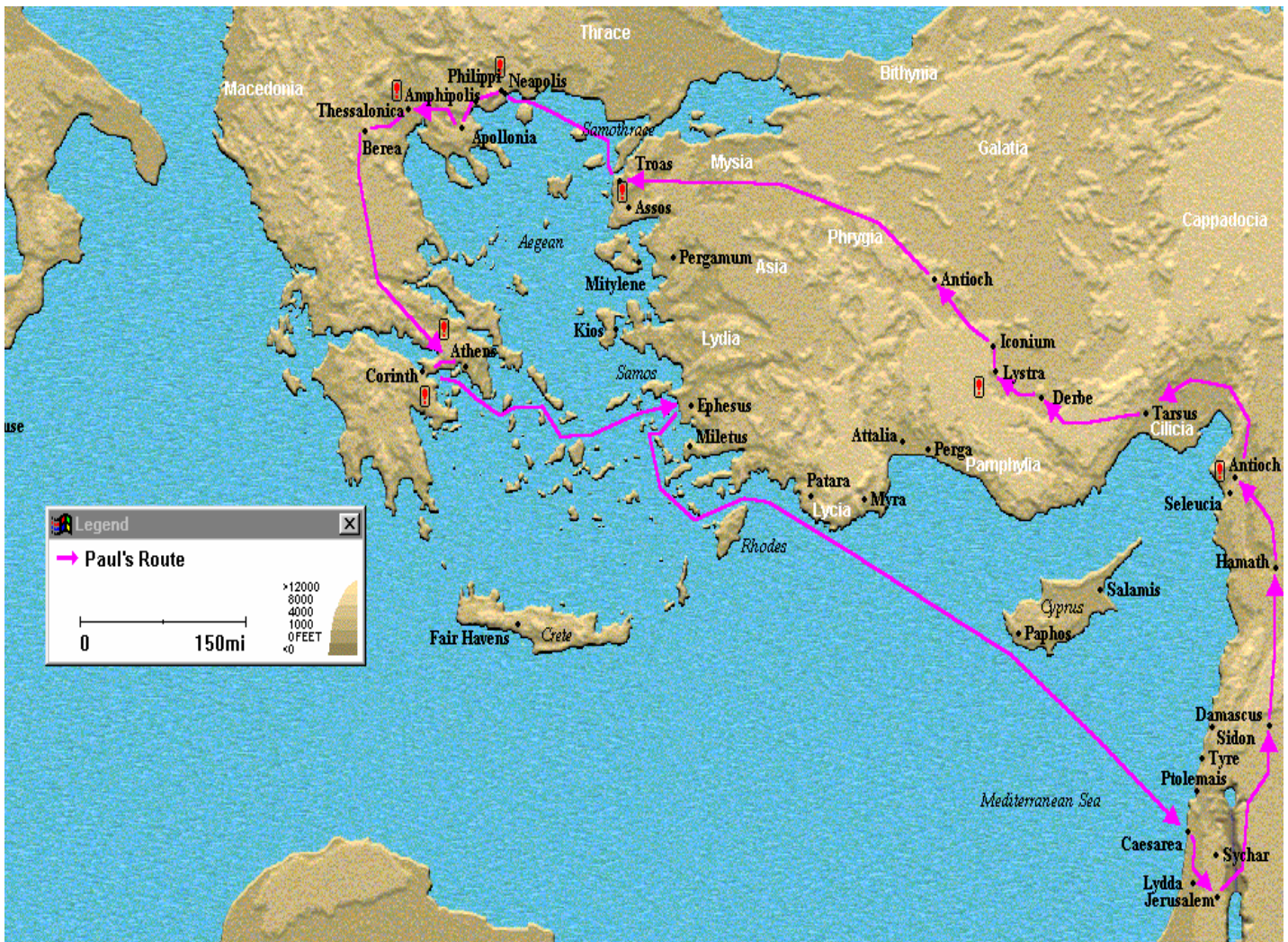
Working by Faith

Laboring in Love

Enduring by Hope

**THESSALONICA** (*Thehs suh loh ni' kuh*) The name of modern Thessaloniki, given to the city about 315 B.C. by Cassander, a general of Alexander the Great. He founded the city in that year, naming it after his wife who was the daughter of Philip II and half sister of Alexander. Located on the Thermaic Gulf (Gulf of Salonika) with an excellent harbor—and at the termination of a major trade route from the Danube—it became, with Corinth, one of the two most important commercial centers in Greece. In the Roman period, it retained its Greek cultural orientation and functioned as the capital of Macedonia after 146 B.C. When the apostle Paul visited the city, it was larger than Philippi which reflected a predominantly Roman culture. Thessalonica was a free city, having no Roman garrison within its walls and maintaining the privilege of minting its own coins. Like Corinth, it had a cosmopolitan population due to the commercial prowess of the city. The recent discovery of a marble inscription, written partly in Greek and partly in a Samaritan form of Hebrew and Aramaic, testifies to the presence of Samaritans in Thessalonica. The Book of Acts testifies to the presence of a Jewish synagogue there (17:1).<sup>3</sup>

### Paul's Second Missionary Journey A.D. 50-52, Acts 15:40-18:23



<sup>3</sup> Holeman Bible Dictionary

#### THE GROWING CHRISTIAN Thessalonians



**The Thessalonians faced pressing questions:**

1. When would Christ return? Had those believers who had died missed the blessings of His return?
2. What should they expect from a minister? Who could they trust as a true spiritual leader?
3. What is the place of daily work in the life of Christians waiting for the second coming?
4. Given that Paul spent only a few weeks founding the ministry, could they become a viable church?
5. Could they stand up against violent opposition?

**KEY DOCTRINES MENTIONED IN 1 AND 2 THESSALONIANS<sup>4</sup>**

Inspiration and authority of Scripture	1 Thes. 2:13; 2 Thes. 2:15; 3:6, 17
One God existing in three Persons	1 Thes. 1:1, 5-6; 4:8; 5:19; 2 Thes. 2:13
Jesus is God	1 Thes. 3:11-12; 2 Thes. 2:16-17
Salvation based on Christ's death	1 Thes. 4:14; 5:9; 2 Thes. 2:13-14
The believer's union with Christ	1 Thes. 1:1; 5:5; 2 Thes. 1:1
Sanctification expressed in way of life	1 Thes. 4:3-12; 5:12-18
The importance of prayer	1 Thes. 3:11-13; 5:23-24; 2 Thes. 1:11-12; 2:16-17; 3:5, 16
Jesus' return for His church	1 Thes. 4:13-18; 2 Thes. 2:1
Appearance and activity of a "lawless one"	2 Thes. 2:1-11
Terrible judgments on sinners	1 Thes. 1:10; 2:16; 2 Thes. 1:6-10
Peace and glory for believers	1 Thes. 1:10; 5:9; 2 Thes. 1:7, 10, 12; 2:13-14
Christian responsibility to work till then	1 Thes. 4:11-12; 5:14; 2 Thes. 3:6-15

**Themes**

- Persecution
- Bereavement
- Purity & Discipleship
- Second Coming
- Thankfulness

**Key Verse:** 4:17b And so we will be with the Lord forever.

<sup>4</sup> The Bible Readers' Companion

THE GROWING CHRISTIAN  
Thessalonians



**Pre-Questions for You and Me**

- What kind of a Christian model am I? Would Paul call my church and me his hope, joy, and crown?
- How prepared am I for life’s troubles and for persecution?
- Am I living a pure life? Are there areas I haven’t submitted to Christ?
- What’s my view of the future? Am I convinced there is a glorious plan set out for me?
- What’s my view of the present? Am I “just getting by”?

Adult Upper Room Sunday School, **Thessalonians, Living In The End Times**  
 Fall 2004 Syllabus

<b>Date</b>	<b>Primary Scripture</b>	<b>Topic/Devotional Guide</b>	<b>Stott</b>	<b>Teacher</b>
<b>Sept 19</b>	Acts 17, 18	Introduction	17-21	Norm
<b>Sept 26</b>	1 Thes 1:1-10	Passing It On; Spreading The Gospel	25-44	Joe
<b>Oct 3</b>	1 Thes 2:1-16	Pleasing God; Being a Steward, Mother, Father, And Herald	45-60	Daniel
<b>Oct 10</b>	1 Thes 2:17-3:13	Double Commitment; Serving Both The Gospel And The Church	60-74	Norm
<b>Oct 17</b>	1 Thes 4:1-12	Living The Gospel; Christian Behavior	75-91	Joe
<b>Oct 24</b>	1 Thes 4:13-18	Hope In The Face Of Death; Return, Resurrection, Rapture, Reunion	92-107	Daniel
<b>Oct 31</b>		Reformation Sunday; TBA		
<b>Nov 7</b>	1 Thes 5:1-11	Waiting For Christ; The Alert Community	107-116	Norm
<b>Nov 14</b>	1 Thes 5:12-28	Christian Community; A Gospel Church	117-135	Daniel
<b>Nov 21</b>	2 Thes 1:1-12	Dynamic Faith; The Revelation Of Christ	142-155	Joe
<b>Nov 28</b>				
<b>Dec 5</b>	2 Thes 2:1-17	Standing Firm; The Rebellion Of Antichrist	156-180	Daniel
<b>Dec 12</b>				
<b>Dec 19</b>	2 Thes 3:1-18	The Word of Peace; The Responsibility of Christians	181-199	Norm
<b>Dec 26</b>				

Joe’s suggestions for dynamite personal study times:

**Pray --- Read --- Read --- Devotional --- Commentary --- Pray**

Devotionals - \$6 Stott Commentary - \$12



# 1 Thes 1:1-10, Passing It On; Spreading The Gospel

Tables: (4 min.)

- Where were you about 18 years ago? Share something about your life back then.
- Take the role of 1<sup>st</sup> Century pagans. Discuss what you might believe about God(s), man, fate, and spirituality.

## Introduction/Greeting v. 1

Tables: (3 min.)

- Why would this gospel be revolutionary to 1<sup>st</sup> Century pagans?
- What is it about the gospel that is still revolutionary today?

## Description of their lives v. 2, 3

faith	→	work
love	→	labor
hope	→	endurance

## Description of how the gospel came to them; authentic preaching v. 4, 5

- In words
- With power- deep penetration in mind, spirit, heart
- With conviction- of the preachers, that they had confidence in what they were telling them
- With the Holy Spirit- who oversees all three of the above. Notice the Spirit is involved in the preacher, giving conviction, in the message with the *sword of the spirit*, and in the hearer, bringing deep change.

The Word without the Spirit is powerless and the Spirit without the word is pointless.

## Scripture Memory

### Description of their conversion v. 5 - 8

- They welcomed the message- despite suffering; with joy
- They became imitators of us and of the Lord
- They became a model for others

### v. 9, 10

They turned from idols  
 They went to serve the Lord  
 They began to wait for His return

Tables: (as time permits)

- Which of the elements in v. 5 have you often seen in preaching and witnessing? Which have been lacking?
- What were the ways (at least the ones you are aware of) God used to introduce you to the gospel?



## 2 Thessalonians 2, The Culmination of Human History

### 1. Two Comings (Parousias) 2:1-8, 9

#### **Christ's**

1 Thes 4:15, 2 Thes 2:1,8

- Personal
- Public
- Powerful- with miracles; revealing

#### **Antichrist's**

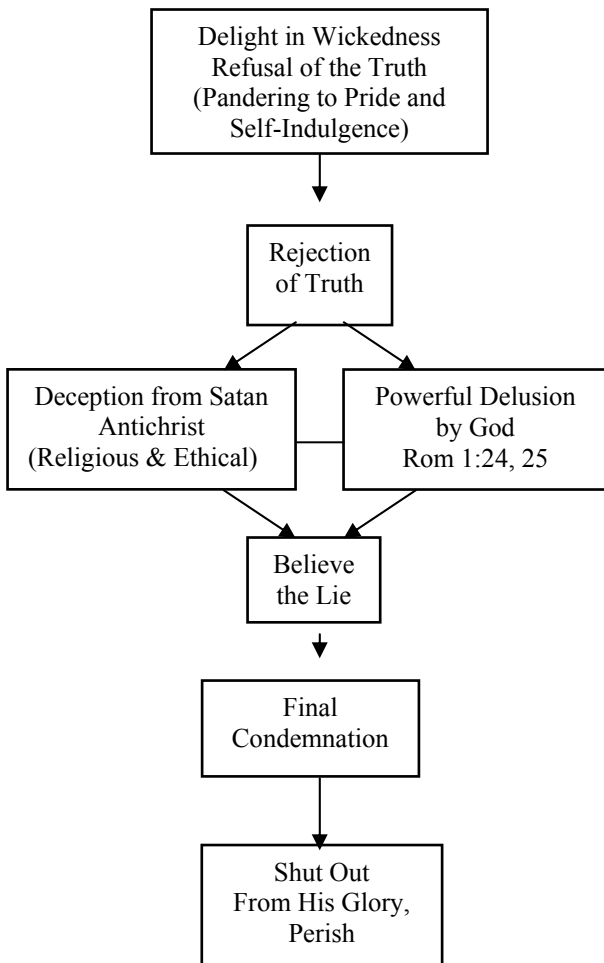
2 Thes 2:9

- Personal
- Public
- Powerful- with counterfeit miracles, deceiving

### 2. Two Paths for Humanity 2:9-12, 13-14

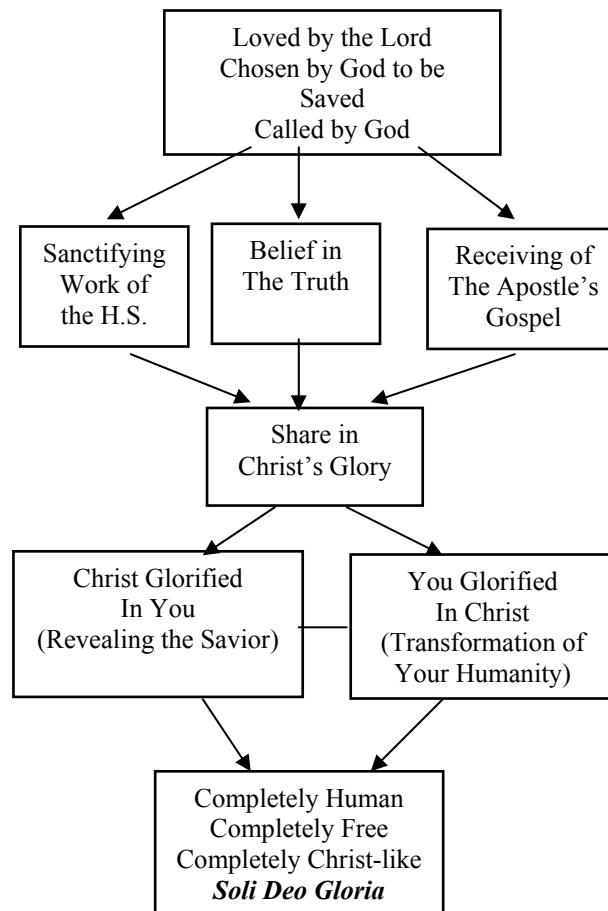
#### **Downward**

2 Thes 2:9-12



#### **Upward**

2 Thes 2:13-14



### 3. Four Periods of History 2:1-12

- Period of Restraint
- Period of Rebellion
- Period of Revelation

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- Period of Retribution
- 4. Application 2:13-17
  - Stand Firm
    - Religiously- in beliefs holding to the teaching
    - Ethically- in deeds reflecting God’s goodness and love
    - Emotionally and Mentally- in hope of Christ’s return
  - Be Encouraged and Strengthened by God

This takes us back to Paul’s original description of the growing Christian from his first letter:

1 Thes 1:9b-10, People who are:

- Turning** to God from idols
- Serving** the living and true God
- Waiting** for His Son from heaven

1 Thes 1:3, People for whom:

- Their work is produced by **faith**
- Their labor is prompted by **love**
- Their endurance is inspired by **hope**

## Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter XXXIII: Of the Last Judgment

**33:1** God hath appointed a day, wherein He will judge the world in righteousness, by Jesus Christ (Acts 17:31), to whom all power and judgment is given of the Father (John 5:22, 27). In which day, not only the apostate angels shall be judged (1 Cor 6:3; 2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6), but likewise all persons that have lived upon earth shall appear before the tribunal of Christ, to give an account of their thoughts, words, and deeds; and to receive according to what they have done in the body, whether good or evil (Eccl 12:14; Matt 12:36, 37; Rom 2:16; 14:10, 12; 2 Cor 5:10).

**33:2** The end of God’s appointing this day is for the manifestation of the glory of His mercy, in the eternal salvation of the elect (Matt 25:21; Rom 9:23); and of His justice, in the damnation of the reprobate who are wicked and disobedient (Rom 2:5, 6; 9:22; 2 Thes 1:7, 8). For then shall the righteous go into everlasting life, and receive that fulness of joy and refreshing, which shall come from the presence of the Lord (Matt 25:31-34; Acts 3:19; 2 Thes 1:7-10); but the wicked, who know not God, and obey not the Gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast into eternal torments, and be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power (Matt 25:41, 46; 2 Thes 1:9).

**33:3** As Christ would have us to be certainly persuaded that there shall be a day of judgment, both to deter all men from sin; and for the greater consolation of the godly in their adversity (Luke 21:27, 28; Rom 8:23-25; 2 Cor 5:10, 11; 2 Thes 1:5-7; 2 Pet 3:11, 14); so will He have that day unknown to men, that they may shake off all carnal security, and be always watchful, because they know not at what hour the Lord will come; and may be ever prepared to say, Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly (Matt 24:36, 42-44; Mark 13:35-37; Luke 12:35, 36; Rev 22:20). Amen.

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**A Note To My Students ...**

“Mr. Morgan, do you really believe there’s a hell?”

In trying to respond to this question I sometimes feel like I’m in the *Emperors New Clothes* story where if I answer what seems obvious to me I am cast as an idiot and all chance for future dialogue is squelched. The difficulty with discussing such a topic is that we often do it from the perspective that we as human beings are these sweet, innocent, or at best passive spectators in the grand scheme of the cosmos whereas God is up there trying to get us.

Following are short responses to the hell challenge and a few related questions. For each response I have tried to stick to historic Christian ideas that place God at the center of the universe and leave man as His special, yet fallen creation. I continue to ponder these difficult issues and so welcome your thoughtful comments.

- [Is there a hell? Is there a heaven?](#)
- [If God is loving, how could He send people to hell?](#)
- [Should we be afraid of demons?](#)
- [If God is all good and all-powerful, how could He allow the existence of evil?](#)

**Is there a hell? Is there a heaven?**

The historical scriptures called the Bible say both heaven and hell are particular places. In fact, Jesus referred to hell more than anyone in both the Old and New Testaments. The main point is that our lives on earth are passing and there is much more to reality than we understand. Hell is an awful place reserved for those who live their lives without honoring and submitting to the Creator. This includes all of us. The only way to avoid this fate is to seek God’s forgiveness and goodness through what Jesus did while on earth. Heaven is the wonderful promise of life better than any could imagine for those God forgives and calls to Himself. According to the New Testament, how we respond to Jesus today, is crucial regarding our future fate. What do you think of Jesus? Is what you know about him from what others have told you or have you personally examined the historical texts (Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) for yourself?

**If God is loving, how could He send people to hell?**

This question is often framed in such a way that God is viewed either of two ways. First God is seen as a fickle old man who willy-nilly sends some to eternal torment while allowing many hypocrites to paradise. Secondly, God is often viewed as this wimpy yet kind grandfather who exists to make us feel good and who therefore would never do something against our wishes. The historical scriptures called the Bible portray God as all-powerful, all beautiful, all loving, all knowing, and worth our complete respect, obedience, and love. God is called “holy” and we are portrayed as selfish, egotistical, and rebellious. Who can stand before such a God? Nobody! To be a Christian implies that we acknowledge our utter unworthiness before Him and that only through God’s forgiveness and acceptance through what Jesus has done may any of us approach Him. Can God send people to hell? Perhaps a better question is: Why should God send anyone to heaven?

**Should we be afraid of demons?**

“The devil made me do it!” an old comedian used to say. Even today, many still claim that demons may possess people and cause them to do wicked things. While these thoughts may seem absurd to many of us, the historical scriptures called the Bible make two related comments. First, the devil is on a short chain. While Satan is portrayed as a real person, he is also mentioned as one whose power stems mostly from his ability to get us to believe lies. Little may he do without our own invitation or inactivity. Secondly, Jesus stated that it is not what goes into a person that makes them bad, but what comes from our hearts. We are portrayed as incredibly beautiful yet self-centered and rebellious. Jesus’ concern for people was not that they are exposed to bad things, but that they themselves need a total change of heart and mind, called being born again. Being born again can only come about through God’s forgiveness based on what Jesus did while on earth. As you view your own heart, do you see yourself as morally pure enough for a perfect and holy God? To the Christian, demons are to be respected, but our biggest problem lies much closer to home.

**If God is all good and all-powerful, how could He allow the existence of evil?**

This is one of the most difficult and perplexing of all theological questions. Bertrand Russell’s essay on “Why I Am Not a Christian” centers on this issue. The problem, as many see it, is that if God were truly good, He wouldn’t allow evil unless He couldn’t prevent it



and so He is not all powerful. On the other hand, if God were truly all powerful, He must not be totally good because He allows evil to continue. The historical scriptures called the Bible make two points that don't fully answer this difficulty, yet to some they do illuminate the most important ideas. First, man is given choice. Somehow the existence of evil is related to our being able to make moral judgments. It is not as if God created little robots that would do exactly what He dictates (determinism). Secondly, because we are not robots there is the possibility of one of the most wonderful things in life, love. While evil does exist, there is also incredible love all around us. The greatest love, according to the Bible, is that God sent His own son to die for our moral failures, bringing the possibility of beautiful life to any that accept Him. Does God allow evil? Perhaps an even more profound thought given so much war and hatred in our world, is to wonder why God would care enough to promote love.

**For the Christian, this life will include  
the only exposure he will ever have to sin and corruption.  
For the Non-Christian, this life will include  
the only exposure he will ever have to love and redemption.**

*Heaven Heaven Heaven Heaven Heaven Heaven*

*Heaven Heaven Heaven Heaven Heaven Heaven*

**CULTURE - Humanity - CULTURE**

*Hell Hell Hell Hell Hell Hell*

*Hell Hell Hell Hell Hell Hell*

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