

First & Second THESSALONIANS



**"Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant
about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like
the rest of men, who have no hope."**

— 1 Thessalonians 4:13

Doyle Gilliam

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The Letters to the Thessalonians

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The Letters to the Thessalonians

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This Book is Dedicated to
my wife

Louise Gilliam

my faithful companion in my ministry
and mission work, both state side and foreign.



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and

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A companion workbook on the study of the Letters to the Thessalonians by Doyle Gilliam is available for purchase through the Sunset International Bible Institute External Studies: 1 (800) 687-2121

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Special gratitude must be expressed to Cline Paden and Truman Scott who began the video course series in 1989, to Bob Martin, who directed Sunset Video Studio, to Virgil Yocham and the staff of Sunset External Studies Division who wrote the study guides, to Darlene Morris and the staff of Sunset Translation / Editing Center who edited the manuscripts and to each faculty member of Sunset International Bible

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Background and Introduction

Acts 17:1–15

These letters are some of the earliest writings of the New Testament. Perhaps they are even the earliest writings of Paul, with the possible exception of the book of Galatians.

Paul was on his second missionary journey when he came to the city of Thessalonica, and preaching the Gospel, established the church there. As a background of this study, concerning the preaching of Paul, Silas, and Timothy in the city of Thessalonica, consider Acts 17:1–15:

When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. “This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ,” he said. Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women. But the Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason’s house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd. But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other brothers before the city officials, shouting: “These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar’s

decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus.” When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil. Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go. As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went into the Jewish synagogue. Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. Many of the Jews believed, as did also a large number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men. When the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, they went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up. The brothers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea. The men who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible (Acts 17:1–15).

Establishment of the Church in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1–15)

The Evangelistic Team — Paul, Silas, and Timothy

Paul, Silas, and Timothy were the team of men who preached the Word of God in Thessalonica. Paul and Barnabas had made the first missionary journey together. One can find this in Acts 13 and 14. However, in Acts 15:36–41:

. . . Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord . . .” Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for

Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left . . . He went through Syria and Cilicia . . .

Notice that John Mark had been with them on the first journey, and Paul was not pleased to have him accompany them on this one. The contention between them was so bad that they were unable to make the second journey together.

When Paul and Silas reached the city of Lystra, they picked up a young man whose name was Timothy. He had been converted, perhaps on Paul's first journey, and he was commended by the brothers there. He had a Jewish mother and a Greek father. Paul had him circumcised, then took him along as one of their companions. Timothy would be looked upon as an apprentice missionary working with the older men, Paul and Silas. According to Acts 16, another man joined Paul, Silas, and Timothy temporarily. This man was Luke, the writer of the Book of Luke and Acts. Luke used the expressions "**we**" and "**us**" in Acts 16:9–10 indicating that he had joined Paul and Silas in Philippi, where they were preaching the Word of God. These verses record the Macedonian call Paul received:

*During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." After Paul had seen the vision, **we** got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called **us** to preach the gospel to them.*

However, in Acts 16:40, Luke said, "*After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, **they** went to Lydia's house, where **they** met with the brothers and encouraged them. Then **they** left.*" This implies that Luke stayed in Philippi whereas Paul, Timothy, and Silas went on their journey to preach the Word in Thessalonica and other places.

The Evangelistic Method — Preaching in the Synagogue in Thessalonica

When one looks at preaching the Word of God in the city of Thessalonica, it is important to look at the city itself. In Paul's day this was the largest and most important city in Macedonia. It was the capitol of the province. It had a very fine harbor, and the famous Via Ignacia, the Roman highway from

east to west, passed through it. These things also caused it to be considered a place of great commerce and trade.

Thessalonica was built around the year 315 B.C. by Cassander, who was one of Alexander the Great's generals. He named the city after his wife who was a half-sister to Alexander the Great. Thessalonica included the town of Therma which was a settlement near the hot springs there. In the year 42 B.C. Thessalonica sided with Octavian and Antony in the Roman civil war. Since Thessalonica was on the right side, they were rewarded, by the victors, the status of a free city. This resulted in their ruling officials being called polytarchs. This name has been found on inscriptions, from the Greek *politarchas*, meaning city officials or magistrate (cf. Acts 17:6, 8). Under its modern name, Salonika has remained a thriving city in modern Greece with a population of about one half million.

Remember it was Paul's custom to go into Jewish synagogues and Jewish meeting places all over the Roman empire. He would preach the Word of God in these places before he preached to other people. An example of this would be:

From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down. After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue rulers sent word to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak" (Acts 13:14–15).

Paul and Barnabas were recognized as Jews with dignity and or backgrounds in learning. The synagogue leaders requested that Paul and Barnabas speak the Word of God in their synagogue. In Acts 17:10–12 Luke wrote about synagogue preaching:

As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they

received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.

The phrase “*the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians*” does not mean the Thessalonians generally, it means the Thessalonian Jews. Other Jews were not receptive to the Gospel, but the Jews in Berea at the synagogue were receptive: “. . . *they received the message with great eagerness and examined the scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.*”

According to Acts 18:4, when Paul went to the city of Corinth, “*Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.*” When he went to Ephesus, he had the same practice there. Acts 18:19 says: “*They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.*” This was all according to God’s plan, that the Gospel be offered to the Jews first. In a well known passage, Romans 1:16, Paul said, “*I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.*” In another passage very similar to this in Acts 13:46–47, Paul was in the city of Antioch Pisidian. Paul and Barnabas preached the Word of God one Sabbath and were asked to preach again the next Sabbath. Almost the whole town came together and the Jews were antagonized and jealous because of this. They began to contradict the things that were spoken by Paul. This is the response Paul and Barnabas gave:

Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: “We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. For this is what the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth’” (Acts 13:46–47).

Paul and Barnabas were fulfilling the purpose of God in preaching first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. Notice that they were preaching and proving the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ from Old Testament scriptures:

As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ . . ." (Acts 17:2–3).

Jesus taught the same way during His personal ministry:

"But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?" (John 5:45–47).

Later, after Jesus was raised from the dead, He met with two of His disciples on the road to Emmaus. They were confused, perplexed, and disappointed. Jesus spoke to them:

. . . "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself (Luke 24:25–27).

Jesus came to fulfill the writings of Moses and all the scriptures of the Old Testament. When He preached He often referred to the Old Testament scriptures and pointed out the fact that He had fulfilled what was written by Moses and other prophets in the Psalms. This same apostolic pattern of preaching was used in the Book of Acts. Paul was speaking

before King Agrippa and a great multitude of people who had gathered together to hear his defense. In Acts 26:22–23, he said:

“But I have had God’s help to this very day, and so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen – that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles.”

Paul was saying, “I am preaching something that was talked about and predicted in the Old Testament Scriptures.” In 1 Corinthians 15:3–4, he said:

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures . . .

Peter also made a similar comment:

Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow (1 Peter 1:10–11).

The Evangelistic Results of Preaching in Thessalonica

The reception to the preaching of the Gospel in Thessalonica was a positive response. There were converts from both Jews and Gentiles. Acts 17:4 says: “Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women.” Remember Paul commented on the fact that the Christians in Thessalonica had turned from idols to serve the

living God: *“for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God . . .”* (1 Thessalonians 1:9).

The response had been tremendous in the city of Thessalonica. However, there was also a negative response. The Scriptures say that the Jews formed a mob and started a riot, which caused Paul to have to leave the town prematurely: *“When the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, they went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up”* (Acts 17:13).

Perhaps the actions of the Jews that were so fresh in Paul’s mind were what called forth one of the greatest and strongest indictments that he ever made against the Jews in any of his writings. His response was so strong that there are some people who do not even believe that Paul could have written these words. Paul said:

For you, brothers, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews, who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to all men in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last (1 Thessalonians 2:14–16).

These are strong words because they describe the apostasy of the nation of Israel, a nation who had left the way of God that He had prepared for them through the Messiah. Notice the departure from Thessalonica and the posting of the bond according to Acts 17:9–10: *“Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go. As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea.”* They were not

ready to leave. They felt there was more teaching that needed to be done, and they were deeply concerned about that.

The Occasion and Purpose of 1 Thessalonians

The Occasion of the Letter

According to Acts 17:5–10 the opposition called for Paul and Silas to leave Thessalonica prematurely. They had wanted to return to Thessalonica, but according to 1 Thessalonians 2:17–18:

... when we were torn away from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. For we wanted to come to you — certainly I, Paul, did, again and again — but Satan stopped us.

Paul waited a short while longer but was unable to restrain himself because of his concern for them. Paul was not able to go himself, so he sent Timothy to strengthen and encourage the Thessalonians in their faith. Timothy had returned with an encouraging report, but also with news that there were some problems. For this reason, Paul wrote the letter of 1 Thessalonians. This letter was written around the year 50 or 51 A.D.

Purposes of the Letter

There were several purposes for writing 1 Thessalonians. The first purpose was to express joy and thanksgiving for their faith, diligence, and endurance to God. 1 Thessalonians 1:2–3, and many other verses convey that Paul was thankful unto God for them and for their faith:

We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

In spite of severe suffering, the Lord's message had been received by the people in Thessalonica. The message had also been sent to other places. Their faith was known in every place: *"For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy"* (1 Thessalonians 2:19–20). Paul also said, *"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?"* (1 Thessalonians 3:9).

Second, Paul wrote this letter to present a defense of himself, his fellow workers, and their ministry among the Thessalonians. In 1 Thessalonians 2:1–2, he writes:

You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure. We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition.

Paul and his fellow workers were not religious charlatans. They did not have impure or deceitful motives in preaching the Word of God. Paul argued that they had behaved in a manner that showed they deeply loved and shared their lives with the Thessalonians. They also worked hard with their hands and were not a burden to anyone. The summarizing verse for this would be 1 Thessalonians 2:8. Paul said: *"We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us."*

The third purpose in writing the first letter to the Thessalonians was to encourage their faith in the midst of trials: *"You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit"* (1 Thessalonians 1:6).

Paul wrote about their trials when he said:

For you, brothers, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You

suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews (1 Thessalonians 2:14).

We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God's fellow worker in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, so that no one would be unsettled by these trials . . . (1 Thessalonians 3:2–3).

The fourth reason for writing the first letter to the Thessalonians was to warn against an easy-going pagan standard in sexual matters:

Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 4:1–8).

Christians who had recently been called out of paganism with all its sexual immorality and sensuality were often tempted to return to that lifestyle. Paul said God has a different message for His holy people. *"It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality . . . For*

God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life” (1 Thessalonians 4:3, 7).

The fifth purpose of the first letter was to clarify matters concerning the second coming of Christ. Some of the saints in Thessalonica had doubts and anxieties about those who had died. They were also ignorant of what really would take place when Jesus came. Paul assured them that the saints who died in Christ would not miss out on the blessings of God at the Lord’s return:

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17).

However, there was another problem concerning the second coming concerning the dates and times. Paul discussed this in 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11. They had been taught that the Lord would “*come like a thief in the night*” (1 Thessalonians 5:2), and they would not know the precise time and date of that coming. They learned that because they were the sons of light; they were to live as children of the day. If they lived as children of the day, when that day came, it would not catch them unprepared for his coming as the pagans would be.

The sixth, and last, reason for Paul to write the first letter to the Thessalonians was to give them some exhortations concerning their relationships with each other. These exhortations are in 1 Thessalonians 4:9–12, and 5:12–22. For example:

Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more. Make it your

ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody (1 Thessalonians 4:9–12).

Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other . . . Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus (1 Thessalonians 5:12–13, 16).

An Outline Of 1 Thessalonians (From F. F. Bruce)

- A. Salutation (1:1)
- B. Thanksgiving for their faith and steadfastness (1:2–10)
- C. Explanation of his own conduct (2:1–16)
- D. Narrative of events since he left Thessalonica (2:17–3:10)
- E. Prayer for an early reunion (3:11–13)
- F. Encouragement to holy living and brotherly love (4:1–12)
- G. Concerning the second advent (4:13–5:11)
- H. General exhortations (5:12–22)
- I. Prayer, final greeting and benediction (5:23–28)

Joy In Remembering

1 Thessalonians 1:1–10

Introduction

Paul was joined by Silas and Timothy as he wrote this epistle to the church in Thessalonica to encourage them in the midst of troubles.

Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you. We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia — your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he

raised from the dead — Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

The Salutation

Correspondents and Recipients

The Correspondents — Paul, Silas and Timothy (1:1)

The three men involved in writing this epistle were Paul, Silas, and Timothy. In the beginning Paul was called Saul, Saul of Tarsus. Saul was a former Pharisee and a persecutor of the church. In Galatians 1:13 he said, *“For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it.”* Saul was so zealous in his pursuit that he got permission from the High Priest to go to Damascus so he could persecute Christians there. However, while he was on the road to Damascus he met the Lord. Saul asked Him what he ought to do: “. . . ‘Get up,’ the Lord said, ‘and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do’” (Acts 22:10). There was a man named Ananias in Damascus who had been fasting and praying for three days and nights. This is the man God called to go to Saul. In Acts 22:16 Paul remembered what Ananias had told him: *“‘And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.’”* Saul did as he was told. He arose, was baptized, and began to preach the Word of God. Saul was given a divine commission to open the eyes of both the Jews and the Gentiles. Many years later, he stood before Agrippa and other dignitaries in Caesarea and reflected on what Jesus had said to him:

“Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive

forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me” (Acts 26:16–18).

Paul also mentioned his mission in Acts 13:46–47:

Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: “We had to speak the word of God to you [Jews] first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. For this is what the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’”

Paul was not embarrassed to preach the Gospel because he knew of its saving power. In Romans 1:16 Paul said, *“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.”* In Acts 26:19–20 Paul continued:

“So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.”

Paul was so convicted that he could not do anything but preach the message. He wrote in 1 Corinthians 9:16: *“Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!”*

Next look at the writer Silas. Silas was a leader in the Jerusalem church:

Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, two men who were leaders among the brothers (Acts 15:22).

Silas was a prophet according to Acts 15:32, *“Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the brothers.”* After Paul and Barnabas disagreed about taking John Mark on their journey, Paul chose Silas to accompany him: *“But Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord”* (Acts 15:40). Silas was also a Roman citizen:

But Paul said to the officers: “They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out” (Acts 16:37).

Silas was also considered a *“faithful brother”* years later in 1 Peter 5:12, *“With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother . . .”*

The last writer of the Thessalonian letters was Timothy. Timothy had a Jewish mother who was a Christian and a father who was a Greek according to Acts 16:1: *“[Paul] came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek.”* Timothy learned sincere faith from his mother and grandmother as recorded in 2 Timothy 1:5, *“I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.”* He was taught from childhood by his mother and grandmother about faith in God and the Holy Scriptures. In 2 Timothy 3:15, Paul wrote, *“and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”* This gave him the background that prepared him for service. He rendered this service to God beside the Apostle Paul on their preaching journeys. He was commended by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium according to Acts 16:2. The brothers saw his sincere faith and recommended him to Paul. Paul learned he could believe and trust Timothy which was

apparent in the way Paul sent him to encourage the faith and dedication of God's people in various places:

For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church (1 Corinthians 4:17).

Paul mentioned this again in 1 Thessalonians: *"We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God's fellow worker in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith"* (1 Thessalonians 3:2). Timothy is often associated with Paul in the salutations of Paul's letters, for example, *"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother . . ."* (2 Corinthians 1:1). This is also true in the letters to the Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, and 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

The Recipients — The Church

Now look at the recipients of the letter. The letter was written to the church of the Thessalonians. Letters written in ancient times were written with the name or names of the people who wrote them and then who the letter was written to following that. For example, *"Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians . . ."* (1 and 2 Thessalonians). *"The church of the Thessalonians"* was an unusual expression in the New Testament. There is a similar expression found in Galatians 1:2 where Paul wrote, *"and all the brothers with me, To the churches in Galatia."* However, these were churches in the province of Galatia. Paul was writing to a church in a town of Thessalonica when he called it *"the church of the Thessalonians."* Remember, the church was made up of the Thessalonians. Paul said: *"to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect"* (Hebrews 12:23). Notice that the firstborn are

described as being in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. This is in harmony with what Paul wrote:

For you, brothers, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews (1 Thessalonians 2:14).

Paul recognized that the church of the Thessalonians existed in the Father and the Son. Later in 1 Thessalonians 3:11 Paul uttered a prayer, “Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you.” The prayer is addressed to both the Father and to the Lord Jesus. The same type of phrase is used in 2 Thessalonians 2:16–17. Not only is the prayer addressed to the Father and the Son, but the Son is actually mentioned first. He said:

May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

The fact that Paul attributed the blessings of God from both the Father and the Son indicated his high view of Christ. He also offered prayers to both the Father and the Son which showed he believed Jesus Christ is God with all that the word implies.

The Greeting: “Grace and Peace to You”

In the greeting Paul said, “Grace and peace to you.” Out of grace will come gratitude. Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 1:12–14:

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was

shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

Paul always felt deep gratitude to Christ for the grace he was given. Notice, he always began with grace and then peace. He said “*Grace and peace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*” (2 Thessalonians 1:2). There is “*peace with God.*” There is also something called the “*peace of God.*” In Romans 5:1 Paul said, “*Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*” This meant the war was over; the alienation was eliminated. Now men and women can have a peaceful relationship with God. However, there is also what Paul called the “*peace of God.*” The “*peace of God*” is what results from a life of prayerful trust on a daily basis. It does not happen immediately. It develops in a Christian as he learns to trust and depend on Christ. For example, in Philippians 4:6–7 Paul wrote:

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Thanksgiving for Their Faith, Hope and Love

Prayers of Thanksgiving (1:2–4)

Paul thanked the Thessalonians for their faith and faithfulness. In 1 Thessalonians 1:2 he said, “*We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers.*” This is characteristic of the letter of 1 Thessalonians. He often said, “*We thank God for you . . .*” For example in 1 Thessalonians 2:13 he wrote:

And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.

In 1 Thessalonians 3:9 Paul did not have the words sufficient enough to describe the gratitude and thanksgiving he had for the Thessalonians. He said, *“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?”* Paul often wrote this to churches he had and had not established. In Colossians 1:3–4 he said, *“We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints.”* Paul had not been in Colosse at the time, but he had heard about their faith and love and thanked God for them. One can see this in Philippians 1:3, *“I thank my God every time I remember you.”* The church in Philippi supported Paul in his needs. Paul looked back on it and said, *“In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now”* (Philippians 1:4–5).

In this context, he remembered three things about the Thessalonians. The first one was, *“your work produced by faith”* (1 Thessalonians 1:3). According to the book of Hebrews, faith is active. In Hebrews 11 the writer reminds the reader about the great accomplishments that came about because of faith. For example: *“By faith Noah . . . built an ark”* (Hebrews 11:7); *“by faith Abraham . . . obeyed and went out”* (Hebrews 11:8); *“by faith Abraham . . . offered Isaac as a sacrifice”* (Hebrews 11:17). Faith accomplishes great things because people are moved by it to obey God in every circumstance of their lives. The book of James discusses faith, works of faith, and deeds. In James 2:26, he said: *“As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.”* Faith was always demonstrated through actions in the Old and New Testament. Paul wrote in Galatians 5:6: *“For in Christ Jesus*

neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love."

Second, Paul mentioned his thanksgiving for the Thessalonians' "*labor prompted by love*" (1 Thessalonians 1:3). This is a tremendous point. Love is always demonstrated in action. Love was what prompted sacrificial giving for others. It was love that prompted God to give His Son. Paul wrote in Romans 5:8, "*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*" John also mentioned this in 1 John 3:16–18:

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

Third, Paul mentioned his thanksgiving for the Thessalonians' "*endurance inspired by hope*" (1 Thessalonians 1:3). The Thessalonians endured severe opposition and persecution because of their living hope in God and in the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul wrote about this hope in 2 Corinthians 4:16–18 when he said:

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

In Hebrews 6:19 one can also read: "*We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain.*" Christians, like the Thessalonians, are able to endure difficulties, trials and

tribulations because of the hope they have. Christians are saved by hope, which enables them to endure.

Notice that Paul and other writers in the Bible often combine faith, hope, and love in their writings. In 1 Thessalonians 5:8 Paul said, *“But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.”* This same triad of faith, hope, and love are found in Romans 5:2–5. Paul said:

Through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

Paul said, *“we have gained access by faith,” “we rejoice in hope of the glory of God,”* and *“God has poured out his love into our hearts.”* The triad can also be found in passages like Colossians 1:4–5 where Paul said:

Because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints — the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel

Faith, hope, and love are combined. Perhaps the most well known of all these passages is 1 Corinthians 13:13 where Paul said: *“And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.”*

The Response of the Thessalonians to the Gospel (1:4–10)

Notice the response of the Thessalonians to the Gospel in the first letter to the Thessalonians. An election had taken place. The Thessalonians had been chosen by God. The Bible teaches that God chooses or elects nations and individuals. In the Old Testament God elected Israel to proclaim His praise to others. In Amos 3:2 God said: “*You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins.*” God’s purpose is expressed in Isaiah 43:21. God through Isaiah said, “*the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise.*” Abraham, Moses, Aaron, and others through the Holy Scriptures were chosen by God as a special nation so they might proclaim His praise to the Gentiles. Christians are also a chosen people. Paul said: “*For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.*” (Ephesians 1:4). In Romans 11:5 he said, “*So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.*” Peter also wrote about God’s chosen people. He said in 1 Peter 2:9:

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

The Bible teaches not only that man is elected, but also must be responsible and respond to God’s choosing. In Amos 3:2 which has been noted, Amos said: “*You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins.*” Christians have the same responsibility. In Romans 11:19–22 Paul said:

You will say then, “Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.” Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.

Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off.

Peter also wrote about the election of the Christians, He said: *“Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall”*(2 Peter 1:10). In Colossians Paul wrote about the conditional nature of Christian security. He wrote that God would present the holy people to Himself in Christ through the death of Jesus. In Colossians 1:22–23 he said:

But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation — if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

The proof that the Thessalonians were chosen came from the way the Gospel was preached in Thessalonica. Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 1:4–5:

For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake.

The Word is necessary, because without it there can be no salvation. Peter said in 1 Peter 1:23, *“For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.”* Paul said in Romans 1:16, *“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of*

God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile."

Salvation also comes with the Holy Spirit. Paul's preaching was accompanied by miracles, signs, and wonders. In Romans 15:19 Paul said: *"by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ."* In 2 Corinthians 12:12 he said, *"The things that mark an apostle — signs, wonders and miracles — were done among you with great perseverance."* Hebrews 2:3–4 says:

How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

God's power was shown by miracles, signs, and wonders through the Holy Spirit. Salvation came by the Word with great conviction demonstrated by the lives of those who brought the message. Paul summarized this view in 2 Corinthians 4:13: *"It is written: 'I believed; therefore I have spoken.' With that same spirit of faith we also believe and, therefore speak."*

Another proof that the Thessalonians were elected was shown in how they imitated the preachers of the Gospel and the Lord and how they received the message. In 1 Thessalonians 1:6 Paul said: *"You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit."* Paul and his fellow workers set an example for the Thessalonians. They also preached despite severe opposition, without capitulating to the pressures of those around them. In response the Thessalonians did the same. The Thessalonians *"welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit."* Note how many times joy and the Holy Spirit are connected in the Bible. For example Paul said, *"For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of*

righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit”(Romans 14:17); and in Romans 15:13, “*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*”

Notice the Thessalonians became an example to others. Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 1:7–10:

And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia — your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead — Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

Thessalonica is the only church in the New Testament that is mentioned as being a model to all the other churches. In Romans 1:8 the church received a letter in which Paul said, “*First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world.*” The Thessalonians were also known for their evangelistic zeal. Paul mentioned this previously in 1 Thessalonians 1:8–9. He said, “*how you turned to God from idols*”(1 Thessalonians 1:9). In Acts 14 the people in the Lycaonian city of Lystra believed that Paul and Barnabas were gods. When the people tried to worship them Paul said in Acts 14:15:

“Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them.”

Paul also preached turning away from idols in Acts 17:29–30:

“Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone — an image made by man’s design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.”

Remember in Acts 26:18:

“To open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”

Paul had been given a commission to “turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God,” and the people had turned to serve God. In 1 Corinthians 8:5–6 Paul said:

For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

In Romans 6:17–18, Paul reminded the Romans that they had at one time been “slaves to sin,” but when they obeyed Jesus’ teaching, they became “slaves to righteousness.” Then Paul said they not only turned to become slaves to righteousness but they turned to wait for Jesus who would deliver them from the wrath to come. Paul said:

But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness (Romans 6:17–18).

Paul's Ministry In Thessalonica

1 Thessalonians 2:1–16

Introduction

Paul and his companions were in Thessalonica for some time before they were forced to leave. They were falsely accused of being religious charlatans who roamed the Mediterranean area trying to promote their religion. As Paul preached to the Thessalonians, he affirmed the integrity and purity of their motives. Four points regarding Paul's ministry in Thessalonica will be addressed in this chapter. They are: Paul's visit in 1 Thessalonians 2:1–4; Paul's behavior in 1 Thessalonians 2:5–8; Paul's example in 1 Thessalonians 2:9–12; and the acceptance of the message by the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 2:13–16.

Paul's Defense of His Message

The first point regarding Paul's ministry in Thessalonica was Paul, Silas, and Timothy's visit there. In 1 Thessalonians 2:1 Paul said, "*You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure.*" The Thessalonians received the Word of God and turned from idols to serve the living God. All of Macedonia, Achaia, and the known world learned of this.

Paul and Silas had suffered and been insulted previously at Philippi. The Philippians knew what happened to them. Paul and Silas were taken by the guards. They were stripped, beaten, locked in an inner cell of the prison, and had stocks fastened to their feet (cf. Acts 16:22–24).

The Thessalonians also knew about Paul and Silas' suffering. Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 2:2, "*We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition.*" Despite "*strong opposition*" from the Jews in Thessalonica, Paul, Timothy, and Silas preached the Word of God there. Notice how Paul explained their preaching. He said, "*with the help of our God.*" Rather than boasting, he gave credit to God. In 2 Corinthians 4:7 Paul said, "*But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.*" Paul endured great persecution. He called it a "*thorn in his flesh*" (2 Corinthians 12:7). According to 2 Corinthians 12:9–10 he asked the Lord to take it from him, but the Lord said:

... "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Out of weakness, Paul and his companions found boldness and strength to preach the Word of God in Thessalonica.

Paul denied any false motives in their preaching to the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 2:3–4:

For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts.

"Error" in this passage means "*false teaching.*" Paul was saying that he and his companions did not teach doctrinal error when they came to the Thessalonians. This is reminiscent of Peter's statement in 2 Peter 1:16; "*We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming*

of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty." Paul may have had this in mind in 2 Timothy 3:13 when he said, "*evil men and imposters . . . deceiving and being deceived.*" Jonah said something similar in the Old Testament concerning false teaching and wickedness in Nineveh. Jonah spoke of what God told him in Jonah 1:2 and 3:2. God said: "*Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me*". . . "*. . . and proclaim to it the message I give you.*" Paul and his companions also proclaimed the message God had given them. They did not make it up or imagine it. Paul expressed this in Galatians 1:8–9, 11–12:

But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned! . . . I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.

Paul and his companions did not have impure motives. The first half of 1 Thessalonians 2:3 says, "*For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives . . .*" The word "*impure*" is usually connected with sexual immorality or sexual impurity (cf. Romans 1:24; Galatians 5:19; 2 Corinthians 12:21; Ephesians 4:19). There were religious teachers who followed ritual prostitution and had impure sexual motives in their preaching. Paul explained that he and his companions had nothing to do with these teachers. There was no moral impurity or depravity in their motivations. The last half of 1 Thessalonians 2:3 says, "*. . . nor were we trying to trick you.*" No means were used to bait or trap the Thessalonians. Paul often faced this type of attitude. He had to

defend himself on numerous occasions. In 2 Corinthians 4:2 Paul said:

Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:4 Paul said: “On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts.” It was not his motivation to please man but to please God. In Galatians 1:10 he said, “Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ. However in other contexts Paul said he **did** try to please men. For example, in 1 Corinthians 9:19–22, Paul wrote:

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.

Paul explained his reasoning for this in 1 Corinthians 10:31–33:

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God

— even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.

Then Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11:1, *“Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.”* In matters of personal rights, privileges, and matters of judgment Paul was forbearing and flexible. In matters of truth and error, right and wrong, Paul was unbending and uncompromising. He was not seeking to please men. He was seeking to please God.

Paul's Defense of His Motives

Paul affirmed his and his companions motivation as they preached the Word of God in Thessalonica. In 1 Thessalonians 2:4 Paul said, *“On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel . . .”* Even though Paul had been a blasphemer and persecutor, he received mercy, was *“approved,”* and given the privilege of preaching the Gospel to others. In Galatians 2:7 he said, *“On the contrary, they saw that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, just as Peter had been to the Jews.”*

Notice also in 1 Thessalonians 2:4 Paul said, *“. . . We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts.”* There is no motivation greater than pleasing God. Jesus said in John 5:30, *“‘By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.’”* Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 4:1: *“Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more.”* A Christian lives his or her life with the recognition that God is testing their hearts. Their lives are not only what they are outwardly nor what they appear to be to others. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 4:5, *“. . . [The Lord] will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. . . .”* In Romans 2:16 he said, *“This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.”*

Everything Paul did was in recognition that God would test men's hearts.

Paul's Defense of His Method

Paul talked about his and his companion's behavior in 1 Thessalonians 2:5–8. For example, in 1 Thessalonians 2:5 Paul said, *"You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed — God is our witness."* To flatter means to praise too much, to praise someone beyond the truth, or to praise someone insincerely. Paul was saying he and his companions never did that and the Thessalonians knew it. In Romans 16:18 he said: *"For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people."* In the Old Testament Absalom, the son of David, stood outside the city gates and flattered the men of Israel. The Bible says in 2 Samuel 15:2–6:

*[Absalom] would get up early and stand by the side of the road leading to the city gate. Whenever anyone came with a complaint to be placed before the king for a decision, Absalom would call out to him, "What town are you from?" He would answer, "Your servant is from one of the tribes of Israel." Then Absalom would say to him, "Look, **your claims are valid and proper**, but there is no representative of the king to hear you." And Absalom would add, "If only I were appointed judge in the land! Then everyone who has a complaint or case could come to me and I would see that he gets justice." Also, whenever anyone approached him to bow down before him, **Absalom would reach out his hand, take hold of him and kiss him.** Absalom behaved in this way toward all the Israelites who came to the king asking for justice, and so **he stole the hearts of the men of Israel.***

Greed is a great motivator. Even religious teachers may have been motivated by greed while they attempted to preach the Gospel. In 2 Peter 2:3 Peter said: *"In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping."* Then in 2 Peter 2:15, Peter used Balaam from the Old Testament as an example. He wrote, *"They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness."* Paul made it known that he was not motivated by any of those things and that those motivations characterize anyone who loves the world and the things of the world. John expressed this as well. He said:

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world — the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does — comes not from the Father but from the world (1 John 2:15–16).

Paul said that covetousness is idolatry in Colossians 3:5: *"Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry."* In Ephesians 5:5 Paul said, *"For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person — such a man is an idolater — has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God."* In many cases when Paul could have received support he refused to do so. When he talked to the Ephesian elders as he was about to bid them goodbye, he reminded them of his ministry among them: *"I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions"* (Acts 20:33–34).

On many occasions Paul appealed to God as his witness. He said, *"God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you"* (Romans 1:9). In 2 Corinthians 1:23 he said, *"I call God*

as my witness that it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth.” In Philippians 1:8 he said, *“God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.”* For testimony to his own motivations, Paul appealed to God. When he wanted to appeal to his conduct, he appealed to the Thessalonian brethren’s knowledge. They knew and could see his conduct.

Paul did not seek man’s praise but God’s. He knew the praise of men was for nothing and that God’s praise was all that mattered. In 1 Thessalonians 2:6 Paul said, *“We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else.”* The Jews of Jesus’ time often remained in unbelief and disobedience because their motivations were wrong. They sought man’s praise rather than God’s. This is what Jesus said to the Jews in John 5:44: *“How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?”* Some who believed in Jesus refused to confess Him because *“they loved the praise from men more than praise from God”* (John 12:43).

Paul then confirmed that he and his companions refused to make themselves a burden to any of the people in Thessalonica. Financial gain was not the reason they preached. They proved this by working with their own hands. However, Paul avowed that he and other gospel preachers had the right to be supported:

In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel. But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me. I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of this boast” (1 Corinthians 9:14–15).

Paul received support from other churches so he could serve the church in Corinth: *“I robbed other churches by receiving support from them so as to serve you”* (2 Corinthians 11:8). He felt it was like robbery to take support from other

churches, but because he did not want to be a stumbling block for the people in Corinth he accepted their funding:

And when I was with you and needed something, I was not a burden to anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied what I needed. I have kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so (2 Corinthians 11:9).

Paul and his companions made an effort not to be like the religious charlatans who made a living out of religion. Although they received some support from other churches they were not a burden to the church in Thessalonica.

Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 2:7, “*but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children.*” This figure of speech was also used by Moses in the Old Testament when he complained to God about having to “*carry*” all the Israelites to the Promised Land. In Numbers 11:12 Moses said:

Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their forefathers?

However Paul did not look upon the Thessalonians as a burden. They were his “*joy*” and “*crown*” (1 Thessalonians 2:19). He treated them with gentleness and the care of a nursing mother. Then he added in 1 Thessalonians 2:8, “*We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.*” It was Paul and his companion’s Gospel because they allowed it to permeate their lives. It was God’s Gospel, it was not a message devised by man. Paul said that he and his companions not only gave the Thessalonians the Gospel but their lives as well. Paul said something similar to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 12:15: “*So I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well. If I love you more, will you love me less?*” Remember what Jesus

said in Matthew 20:28, “*just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*” According to John, this is what love truly is. He wrote in 1 John 3:16: “*This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.*” The Macedonians, including the Thessalonians, had learned the principle of self-giving. In 2 Corinthians 8:5 Paul said, “*And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God’s will.*”

Paul’s Defense of His Example in Thessalonica

The third point to look at is Paul’s example to the Thessalonians. In 1 Thessalonians 2:9 Paul said, “*Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.*”

Paul said he and his companions were involved in “*toil*” and “*hardship*” because they “*worked night and day.*” One can read in Acts 18:3 that their work was in making tents or working leather. In 2 Thessalonians 3:8, Paul again reminded the Thessalonians of their selfless ministry. He said: “*Nor did we eat anyone’s food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you.*” Paul received financial help from the church in Philippi more than once: “*for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need*” (Philippians 4:16).

Paul mentioned his and his companions righteous lives in 1 Thessalonians 2:10, “*You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed.*” In 2 Corinthians 1:12 Paul wrote:

Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity

that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God's grace.

Paul said, “we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children” (1 Thessalonians 2:11). He never wore a religious title. This would have violated what Jesus said in Matthew 23:9, “‘And do not call anyone on earth ‘father,’ for you have one Father, and he is in heaven.’” Paul was not called “Father.” However he looked upon those he taught as his spiritual children. Paul said, “For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children” (1 Thessalonians 2:11). Also in Philemon 1:10, Paul said, “I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains.” In 1 Corinthians 4:14–15, he wrote to the Corinthians:

I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children. Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.

As a spiritual father figure Paul treated the Christians with compassion. In 1 Thessalonians 2:11–12 Paul said,

For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory

In the Bible, Christians are made or counted worthy on the basis of Christ's atoning sacrifice. They cannot be worthy on the basis of their own righteousness or goodness. Romans 3:24 says, “ [we] are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” Romans 5:1 says, “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” God makes each person worthy. Yet there is a responsibility to live lives

worthy of God. These Biblical passages express this fact. Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:1, *"As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received."* He also said, *"And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God"* (Colossians 1:10). In Philippians 1:27 Paul said:

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel.

It is a life worthy of God that calls His children into His Kingdom and glory. The Kingdom was a present reality and men were being called into it. In Colossians 1:13 Paul said, *"For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves."* In Revelation 1:5–6 John said:

And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

The Hebrew writer recognized the present reality of the Kingdom. In Hebrews 12:28 he said, *"Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe."* There is also a future aspect to the Kingdom. God continually calls His children to that Kingdom and glory. Paul talked about the future Kingdom in 2 Timothy 4:18 when he said: *"The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen."* Peter had the same Kingdom in mind in 2 Peter

1:11 when he said, *“and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”*

The Acceptance of the Message

The fourth point is the acceptance of the message by the Thessalonians. This is found in 1 Thessalonians 2:13–16. In 1 Thessalonians 2:13 Paul said:

And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.

The Thessalonians received the Word of God for what it is, the Word of God. The Gospel had been divinely revealed. As Paul said again in Galatians 1:12, *“I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.”* Also in 1 Corinthians 14:37 Paul said, *“If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord’s command.”* Ephesians 3:20 says, *“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.”* The Thessalonians’ reception of this message was another cause for thanksgiving to Paul. Several statements in 1 and 2 Thessalonians emphasize that fact. In 1 Thessalonians 3:9 he said, *“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?”*

Paul said the Thessalonians had not only received the Gospel as the Word of God, but they had become *“imitators of God’s churches in Judea”* (1 Thessalonians 2:14). *“God’s churches in Judea”* included the church in Jerusalem as well as other churches in the province. Acts 4–9 tell of the intense persecution that the churches went through in their beginning. Paul reminded the Galatians that he had also been involved in the persecution. In Galatians 1:13 he said, *“For you have heard*

of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it.” He had traveled to look for Christians in other areas Christians and when he found them they were often put to death. Paul said in Acts 26:9–10:

“I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them.”

Not everyone received the Gospel. There was a persecution upon the brethren, and a hardness among the Jews that caused severe opposition towards Paul and the Christians. Paul said harsh things about the Jews: “[they] *killed the Lord Jesus*” (1 Thessalonians 2:15). Peter also stood up on the day of Pentecost and told the Jews:

“This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him” (Acts 2:23–24).

In Acts 3:15 Peter said: *“You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this.”* Stephen said they killed the prophets too:

“You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him” (Acts 7:51–52).

Remember in Matthew 23:37 Jesus wept over Jerusalem and said:

“Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.”

Even in Thessalonica and Berea the Jews were the ones who drove Paul and Barnabas out. Paul said:

The Jews incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region (Acts 13:50).

This persecution took place in many other parts of the Roman empire. Paul said very hard things about the Jews and their attitude toward the Gospel in 1 Thessalonians 2:15–16:

[The Jews] killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to all men in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last.

Remember what Jesus said:

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to” (Matthew 23:13).

Paul was forbidden by the Jews to preach to Gentiles on many different occasions. In 1 Thessalonians 2:16 Paul said, *“The wrath of God has come on them at last.”* To say this meant “though it has not happened already, it was a very

definite thing.” Their sins had been piled up to the limit, and the Lord would fully punish them when He came in judgment.

Paul's Concern for Their Steadfastness and Growth

1 Thessalonians 2:17–3:13

Introduction

Paul, Timothy, and Silas were forced to leave Thessalonica before they were ready. Opposition from the Jews forced them out, leaving a young church with converts freshly out of Gentile paganism. They were surrounded by hostile Jews and their countrymen who opposed and severely persecuted them. In this section of Scripture Paul discussed his great anxiety for the Thessalonian converts, how he sent Timothy to them, and of Timothy's encouraging report.

But, brothers, when we were torn away from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. For we wanted to come to you — certainly I, Paul, did, again and again — but Satan stopped us. For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy. So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God's fellow worker in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them. In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted.

And it turned out that way, as you well know. For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter might have tempted you and our efforts might have 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, 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. May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

Paul's Concern for the Thessalonians

Paul had a longing to see and return to the Thessalonians. He said, *"For we wanted to come to you — certainly I, Paul, did, again and again — but Satan stopped us"* (1 Thessalonians 2:18). Paul specified that, out of the three, he especially wanted to come back. It was not their will to leave. He said:

But, brothers, when we were torn away from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you (1 Thessalonians 2:17).

What Satan did to keep them away was unclear but Paul said, “*we were torn away from you . . .*” (1 Thessalonians 2:17). Acts 17 says that Paul and Silas were forced to leave because of opposition from the Jews. However they were not ready to go. Acts 17:5 says that the Jews were jealous. They rounded up bad characters from the marketplace and formed a mob. Then they started a riot in the city. The mob rushed to Jason’s house in search of Paul and Silas, “*then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go*” (Acts 17:9). The expression mentioned earlier, “*we were torn away from you*” (1 Thessalonians 2:17), literally means to be orphaned. Paul had described himself and his companions as being “*like a mother caring for her little children*” (1 Thessalonians 2:7) and as “*a father deals with his own children*” (1 Thessalonians 2:11). Paul and his companions were like orphaned children. They could be like mothers. They could be like fathers. They could be like children. Every case showed the tender compassion and close relationship that Paul and his companions felt for the Christians in Thessalonica. The Thessalonians were always on his mind:

Since we have been physically separated from you, my brothers (though never for a moment separated in heart), we have longed all the more to see you face to face. Yes, I, Paul, have longed to come and see you more than once — but somehow Satan prevented our coming. (1 Thessalonians 2:17 JB Phillips Translation)

They were away in body but in mind and heart they had never left the Thessalonians. Paul spoke of the intense longing to return to the Thessalonians. This was characteristic of Paul’s attitude toward the converts. Paul said that Satan stopped them from coming back. The word “*Satan*” is from a word meaning “*adversary*” which is used three times in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. In these instances “*Satan*” refers to adversaries that God raised up against Solomon because of his apostasy (cf. 1 Kings 11).

The Bible mentions several other names or titles for Satan. In 1 Peter 5:8 Peter called him, "*Your enemy the devil.*" In Matthew 13:38 Jesus called him "*the evil one.*" He is also called "*the ruler of the kingdom of the air*" in Ephesians 2:2. In John 14:30 Jesus called him "*the prince of this world.*" He was "*the serpent*" in 2 Corinthians 11:3. The serpent who beguiled Adam and Eve in the garden and who sought to beguile the Corinthians. In 2 Corinthians 4:4 Paul called the devil "*the god of this age.*" In Revelation he is referred to as "*the dragon*" or "*the great red dragon.*" Satan is described as having tremendous power and one who tries to entice the Christian away from God. Then in 1 Thessalonians 3:5 Paul called him "*the tempter.*" In some way he was involved in hindering Paul's return to the Thessalonians. Some scholars think it was the bond that was posted by Jason. However the Christians in Thessalonica would have known about that. This context implies that they expected Paul to return and he was explaining why he was unable to. Whatever it was Paul attributed the hindrance to the power of Satan.

Paul had great joy and glory because of the Thessalonians. In 1 Thessalonians 2:19–20 Paul said: "*For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy.*" In Philippians 2:16 he said, "*you hold out the word of life — in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing.*" A similar expression is found in 2 Corinthians 1:14 when he said, "*as you have understood us in part, you will come to understand fully that you can boast of us just as we will boast of you in the day of the Lord Jesus.*" Faithful converts to Jesus are the teacher's greatest joy. In Philippians 4:1 Paul said, "*Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!*" Also in 3 John 4, John said, "*I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.*" So God's servants who teach the Gospel can glory and boast in their converts when the day of the Lord Jesus comes. This is especially true

if they remain faithful through the pressures of Satan to force them away from the living God.

Notice the encouraging report Timothy brought back to Paul. Paul was concerned about what was going on with the Thessalonians so he sent Timothy to them. In 1 Thessalonians 3:1 Paul said, *“when we could stand it no longer.”* In other words Paul and his companions had such deep anxiety they could not rest. The Jews stirred up opposition for the Thessalonians and their own countrymen persecuted them. Paul said:

So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God's fellow worker in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith (1 Thessalonians 3:1–2).

According to Acts 17:14 Paul was forced, because of Jewish persecution, to leave Berea. Acts 17:15 says, *“the men who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.”* Although Acts does not reveal all the details of how Timothy and Silas met up with Paul in Athens, they did arrive in Athens. This is known because they were both available for Paul to send Timothy to Thessalonica, and Silas to another point in Macedonia.

Timothy was described by Paul in different ways throughout the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians 4:17 he was described as being a *“faithful brother.”* Paul said in Philippians 2:22, *“But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father, he has served with me in the work of the gospel.”* In the first letter to the Thessalonians Paul described him as *“our brother and God's fellow worker”* (1 Thessalonians 3:2). *“God's fellow worker”* is a staggering expression. This is not the only time that expression is used in the Bible however. For example in 1 Corinthians 3:9 Paul said, *“For we are God's fellow workers.”* In Romans 16:21, he

referred to Timothy as *"my fellow worker."* He had confidence in sending Timothy on this journey.

According to 1 Thessalonians 3:2 Paul wanted to strengthen and encourage the Thessalonians in their faith, In 1 Thessalonians 3:3 he specified another reason. He said: *"so that no one would be unsettled by these trials."* Paul wanted the Thessalonians to understand that as Christians they should not look at trials the same as people in the world did: *"You know quite well that we were destined for them"* (1 Thessalonians 3:3). In other words, God has designed trials, opposition, and persecution as a part of the Christian life. Remember what Jesus said in John 15:18–20:

"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also."

In John 16:33 Jesus said: *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."* A statement is made about this in 2 Timothy 3:12: *"In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."* Paul was saying that everything Jesus warned about had taken place. The Thessalonians knew it was destined to be that way. They were warned in advance. Paul said, *"when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know"* (1 Thessalonians 3:4). In Acts 14:22 Paul and Barnabas were returning on their first missionary journey to visit newly established churches. The Bible says that they were *"strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. 'We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.'"* Jesus mentioned why these things

should be known in advance: “*All this I have told you so that you will not go astray. They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God*” (John 16:1–2). Remember Paul persecuted the church when he was still Saul of Tarsus and did it with a good conscience. He said, “*I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth*” (Acts 26:9).

Paul was concerned about the Thessalonians faith:

For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter might have tempted you and our efforts might have been useless (1 Thessalonians 3:5).

In other words, “why would we put so much effort into teaching you to have you fall away because of opposition.” The loss of the Thessalonians’ faith would have meant that his efforts were in vain. Paul wrote in a similar vein to other churches. In Philippians 2:16 he wrote, “*as you hold out the word of life — in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing.*” In Galatians 2:2, when he talked about the problem of the requirement of Titus being circumcised and binding the law upon the Gentiles, he said:

I went in response to a revelation and set before them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. But I did this privately to those who seemed to be leaders, for fear that I was running or had run my race in vain.

If the Thessalonians had turned away it would have meant apostasy because they were not continuing to trust God. But Paul said, “*Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love*” (1 Thessalonians 3:6). One would get the impression Timothy had just arrived and Paul immediately sat down and wrote the letter to the Thessalonians to congratulate them on the good news.

Timothy's Encouraging Report

There is a passage in Proverbs 25:25 that says, *"Like cold water to a weary soul is good news from a distant land."* In the same way the news Paul got from Timothy was like cool and refreshing water. In the first half of 1 Thessalonians 3:6 Paul talked about the Thessalonians' faith and love. They needed faith and love because if there is faith, then there is submission to God. If there is love for God, His will will be done.

1 Thessalonians 3:8 says, *"For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord."* In the last half of 1 Thessalonians 3:6 Paul said, *"[Timothy] 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."* Paul said they *"really live"* because the Thessalonians were *"standing firm in the Lord."* Paul's whole life was wrapped up in these converts. He had deep concern for them which must have caused him sleepless nights. When the good news came about their faith and love he was able to relax. He exhorted the Christians to stand firm, not only here but in other passages. For instance in 1 Corinthians 16:13 Paul said, *"be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong."* Also in Galatians 5:1 Paul said: *"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."* In Philippians 1:27 Paul wrote:

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel.

It is important that Christians continue to stand firm despite opposition and any pressures they may have from the unbelieving outside world.

The Good News Brings Paul Satisfaction

Paul was very pleased to receive this letter: *"Now we really live"* (1 Thessalonians 3:8). His happiness was wrapped up in the converts. In 2 Corinthians 11:28–29, after talking about all the daily dangers he faced, he said: *"Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?"* In 1 Thessalonians 3:9 Paul said, *"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?"* The Thessalonians had pleased Paul in so many ways: *"They had turned from idols to serve the living God"* (1 Thessalonians 1:9). In 1 Thessalonians 3:7, despite severe trials and persecution, they persevered and had grown in both faith and love. They spread the message. Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 1:8, *"your faith in God has become known everywhere."* They also lived to please God. 1 Thessalonians 4:1 says, *"Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more."* They lived to please God, they manifested love to all the brothers throughout Macedonia and Achaia, and they were encouraging and building each other up in the faith. No wonder Paul felt incapable of thanking God enough for them. The Thessalonians were a dream congregation for any preacher. However Paul was still concerned about going to see them. He prayed about going to them: *"Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith"* (1 Thessalonians 3:10). The expression *"your faith"* is found four or five times in this chapter. It is interesting that Paul spoke over and over again about their faith. This suggests that if a Christian's faith is right, everything else is going to be right. He said, *"we sent Timothy, who is our brother and God's fellow worker in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and to encourage you in your faith"* (1 Thessalonians 3:2). In 1 Thessalonians 3:5 Paul said, *"For this reason . . . I sent [Timothy] to find out about your faith."* 1 Thessalonians 3:6 says, *"[Timothy] has brought good news*

about your faith and love." In 1 Thessalonians 3:7 he said, *"Therefore, brothers, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith."* If faith is present everything else will fall into place. However their faith was not perfect. In fact, in 1 Thessalonians 3:10 he said, *"Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith."* What were they lacking? In 1 Thessalonians 4 and 5 one can read about the problems the Thessalonians were having. For example Paul warned them about reverting to pagan sexual immorality (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:3). It was rampant all around them. They also had a problem not minding their own business and providing for their own needs according to the exhortation in 1 Thessalonians 4:11–12. They had anxiety over the fate of their loved ones who had died in the Lord. They wondered if they would lose out in the blessings and favor of God when the Lord returns (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:13). They also had a lack of proper respect in regard to their leaders. 1 Thessalonians 5:12–13 says:

Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.

Paul's Prayer for the Thessalonian Christians

Paul's prayer in 1 Thessalonians 3:11–13 began with, *"Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus . . ."* He appealed both to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. In 2 Thessalonians 2:16–17, Paul prayed a similar prayer. He said, *"May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father . . ."* He, again, addressed the prayer to both the Father and the Son. Sometimes the prayer is addressed to the Lord Jesus Christ first and then to the Father. The fact that he appealed to both the Father and the Son is a strong affirmation that Jesus Christ is an absolute deity.

In 1 Thessalonians 3:11 Paul's prayer was, "*Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you.*" According to history, Paul did not return to Thessalonica immediately after writing this letter. In Acts we find that he arrived later in Macedonia. Paul said:

When the uproar had ended, Paul sent for the disciples and, after encouraging them, said good-by and set out for Macedonia. He traveled through that area, speaking many words of encouragement to the people, and finally arrived in Greece (Acts 20:1–2).

Continuing the prayer in 1 Thessalonians 3:12 Paul prayed, "*May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.*" The Thessalonians already loved their brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet they were encouraged to let that love grow until it overflowed. 2 Thessalonians 1:3 says that this prayer was answered. Paul wrote:

We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing.

One of the marks of discipleship among God's people is that they love one another. Jesus said:

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34–35).

Peter wrote in 1 Peter 1:22, "*Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.*" In 1 Thessalonians 3:13 Paul continued his prayer: "*May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy*

...” A prayer for inner strength is what Christians ought to pray for one another. In Ephesians 3:16 Paul said, *“I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being.”* Notice he prayed for the Colossians in the same way:

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God (Colossians 1:9–10).

Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 3:13, *“... be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.”* The Lord is often pictured in the Scriptures coming with His angels. For example in 2 Thessalonians 1:7 Paul said, *“This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels.”* In Matthew 13:41–42 Jesus said:

“The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all that do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Also in Matthew 25:31 Jesus said, *“When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory.”* The Bible also teaches that God will come with His people, the saints: *“We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him”* (1 Thessalonians 4:14). In this particular context it may be that the statement includes both the angels along with the saints who have gone to be with the Lord.

Conclusion

Notice that each chapter in 1 Thessalonians closes with a reference to the second coming of Christ. This chapter stresses the need for a life that is *“blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.”* Remember what John wrote in 1 John 3:2–3. He said:

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.

Living to Please God

1 Thessalonians 4:1–12

Introduction

It may seem strange that Paul should go to such lengths to inculcate sexual purity in a Christian congregation; but two things have to be remembered. First, the Thessalonians had only newly come into the Christian faith and they had come from a society in which chastity was an unknown virtue; they were still in the midst of such a society and the infection of it was playing upon them all the time. It would be exceedingly difficult for them to unlearn what they had for all their lives accepted as natural. Second, there never was an age in history when marriage vows were so disregarded and divorce so disastrously easy. The phrase which we have translated “that each of you should possess his own body in consecration and in honour” could be translated, “that each of you may possess his own *wife* in consecration and in honour.”¹

1 Thessalonians 4:1–12:

Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you

¹ Barclay, William, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, p. 230.

should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit. Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more. Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.

A Life Pleasing to God

One of the dangers the First Century Christians faced was living in a pagan world that had a pagan lifestyle of sexual immorality. Blatant immorality was widely practiced in the Greek world without shame or embarrassment. An example of how blatant this sexual immorality was can be found through something Demosthenes², a prominent Greek statesman and orator, at one time said: “We keep prostitutes for pleasure. We keep mistresses for the day to day needs of the body. We keep wives for the begetting of children and for the faithful guardianship of our homes.” This quote shows that there was

Editor’s note: Demosthenes 384-322 BC was a prominent Greek statesman and orator of ancient Athens. His speeches provided valuable information on the political, social, and economic life of 4th century Athens (www.britannica.com/Demosthenes)

no shame in extramarital relationships. However, God would not tolerate such a lifestyle for His people. The people who He called out of the world. God called His people to be Holy, to be faithful in marriage, and to be sexually pure before marriage. It was not easy for the Thessalonians to follow this ethic of moral purity, however, when they were surrounded by a world that abandoned itself to the grossest kind of immorality. Christians were constantly tempted to return to the immorality which they had recently been delivered. The fact that this epistle and many others in the New Testament warn about sins of such sexual immorality demonstrates that this problem was real and pressing throughout the whole Roman empire.

Note that the sum of verses in the New Testament that are written about the dangers of sexual immorality are written to Christians. In Romans 13:13 Paul said, *“Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.”* In 1 Corinthians 6:18a Paul said, *“Flee from sexual immorality.”* In 2 Corinthians 12:21 Paul said:

I am afraid that when I come again my God will humble me before you, and I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual sin and debauchery in which they have indulged.

In Galatians 5:19–21 Paul talked about the works of the flesh. He said:

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery . . . I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Paul warned the Ephesians, *“But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people”*

(Ephesians 5:3). He also warned the Philippians about sexual sins:

For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things (Philippians 3:18–19).

The Colossians were also warned. In Colossians 3:5, Paul said: *“Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.”* Hebrews 13:4 says, *“Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.”* Society today has become much like the decadent society of the first century. Today sexual immorality is widely tolerated and practiced. This is also true among God’s people. Even though this passage shows that it is God’s will that His people be Holy and avoid sexual immorality, *“For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life”* (1 Thessalonians 4:7). That demand is still a part of the Christian ethic today. Although this standard of living is different than the world’s, God calls His people to live a different lifestyle. Paul often referred to what he had taught the Thessalonians while he, Timothy, and Silas were with them. In 1 Thessalonians 4:1a Paul said, *“Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God.”* Man cannot simply do what he sees as right in his own eyes. God knew man would need instructions on how to please Him. He gave these instructions to Paul who administered them during his short stay in Thessalonica. He added instructions about sexual impurity. These instructions were by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. In 1 Corinthians 14:37 Paul said, *“If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord’s command.”*

Paul also said in 1 Thessalonians 4:8a, *“he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God.”* Paul was not criticizing

what the Thessalonians were doing. He was simply warning them about the dangers of what they were doing. Paul said that they were living a lifestyle that pleased God.” 1 John 1:7 says that they were walking in the light. *“If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.”* They were living according to the truth, but Paul said, *“I want to urge you to do this more and more”* (1 Thessalonians 4:10). God’s people cannot allow themselves to be satisfied to remain in the same spiritual state year after year. Paul also urged the Thessalonians to continue to *“encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing”* (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

A Life of Sexual Purity

Paul explained the reason for sexual purity in 1 Thessalonians 4:3–8. He wrote:

It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit.

Biblical writers often emphasized the need for sexual purity. For example, Peter wrote:

As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do;

for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy” (1 Peter 1:14–16).

Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 4:3b, *“You should avoid sexual immorality.”* Remember in Acts 15 the Church in Jerusalem sent letters to the Gentile churches to tell them that they did not have to keep the law of Moses to be saved. There were, however, moral obligations to follow. Paul said, *“You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality”* (Acts 15:29). In 1 Corinthians 6:18 Paul wrote: *“Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.”* Notice also that he said that, *“Each of you should learn to control his own body”* (1 Thessalonians 4:4). Man makes a general assumption that self-control is an impossibility. Paul, however, took away that excuse. He wrote to Timothy about this when he said:

Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure . . . Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart (1 Timothy 5:22, 2 Timothy 2:22).

In 1 Corinthians 6:18–20 Paul said:

Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

The heathen are described as those who do not know God (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:5) because even though they had

opportunities to know Him they rejected those opportunities. Paul discussed this in Romans 1:21. He said, *“For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.”* Paul said that they exchanged the truth about God for a lie, served and worshiped a creature rather than the creator, and refused to have God in their knowledge (cf. Romans 1:25). Then in Ephesians 2:12 he mentioned the Gentiles. He said they were described as *“separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.”* Their practice of passionate lust could not serve them as a guide. In other words *“it doesn’t matter what the world is doing.”* In Ephesians 4:17–19 Paul said:

So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

God’s Children are to *“put to death,”* or crucify, the passions of the flesh. Paul wrote: *“Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desire and greed, which is idolatry”* (Colossians 3:5). In Galatians 5:24 he said, *“those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.”* Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 4:6, *“in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you.”* A similar warning can be found in the Old Testament. Proverbs 5:15–18, 20 says:

*Drink water from your own cistern,
running water from your own well.*

*Should your springs overflow in the streets,
your streams of water in the public squares?*

*Let them be yours alone,
never to be shared with strangers.*

*May your fountain be blessed,
and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth . . .*

*Why be captivated, my son, by an adulteress?
Why embrace the bosom of another man's wife?*

These passages suggest that sexual impurity was a problem for people in the Old Testament, the New Testament, as it is still a problem today. Paul and his companions warned the Thessalonians about the danger of sexual immorality and of the punishment if they chose that lifestyle (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:6b). In Galatians 5:19–21, Paul warned them about the works of the flesh. He concluded by saying:

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissension, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you [Christians in Galatia], as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Paul said that those who live that kind of lifestyle will not inherit God's kingdom (cf. Ephesians 5:5). Hebrews 13:4b says, "God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral." Revelation 21:8 tells what that punishment will be. John said:

But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars — their place

will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.

These warnings were addressed to Christians not heathens. Paul and Peter did not write their letters to unbelievers or pagans. They wrote them to people who had been born again. People who were in God's family. Paul and his companions warned those who were reborn that they could not practice such a lifestyle and inherit the kingdom of God (cf. Galatians 5:21). Paul said in 1 Timothy 5:22b, "*Keep yourself pure.*" Paul told them to flee the passions of youth (cf. 2 Timothy 2:22). John spoke of the hope that Christians have of being like Jesus and seeing Him as He is. John went on to say, "*Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure*" (1 John 3:3).

In the context of 1 Thessalonians 4:8, rejection of the instruction concerning moral purity and abstinence from sexual sins means rejection of God. Paul will not be the one to bring punishment. He was revealing the will of the Almighty God. It is God's will that His people live morally pure lives. Paul said that this punishment is reserved for those who are disobedient (cf. Ephesians 5:6).

Notice also that sexual sins are contrary to the presence of the Holy Spirit (cf. Galatians 5:17). This is true in the Christian's body as well as life. Paul warned about sexual immorality again in 1 Corinthians 6:19–20. He said:

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

In other words, "how can you live life defiling a body where the Holy Spirit dwells?" Notice also that in Galatians 5:22–23 Paul said that one of the characteristics of someone who has the fruit of the spirit is self-control. For example: *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and **self-control**. Against such things*

there is no law.” This involves a life-style that is quite different from what other people who are not of the spirit practice.

A Life of Brotherly Love

Paul’s next point is about brotherly love. He said, “*Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other*” (1 Thessalonians 4:9). Paul and other writers often thought it was necessary to write to people about brotherly love. Throughout the New Testament they did so. For example, Paul in Romans 12:10a said, “*be devoted to one another in brotherly love.*” Hebrews 13:1 says, “*Keep on loving each other as brothers.*” In 1 Peter 1:22 Peter said, “*Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.*” In Colossians 3:14 Paul talked about different things that the Christian puts on in his life. He said, “*Over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*” The Thessalonians however had an attitude of wanting to know God’s will. They had learned about the necessity and importance of love and so were already manifesting this love. Paul said, “*you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia*” (1 Thessalonians 4:10). Their love was demonstrated in their generosity toward the poor. Paul wrote about the Macedonians which included the church in Thessalonica. He said:

Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints (2 Corinthians 8:2–4).

This passage indicates that the church in Thessalonica was a loving Church concerned about the poor and needy. They even begged Paul for the opportunity of engaging in that service. But Paul still encouraged them to love even more (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:10). Paul prayed, *“May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you”* (1 Thessalonians 3:12). He did not ask them to do something that he was not doing. According to 2 Thessalonians 1:3b their love did grow. He said, *“the love every one of you has for each other is increasing.”* The Thessalonians love had been so great that it had extended to all the people of Macedonia and then continued to grow even more.

A Life of Honest Endeavor

In 1 Thessalonians 4:11 Paul strongly admonished the Thessalonians to live quiet lives, to mind their own business, and to make a living with their own hands. *“Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life.”* This would include a life of quiet trust and dependence upon God. Jesus spoke of this kind of trust in John 14:1. Jesus’ disciples were very concerned about His leaving. Jesus told them, *“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.”* Paul also admonished the Philippian Christians to a life of trust and quietness. Paul said:

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6–7).

The *“peace of God”* is the result of having an anxiety free, quiet trust in God.

Paul continued to say, *“mind your own business”* Christians are not to interfere in the affairs of others. Peter

warned about this in 1 Peter 4:15. He said *“If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a **meddler**.”*

Paul then said *“work with your hands”* in 1 Thessalonians 4:11c. Some Christians in Thessalonica did not want to face up to their responsibilities of providing for themselves. Paul realized that this was often true. In Ephesians 4:28 he said, *“He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.”* In 2 Thessalonians 3:10 he wrote, *“For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: ‘If a man will not work, he shall not eat.’”* In 1 Timothy 5:8 Paul said, *“If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”* Paul had been a great example in this regard. In Acts 20:34 when he talked to the Ephesian elders he said, *“You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions.”* In 2 Thessalonians 3:8b he said, *“On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you.”*

In 1 Thessalonians 4:12 Paul explained why Christians are to lead quiet lives, mind their own business, and to work with their own hands. He said it is *“so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders.”* It is important that Christians win the respect of those on the outside. Paul was often aware of this. In Colossians 4:5 he said, *“Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.”* This was said in the context of evangelism. How will people on the outside respond to Christians who do not live a Holy life? How can Christians evangelize without having a good rapport with the people they are trying to reach out to. When Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 3:7 about choosing elders, bishops, or overseers he said that the one who is chosen *“must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil’s trap.”* Lost people cannot be won or influenced by Christians if they are lazy or careless in domestic responsibilities.

Another reason Paul gave for doing these three things was, “*so that you will not be dependent on anybody*” (1 Thessalonians 4:12b). Remember Paul said, “*If a man will not work, he shall not eat*” (2 Thessalonians 3:10b).

The Christian's Hope – Return of the Lord

1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

Introduction

In this section of Scripture Paul tells them they must not sorrow as the pagans world sorrowed, as though they had no hope. In the face of death the pagan world had no hope, but this was not true of the believers. Paul informs them that even as they do not live like the pagans, they do not die with the same bleak hopelessness as the pagans. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 Paul wrote:

Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will

be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.

The Christian Hope — its Security

The primary theme of this letter is the second coming of Christ. This theme is mentioned toward the end of most chapters in 1 Thessalonians. In this particular passage Paul dealt with a specific problem concerning the second coming. Some of the Thessalonian Christians were grieving and worried about the loss of loved ones who had died before the Lord's return. They didn't know if their loved ones would be able to experience the Lord's blessings since they died before the Lord's return. In this Scripture Paul wrote to clarify issues concerning Jesus' return and other events connected with His coming. Notice that he talked about their concern for those who fell asleep. This word "*asleep*" in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 is an expression that is often used in the Bible for death. Genesis 47:30 tells the reader about Jacob on his death bed. He said, "*but when I rest [or sleep] with my fathers, carry me out of Egypt and bury me where they are buried.*" In 1 Kings 2:10 the writer spoke of how David would be buried. He said, "*David rested [or slept] with his fathers and was buried in the City of David.*" The New Testament uses the same expression often to mean death. For example in Acts 13:36 Luke wrote, "*For when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his fathers and his body decayed.*" Acts 7:57–59 describes the stoning of Stephen. Luke continued in Acts 7:60,–8:1 to say: "*Then [Steven] fell on his knees and cried out, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' When he had said this, he fell asleep . . . And Saul was there, giving approval to his death.*" His falling asleep meant his dying or his death. In 1 Corinthians 15:6 Paul said, "*After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.*" Again there is a distinction between those who are still living and those who have fallen asleep. This distinction is also made in 1 Corinthians 15:20. Paul wrote, "*But Christ has*

indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." This passage is talking about the resurrection of the dead.

Paul then said that the Thessalonians should not grieve like the rest of men who have no hope. The pagans had no real hope about what would happen after death. Notice how Paul referred to them. He called them, *"the rest of men"* (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Those are people who do not know the true God. 1 Thessalonians 4:5 calls them, *"The heathen, who do not know God."* They are mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 5:6 where Paul said, *"let us not be like others, who are asleep."* Paul was referring to the pagans who were in a spiritual sleep or in a spiritual death. The hopelessness of this pagan world is pointed out not only on their own inscriptions, but also in the writings of the New Testament writers. In Ephesians 2:11–12 Paul wrote:

Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men) — remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.

The pagans are specified as being people *"without hope and without God in the world."* Paul said that they should not grieve like those kinds of people. Though Christians may grieve in some situations, it is not the grief of despair and hopelessness. The Bible doesn't say that Christians should not grieve at all. In fact, there are examples in the Bible of Christians mourning or weeping. In Acts 8:2, *"Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him."* In Romans 12:15 Paul said, *"Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn."* But the grief the Thessalonians experienced was related to their ignorance. They needed to know what was going to happen at Jesus' second coming. They needed to not

have that hopeless despair characterized by the heathen or the pagan.

The Christian Hope — its Guarantee

The basis of Christian Hope is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The only reason Christians will be raised is because Jesus has been raised. Paul said, “*We believe that Jesus died and rose again*” (1 Thessalonians 4:14). This has to do with the basic facts of the gospel. In 1 Corinthians 15:3–4, 17 Paul said:

what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. . . . if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.

There is no need to preach a message if Jesus has not been raised. There is no effect of belief if God has not raised Jesus from the dead. “So our resurrection,” Paul said, “is based on the fact that Christians believe and know that God has raised Jesus from the dead.”

Paul said, God will bring with Jesus those who sleep in Him (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:14). 1 Corinthians 6:14 has a similar passage where Paul said, “*By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also.*” Paul wrote about this again in 2 Corinthians 4:14. He said, “*because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence.*” A summary of what Paul was saying is: “God has raised Jesus from the dead; He will raise you from the dead; and He will present us together in His presence.”

This is a promise “*according to the Lord's own word.*” In 1 Thessalonians 4:15 Paul said, “*According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.*” It was not a product of Paul's wisdom or

ingenuity. Paul reminded the Thessalonians again and again that this was God's message. In 1 Thessalonians 2:13 Paul said, *"when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God."* When Paul wrote to the Galatians, he would remind them of the same thing. In Galatians 1:11–12, he said: *"I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ."* Anyone who takes Paul seriously must believe that his message is a God-given message and that it came to him by revelation of Jesus Christ. What he said about Jesus' resurrection from the dead is based on the command of the Lord and not his own wisdom or ingenuity.

Some people will be alive when Jesus comes. Others will have already died. In 1 Thessalonians 4:15 Paul said, *"According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep."* Paul also said in 1 Corinthians 15:51, *"We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed."* Christians who are alive will not precede those who have fallen asleep. In other words, the living saints will not have blessings or special favors that exceed or excel those who have already died.

The Christian Hope — its Promise

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

Paul talked about the return of the Lord from heaven. He said it was based on the Lord's own promise. There are many promises in the Bible about the return of Jesus. Jesus Himself often spoke of this. In John 14:3 He said, *"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."* In Acts 1 Jesus ascended into the clouds and into heaven to the right hand of

God. Then two angels stood by the apostles and said to them, *“This same Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven will come back again in the same way you have seen him go into heaven”* (Acts 1:11). In 2 Thessalonians Paul wrote: *“This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus”* (2 Thessalonians 1:7–8).

The Bible has many promises about Jesus' return. Christians have the living hope that the Lord will return. Paul discussed some of the things that will happen when Jesus returns from heaven. He emphasized turning from idols to serve the living God, and then waiting for His Son from heaven. Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10:

. . . They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead — Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

In Philippians 3:20–21 Paul wrote:

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

Titus 2:13, in a similar passage says, *“while we wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.”*

According to Paul's statements Jesus' coming will be with a loud command (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:16). The Lord's voice will be heard and will cause all the dead to be raised. In this context Paul is not talking about all the dead. He is talking about the righteous dead. However according to other verses in the Bible, when Jesus comes and His voice is heard, **all** the

dead will be raised. Jesus said this Himself in John 5:28–29. He said:

“Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out — those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.”

Paul also said that there will be the voice of the archangel. One might wonder who this archangel is. The only angel in the Bible who is called an archangel is Michael. For example Jude 1:9 says, *“But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, ‘The Lord Rebuke you!’”* Then in Revelation 12:7 John wrote of Michael and his angels’ fight against the dragon. *“And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back.”* Many people believe that the archangel here is Gabriel. There is an expression, “when Gabriel blows his horn.” The Bible does not specify who this archangel is. It does, however, say that the voice of the archangel will be sounded. Gabriel was a very significant angel in the Bible. He was the one that announced the birth of Jesus. He also announced the birth of John the Baptizer in Luke 1:11–20. Although the name of the archangel is not known, passages show that angels will come with Jesus and be involved in the judgment. 2 Thessalonians 1:7 says that Jesus will come in *“blazing fire with his powerful angels.”* Jesus said in Matthew 25:31, *“when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory.”* Then all the nations will be gathered together before him to be judged.

1 Thessalonians 4:16 says, *“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.”* Paul also wrote about this in 1 Corinthians 15:51–52. He said:

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed — in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

The Christian Hope — its Order

Notice that in 1 Thessalonians 4:16b Paul said, “*the dead in Christ will rise first.*” Two events are being discussed here about the dead. The first is the righteous dead will be raised. The second event is that the righteous living will be caught up with them. In the context of this passage Paul is not discussing the wicked at all. This passage is sometimes misused, and is concluded that the righteous dead will be raised. Then maybe a thousand years later the wicked dead will be raised. This passage is not talking about the wicked dead at all. Paul only discussed two events. The resurrection of the righteous dead, and then the transformation or translation of the righteous living. Although Paul does not speak of the wicked here they are spoken of in other passages. For example, as mentioned before, in John 5:28–29 Jesus said:

“Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out — those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.”

In 2 Thessalonians 1:6–10 Paul also discussed the Lord's second coming. He said:

God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord

and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.

So even though the previous context discussed only the dead and living righteous, the second coming of Jesus **will** involve both the righteous and the wicked. Again Paul said, “*we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep*” (1 Thessalonians 4:15).

When scripture is compared to scripture one can see that Paul at times put himself in the category of those who would be **alive** when Jesus comes. For example he said in 1 Thessalonians 4:15, “*we who are still alive.*” However in other contexts Paul put himself in the category of those who will be **raised** when Jesus comes. One example is 2 Corinthians 4:14. Paul said, “*because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence.*” Another example for this can be found in 1 Corinthians 6:14. He said, “*By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also.*” Paul did not know with absolute certainty whether he would be alive or dead at the second coming of the Lord. They were both possibilities. In 1 Corinthians 15:51 he said, “*We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed.*” In other words “we don’t know for sure whether or not we will be alive when the Lord comes. We will not all sleep, but whether we are asleep or awake, we will all be changed.” Paul said that these men and women are called the dead in Christ. Those who have died in Christ are those who have been baptized (cf. Galatians 3:26–27). In 1 Corinthians 15:16–18 Paul spoke of the validity of those who fell asleep, rising. He said:

For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised,

your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.

John also spoke of those who had fallen asleep in Jesus. In Revelation 14:13 He said:

Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from the labor, for their deeds will follow them."

These are people who are blessed because they have died in the Lord. They were in the Lord when they lived, and when they died they were still in the Lord.

Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 4:17: *"After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever."* Those who are still alive when the Lord comes are going to be caught up with them. This implies being reunited with loved ones who have fallen asleep in Christ (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:17).

One might say that the reward for being a Christian is the privilege of being with the Lord. There are a lot of things about heaven that are not understood. Mysteries will be left to answer. Jesus' second coming is called a revelation from heaven because more things will be made known to the people of God in that great day. However Christians know that they will be with Him. Jesus said in John 12:26, *"Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be."* Jesus then said in John 14:3 Jesus said, *"if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."* The Bible teaches clearly that when the Christian dies, apart from his body, he goes to be with the Lord. In Philippians 1:23–24 Paul said, *"I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body."* He anticipated at the moment of his death going to be with the Lord. He said it was far better than remaining in that

life. In 2 Corinthians 5:8 Paul said, *“We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.”* Paul believed that when Christians die they go to be with the Lord in their spirits. Their bodies go to the grave just as the bodies of all the wicked go to the grave. But when the Lord comes again, the bodies will be raised. Then the body and spirit can both go and be with the Lord. The ultimate hope of the Christian is in the return of Christ with the resurrection and the glorification of these bodies. This is what Paul had in mind in Philippians 3:20–21 when he said:

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

John also wrote about this. He said: *“Dear friends, now we are children of God and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is”* (1 John 3:2). In other words, “we don’t know all the details of what is going to happen, or what heaven is going to be like, *but we know that when he appears, we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is*”

On the basis of all these statements Paul concluded by saying, *“Therefore, encourage each other with these words”* (1 Thessalonians 4:18).

The Thessalonian Christians were able to *“encourage each other”* (1 Thessalonians 4:18) regarding their loved ones who had died in the Lord. On that basis God’s people can still receive encouragement. This is still being done over 1900 years after that passage was written.

The Lord's Return — Times and Dates of His Return

1 Thessalonians 5:1–11

Introduction

In 4:13–18 Paul addressed the concern the brothers had for their loved ones who had died and would not be able to participate in Jesus' blessings at His return. Paul assured them that they had no reason to grieve like those who have no hope: “. . . *the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever*” (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17). Chapter six also shows that Christians who are awake will not have special favors.

In this chapter, Christ's coming as a thief in the night and exhortations and motivation to readiness in view of that coming will be explored. In 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11 Paul said:

*Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, “**Peace and safety,**” destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. 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 self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

Times and Seasons of Christ's Return

In 1 Thessalonians 5 Paul discussed another matter that related to the second coming. It had to do with the time of Christ's coming. Paul said, *"Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you"* (1 Thessalonians 5:1). When Paul said he did not need to write about the times and dates of the second coming of Christ, it was not because the times and dates were already known by the Thessalonians. The time of Christ's coming had not been revealed. What they **did** know was, *"... the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night"* (1 Thessalonians 5:2). Jesus used this teaching in His own ministry. He compared Himself to a thief who would strike while the owner of the house was not ready. Jesus said:

But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him (Luke 12:39–40).

In Revelation 3:3 Jesus was pictured as writing a letter to the church in Sardis saying: *"Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you."* Also in Revelation 16:15 Jesus said: *"Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and*

keeps his clothes with him so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed." Peter used the terminology about the coming of the Lord being like a thief in 2 Peter 3:10: *"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare."* A thief does not announce the time of his coming. He comes unexpectedly. Therefore the coming of Jesus will also be unannounced. No one could know the time of Jesus' coming. Through the years men have tried to set the exact time and date of the Lord's return. Times such as 1000 A.D., 1843, 1844, 1879, 1914, and most recently 1975 have been predicted. Many people tried to get ready for the coming at these times, but all these dates were wrong. Paul said, "When we tell you that you do not need to know about this, you do not need any more information about it." They had already been told that He would come *"like a thief in the night"* (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:2, 4; 2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 3:3, 16:15).

Paul said, *"While people are saying, 'Peace and safety,' destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape."* In the original language, this verse meant at the very moment when people were saying, *"Peace and safety,"* the destruction would come. In the Old Testament many of the prophets would use this figure of speech when they talked about the false prophets of their time. In Jeremiah 6:14, for example, Jeremiah said: *"They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. Peace, peace, they say, when there is no peace"* (Jeremiah 8:11). Their lack of peace was due to people living in rebellion to the will of God. But false prophets were saying, "You are not going to be destroyed. You are not going to be punished by God. Everything is going to be okay. There will be peace. But Jeremiah said that there is no peace, for those who are living in rebellion to the will of God." In Ezekiel 13:10 there is a similar statement, *"Because they lead my people astray, saying, Peace, when there is no peace, and because, when a flimsy wall is built, they cover it with whitewash."* They would build walls so flimsy that they would have to cover it up with whitewash so

no one could see how badly it had been built. In the New Testament Jesus spoke against this false teaching. In Luke 21:34 He said: *“Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap.”*

Paul said that destruction would come suddenly to anyone who was not wary (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:3). While they were unprepared, the destruction would come. In Luke 17:26–30 Jesus said:

“Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all. It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. It will be just like this in the day the Son of Man is revealed.”

Think about the wording of this passage. Eating, drinking, or getting married are not scandalous activities. But Jesus was saying they were going about their everyday lives and forgetting about the will of God entirely: *“. . . up to the day that Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all. . . . the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all.”* According to Jesus this is how it will be when the Son of Man comes. Jesus put His stamp of approval upon these historical Old Testament events. He wanted people to understand that they truly happened so that Christians would not be unprepared as the people in Noah's and Lot's times were.

There was a story found in Reader's Digest that told about a city called St. Pierre on the island of Martinique. The article was entitled, “The City that Died in Ninety Seconds.” Just outside of Mount Pierre was a volcanic mountain called Mount Pele. It had rumbled in the past but had never caused any

serious damage. On Friday, May 2, 1902, people looked out their windows and saw ash all over. They were disturbed, as can be imagined, but went on about their business. They were reassured by the leaders of the town that there was nothing to fear. There were other indications that something was about to happen in the next few days. For example, dangerous snakes and centipedes came down into the nearby villages causing a great deal of pain. The people, however, continued to live as though nothing was going to happen. Finally, on Thursday, May 8th, at about 8:00 in the morning, a huge ball of fire came down from Mount Pele. It engulfed the city of Saint Pierre and 30,000 people died. The only person who was spared was a prisoner who was in a dungeon under the city, but even he was badly burned. This is, perhaps, a modern day illustration of what Jesus meant when He said, “when the destruction comes, the disobedient will be distracted and will not escape” (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:3).

The Necessity of Alertness by Believers

In 1 Thessalonians 5:4–11 Paul spoke about the differences between Christians and those of the world. He said that Christians were different because they were “. . . *sons of the day. . .*” (1 Thessalonians 5:5). Paul said, “*But you, brothers, are not in darkness . . .*” (1 Thessalonians 5:4). The pagan world is pictured as being engulfed in darkness all through the Bible. In John 3:19 Jesus said, “*This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.*” In Acts 26:17–18 Paul spoke to King Agrippa about his mission to the Gentiles,

[God said] . . . *I am sending you to them to open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.*

Paul used this visualization of darkness again in Colossians 1:13 when he said, *“For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.”* He also used it in Ephesians 5:8: *“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.”* In biblical expressions this means people in the world who have not come to know God through Jesus Christ are pictured as living in darkness. Therefore, their conduct and their activities will be very different from those who belong to the Lord.

Paul's next point was the day that Jesus comes should not be a surprise to Christians. Christians do not know the time of His coming any more than the pagans do, but they do know that He is coming *“... like a thief in the night”* (1 Thessalonians 5:2). They were following Him, Who is the Light, and so they would not be overtaken by the darkness. In John 8:12 Jesus said: *“... I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”*

Paul said, *“You are all sons of the light and sons of the day ...”* (1 Thessalonians 5:5). When Jesus was closing his public ministry, He made a final appeal to the Jews:

Then Jesus told them, “You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going. Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light ...”

The expression *“sons of the light”* is a Semitic expression. It refers to people who are characterized by light. Light is a chief ingredient in their existence. In Acts 4 the Apostles gave Joseph the name *“... Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement)”* (Acts 4:36). In the same way, to call a man Barnabas, *“son of encouragement,”* said that his life was characterized by encouraging others. Paul said to the Thessalonians: *“You are sons of light. You do not know when the Son of Man is coming but will not be overcome by the*

darkness. You will not be caught unaware because as sons of the day you are always in a state of readiness" (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:4–6). That day would never surprise them like a thief. They would always be prepared.

Notice also that in 1 Thessalonians 5:5–6 Paul said: "... *We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep . . .*" The "others" mentioned would be the pagans who were spiritually asleep. They were not aware of the things of God. This does not refer to physical sleep or even sleeping in death. It means a spiritual sleep, a spiritual death, or a separation from God. These people did not know about the things of God because they were asleep or were in darkness. In contrast Paul said, "... *but let us be alert and self-controlled*" (1 Thessalonians 5:6). Note that there are frequent exhortations to alertness and watchfulness in the Bible. In Matthew 24:42 Jesus said, "*Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.*" Then in Matthew 24:44 Jesus said, "*So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.*" Mark recorded Jesus' words concerning this in Mark 13:35–37:

"Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back — whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: Watch."

Peter used words much like this in 1 Peter 1:13 when he said: "*Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.*" Peter referred again to this call to action in 1 Peter 4:7 when he said: "*The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.*" Notice that he encouraged them to be clear minded and self-controlled so that they could pray. Again, Peter said, "... [Be] alert! ..." (1 Peter 5:8). This is the same admonition

that Jesus and Paul gave telling Christians not to be caught unaware when the Lord comes, to constantly watch and be prepared.

Then Paul said, *“For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night.”* (1 Thessalonians 5:7). Under normal conditions people sleep during hours of darkness, and those who get drunk usually do so at night. So, when the Bible talks about people who get drunk and carouse in the daytime, it indicates a depraved attitude. Isaiah had the following to say about this, *“Woe to those who rise early in the morning to run after their drinks, who stay up late at night till they are inflamed with wine”* (Isaiah 5:11). Remember the statement in Acts 2:15: *“These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning!”* Also in 2 Peter 2:13 Peter emphasized the wickedness of some of the false teachers and how they were encouraging a false lifestyle: *“. . . Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight . . .”* And since it is normal to sleep or get drunk at night, those who get drunk in the day live in darkness.

Paul said, *“. . . Since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled . . .”* (1 Thessalonians 5:8). When Paul talked about the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22–23, he said, *“But the fruit of the Spirit is . . . self-control . . .”* In 1 Peter 5:8 Peter said:

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” [In contrast to what Paul said] *“Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes”* (Ephesians 6:11).

Paul used the figure of speech of Christian armor in a number of passages. He wanted Christians to know that they would be involved in warfare, and therefore, would need armor to be able to fight. In the context of 1 Thessalonians 5:8 Paul spoke of faith and love as a breastplate. Remember that the Thessalonians had demonstrated both faith and love in trials

and adversities. Even though they had been urged to even greater faith and love (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:10), Paul knew that their faith and love would serve them well as a breastplate in their spiritual conflict. Another part of the armor is called the *“hope of salvation as a helmet”* (1 Thessalonians 5:8b). Hope is an anchor for the soul, firm and secure (cf. Hebrews 6:19). Also John wrote in 1 John 3:3, *“Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.”* The Christian is to put on Christian armor and that armor will enable him to fight the spiritual conflict against the forces of evil. Ephesians 6:13–18 discusses the armor in more detail:

- *the belt of truth buckled around your waist* (Ephesians 6:14b).
- *the breastplate of righteousness* (Ephesians 6:14c).
- [Christians'] . . . *feet fitted with the readiness that comes with the gospel of peace* (Ephesians 6:15).
- *the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one* (Ephesians 6:16b).
- . . . *the helmet of salvation* (Ephesians 6:17a).
- *and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God* (Ephesians 6:17b).

As Christians take on *“the full armor of God,”* they become ready for spiritual warfare. However, Paul said, *“. . . God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (1 Thessalonians 5:9). In 1 Thessalonians 1:10 Paul said, *“. . . wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead — Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.”* That is what Christians are destined for. Hebrews 10:39 says, *“But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.”* Many biblical warnings are about unfaithfulness. God wants His people to understand that if they continue in the faith, grounded, steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the Gospel, then the power is there to guarantee their eternal destiny with God.

Paul said, “[Jesus] *died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him*” (1 Thessalonians 5:10). When Paul said “*awake or asleep*” he meant, “*alive or dead.*” Remember in 1 Corinthians 15:51 Paul said: “. . . *We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed.*”

Paul was a great encourager, and he reminded God's followers that he tried to build them up when he was among them. He exhorted them to encourage each other in the same way. In Acts 20:32 he told the Ephesian elders, “*Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.*” In 1 Corinthians 8:1c Paul said, “*Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.*” The Thessalonians were already encouraging and building one another up. Paul did not rebuke them but urged them to do so more and more. It is noted often in the study of 1 Thessalonians that Paul complimented the people there about their good qualities and encouraged them to do so more and more. (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:1, 10). This suggests that Christians cannot be content with their spiritual status. They must continue to do more and more while growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ so that they might be conformed to His image.

Final Instructions and Conclusion

1 Thessalonians 5:12–28

Introduction

In 1 Thessalonians 5:12–28 Paul gives final instructions to the Thessalonians. It is also the conclusion of the first letter to the Thessalonians. These instructions were given to a church that was highly commended by Paul. He thanked God for them. Their work produced by faith, their labor prompted by love, and their endurance inspired by hope (cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:3) were all qualities that Paul thanked God for. He was also thankful for the way they received God’s message, as if it came straight from God (cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:13). He called them his glory and joy (cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:19–20) and exclaimed, “*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?*” (1 Thessalonians 3:9).

However, the church in Thessalonica was not a church without flaws. Remember Paul said, “*Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith,*” (1 Thessalonians 3:10). In 1 Thessalonians 5:12–28 Paul gave the Thessalonian church the admonitions and instructions they needed to become better Christians. These instructions are still needed by the Church today. Paul wrote:

Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard

in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else. Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil. 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. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it. Brothers, pray for us. Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you (1 Thessalonians 5:12–28).

Instructions with Reference to Elders of the Church

First Thessalonians 5:12–13 gives instructions about the elders of the Church. The things said in these verses could only have been said about elders. They were described as, “. . . *those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you*” (1 Thessalonians 5:12). “. . . *Those who work hard among you . . .*” can be said about other men, but the next words, “[those] *who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you*” can only be used to describe elders. In Acts 20:28 Paul told the Ephesian elders: “*Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.*” These words were addressed to the Ephesian elders at Miletus (cf. Acts 20:17). He called the elders overseers and shepherds of the flock (cf. Acts 20:28). In 1 Peter 5:1–3 Peter said:

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers — not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock."

Notice again the elders are spoken of as those who are in charge of the flock. They have been given the oversight and are the ones who are to be examples for the flock. Then in 1 Timothy 3:1–5, Paul gave qualifications for the elders or overseers. The scripture says, *"If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?"* (1 Timothy 3:5). So those who take care of God's Church are "elders," or "overseers." A similar statement is found in 1 Timothy 5:17 where Paul wrote, *"The elders who direct the affairs of the church and do this are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching."* The terms "elders," "presbyters," "overseers," "bishops," "pastors," or "shepherds" all refer to the same men in the Bible. These different terms are sometimes misunderstood. According to Acts 20:17 Paul "... sent ... for the elders of the church" at Ephesus to come to him. When they came, he said: *"Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood"* (Acts 20:28).

The elders are called "overseers" or "bishops." The words "pastor" or "shepherd" mean the same thing. So the "shepherds," "elders," and "overseers" are recognized, in this passage, as being the same men. Peter and Paul both wrote in agreement in this area. For example in 1 Peter 5:1–2 and Titus 1:57 they said:

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds [or pastors] of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers . . . (1 Peter 5:1–2).

The reason I left you at Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. An elder must be blameless . . . Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless . . . (Titus 1:5–7).

Men in this position can be addressed as “elders” or “presbyters,” “bishops” and “pastors.” They are called “elders” or “presbyters” because of their age and experience. They are called “overseers” or “bishops” because they have the oversight of the congregation. They are called “shepherds” or “pastors” because they look after God’s flock. They are the ones who feed the flock and protect them from their enemies.

The next point is the responsibilities of the Church toward the elders. Paul said, “Respect them” (cf. 1 Timothy 6:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:12). Perhaps the proper respect was not being shown to them. That could have caused tension in the church at Thessalonica. According to Hebrews 13:7 Christians are to: “Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.” This is referring to leaders who have died. It says to imitate their faith and hold them in high esteem. In fact Paul said, “Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work . . .” (1 Thessalonians 5:13). Paul used a form that was only used three times in the New Testament. The translation from the American Standard Version says, “. . . esteem them exceeding highly in love . . .” In the New International Version Bible, he said, “Hold them in the highest regard.” Some significance of their work might be seen from a passage in Hebrews 13:17. The writer said:

Obey your leaders and submit to their authority [Why? Because] “they keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.

The Hebrew Christians were told to respect, honor, and obey the leaders because these leaders would give an account to God about the flock’s conduct. Then in 1 Thessalonians 5:13c, Paul said, *“Live in peace with each other.”* The brethren were to live in peace with the elders. Paul said that this would be encouraging and helpful to the leaders, and that the brethren, as a whole, would get along with each other better. A similar admonition is given in other scriptures. For example Romans 12:18 says, *“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”* Then in Romans 14:19 he said, *“Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.”* Ephesians 4:3 says, *“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”*

Instructions with Reference to Various Individuals

First Thessalonians 5:14–15 gives instructions to certain individuals. In 1 Thessalonians 5:14 Paul wrote, *“And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone.”* This was obviously a problem in the Thessalonian church. Paul said in 1 Thessalonian 4:11, *“... to work with your hands ...”* In Paul’s second letter to the Thessalonians, Paul wrote:

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us” (2 Thessalonians 3:6). “We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies” (2 Thessalonians 3:11).

Paul said to “*encourage the timid*” (1 Thessalonians 5:14b). Perhaps the “*timid*” felt discouraged because they had “. . . *a crushed spirit*. . .” (Proverbs 18:14). Matthew had this in mind when he wrote about the Messiah in Matthew 12:20. He said, “*A bruised reed, he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.*” Some lives were like bruised reeds and smoldering wicks. Instead of despising them Jesus helped and encouraged them. That is what the people of God need to do. Wounded people need encouragement. Paul himself encouraged the Thessalonians when he wrote in 1 Thessalonians 2:11–12: “*For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.*” Then in 1 Thessalonians 5:11 he instructed them to encourage each other: “*Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.*”

Paul also said to “. . . *help the weak* . . .” (1 Thessalonians 5:14). As long as the Church is evangelistic and continues to win the lost, there will be “*weak*” among them. There has always been some tension between the strong and the “*weak*.” This is seen in a number of passages in the New Testament. Paul discussed this extensively in Romans 14 and 15. The discussion continued in 1 Corinthians 8, 9, and 10. Those passages include admonitions such as:

Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters (Romans 14:1). Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification (Romans 14:19). We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up (Romans 15:1–2).

Then in 1 Corinthians 8:9 a similar discussion from Paul said, “*Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak.*”

The strong are admonished to bear with and be patient with the “weak.” In fact, Paul said, “. . . *Be patient with everyone*” (1 Thessalonians 5:14). It is not easy to help people who are resistant to help. Some show a lack of gratitude and fall back into the same situations that overcame them in the past. It takes patience but it is something Christians are called to do. Ephesians 4:2 says, “*Be completely humble and gentle bearing with one another in love.*” In Colossians 3:12 Paul wrote, “*Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.*” In 1 Corinthians 13:4 Paul said, “*Love is patient . . .*” Christians are to be patient as they deal with individuals with various problems. They are to be dealt with in a loving, kind, and patient way.

First Thessalonians 5:15 says, “*Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.*” Christians cannot have a spirit of vindictiveness or retaliation toward wrongdoers. Many passages show this. In Romans 12:17 Paul said, “*Do not repay anyone evil for evil . . .*” In Romans 12:19 he said, “*Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath . . .*” God will take care of it. It is not the Christian’s responsibility. There should be a kind and positive response instead. The Christian attitude is summarized in passages such as Matthew 5:44 when Jesus said, “*But I tell you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.*” Also in 1 Peter 3:9 where Peter said, “*Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing . . .*”

Instructions with Reference to Their Relationship with God

First Thessalonians 5:16–18 shows the instructions for the Thessalonians’ relationship with God. There are three points that Paul made in this section. The first point was, “*Be joyful always*” (1 Thessalonians 5:16). Jesus promised joy to His followers. In John 16:22 He said, “*So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.*” Paul experienced the

circumstances of this joy when he became a Christian. He wrote in Romans 5:2–3, “. . . *And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings . . .*” In 2 Corinthians 6:10 he said, “*sorrowful, yet always rejoicing . . .*” The joy that Paul and other Christians had was not based on outward circumstances. The world could not give or take away this kind of joy. Remember that Paul and Silas were beaten in Philippi with many rods (cf. Acts 16:23 NAS). Acts 16:25 says that at midnight they were praying and singing hymns unto God and the prisoners were listening. It is no wonder the prisoners were listening. Paul and Silas were different from all the other prisoners. They had joy and peace that could not be taken away by the pressures of the world.

Paul’s second point was, “*pray continually*” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Paul often exhorted Christians toward a prayerful life. He said:

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful (Colossians 4:2). Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God (Philippians 4:6).

What does “*Pray continually*” (1 Thessalonians 5:17 NIV) or “*Pray without ceasing*” (1 Thessalonians 5:17 NAS) mean? To understand this statement read First and Second Thessalonians. Paul prayed in every conceivable situation. For example, Paul thanked God for the Thessalonians’ faith, love, and endurance (cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:3). He thanked God for the way they received the Gospel as the very Word of God (cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:13). In 1 Thessalonians 3:9 he said, “*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?*” He prayed that he might be able to see them again and supply what was lacking in their faith (cf. 1 Thessalonians 3:10). He also prayed in 1 Thessalonians 3:11 that God would clear the way for him to return to Thessalonica. He prayed that their love would overflow and increase for one another and for all men (cf. 1 Thessalonians 3:12). In 1 Thessalonians 3:13 he prayed for

their inner strength and purity. In 1 Thessalonians 5:18 he said, “*give thanks in all circumstances . . .*” All of these verses together show that no matter what the situation was, whether it dealt with Paul in his relationship with the brothers and sisters, the brothers’ and sisters’ problems, matters of joy, or matters of distress, Paul always thought about going to God in prayer.

Paul’s third point was, “*give thanks in all circumstances . . .*” (1 Thessalonians 5:18). This sometimes involves suffering and sorrow. Christians have never been promised a life of ease and comfort or a life without pain. Paul said:

. . . we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope” (Romans 5:3–4). *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose* (Romans 8:28).

These verses have encouraged many people through the years to believe that whatever takes place in their lives God can use it for a noble purpose and for their spiritual strength. Being continuously thankful is possible because contentment can be learned. Paul wrote in Philippians 4:12: “*I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.*” In 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 he said, *Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.*” God’s will for His children is to be joyful always. God wants His people to always be joyful, to pray continually, to be satisfied, content, and thankful in all life’s circumstances.

Instructions with Reference to the Holy Spirit and His Gifts

In 1 Thessalonians 5:19–22 Paul wrote about the Holy Spirit’s fire and the gift of prophecy. In 1 Thessalonians 5:19 he said, “*Do not put out the Spirit’s fire*” (NIV) or “*Do not*

quench the Spirit” (NAS) as some translations have it. This is understood by many to mean the miraculous gifts of the Spirit that were given to the early Church, especially since prophecy is mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 5:20. If this is so then the Thessalonians were to accept the Spirit’s teaching. They were not to despise or quench the Spirit by rejecting what had been taught.

There are, however, other ways to quench the Spirit. This can be understood in the light of the context of this letter. In the first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul spoke of a number of things. He spoke of the problem of sexual immorality in 1 Thessalonians 5:4. He talked about their depression about the second coming in 1 Thessalonians 5:4. In 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 he talked about their attitude of respect for leaders and about living in peace with each other. He talked about kindness, patience, and living a joyful and prayerful life, trusting in God. If a person does not do this, he quenches the Spirit. This can be better understood by reading Ephesians 4:30. Paul wrote, “. . . *do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*” One can see that the Spirit can be grieved by falsehood, anger, stealing, laziness, unwholesome talk, brawling, and slander. All of these things are forbidden (cf. Ephesians 4:28, 29, and 31). Read also Hebrews 10:29. The writer said:

How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?

In this context the “*Spirit of grace*” could be insulted by deliberate and willful sin by God’s rebellious children. This would be an example of despising or insulting the Spirit of the living God.

Paul said, “*do not treat prophecies with contempt*” (1 Thessalonians 5:20). Having contempt for the Spirit’s prophecies could be one way of putting out the Spirit’s fire.

Prophecies in the Bible did not always predict the future. They were divine messages or revelations from God. They concerned the past, present, or the future. A prophet, therefore, was a spokesman for God. God's spokesman gave inspired messages in the Old and New Testaments. Prophets were men who worked along with the Apostles. In Ephesians 2:19–20 Paul said they were “. . . fellow citizens . . . and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.” In Ephesians 3:5 Paul mentioned the New Testament prophets again. He said, “[the message of God] . . . was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the spirit of God's holy apostles and prophets.” Some claimed they had a message from Paul. Others claimed they had prophecies (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:2). Even though this brought the prophetic office into contempt, Paul warned against it.

Paul urged the Thessalonians to “*Test everything. Hold on to the good*” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Though the Thessalonians were to accept the prophetic messages, they were not to be gullible. They were not to accept every message without examining it first. It was tested and held only if it was in harmony with God's revealed will. In the Old Testament God's people were warned about the danger of false teachers or false prophets. Deuteronomy 13, Jeremiah 23, and other passages warned that men might speak out of their own hearts but claim they had received the message from God. The New Testament has the same warnings. John said, “*Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world*” (1 John 4:1). The standard used to examine and test each teaching was God's previous revelations. Acts 17:11 says that the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians. They were more noble because “. . . they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.”

In 1 Thessalonians 5:22 Paul said, “*Avoid every kind of evil.*” It is imperative to reject all wrong. This should be done after proper testing and examination. The Bible says: “*Love*

must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good” (Romans 12:9 NIV). *“Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good”* (Romans 12:9 KJV). So this passage is telling Christians that they should receive God’s message: do not despise prophecies, accept the Word of the Spirit as it was given to God’s men, and do not be gullible, but always check out everything by a divine standard.

Conclusion

The conclusion in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 is a prayer for the Thessalonians’ sanctification. Paul said: *“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.”* This process is on-going. It is the inner transformation that goes on as long as each Christian lives. It does not happen immediately after becoming a Christian. In 2 Corinthians 3:18 Paul said, *“And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”*

Paul said, *“The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it”* (1 Thessalonians 5:24). To say the Lord is faithful is to say He is altogether reliable and trustworthy. He can be depended on for everything he says.

Paul concluded his first letter with three requests to the Thessalonians: *“Brothers, pray for us. Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.”* Paul finished the letter with a benediction: *“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you”* (1 Thessalonians 5:29).

Thanksgiving and Prayer

2 Thessalonians 1:1–12

Introduction

The Second Epistle to the Thessalonians was written shortly after the first one, and differs from that (in the introduction) only in the substitution of “our” Father for “the” Father. This second Epistles was prompted by the report that the church was struggling with the time of Christ’s return. Some of these suggestions about when Christ would return had prompted some to stop their daily labors, and await with folded hands the all-important event. A forged letter, bearing Paul’s name, was being circulated by those who were jealous of Paul’s understanding. And so confusion existed in the church.

As Paul begins this second letter to the Thessalonians, he reminds them again of his love for them and that they are still in his prayers. Paul never strayed very far from the truth that he constantly prayed for his converts.

Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing. Therefore, among God’s churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. All this is evidence that God’s judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are

suffering. God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you. With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thessalonians 1:1–12).

This letter to the Thessalonians was not only written by Paul but Silas and Timothy as well. Paul described the Thessalonians as being a church that was “*in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*” (2 Thessalonians 1:1b). The second letter was written around the same time and covered some of the same issues as the first letter to the Thessalonians. However, in the second letter, it was not necessary for Paul, Silas, and Timothy to defend their motives and character as they did in the first letter.

There are three main topics in the second letter to the Thessalonians. First, the steadfastness of the Thessalonians under severe persecution; as a contrast between the fate of the persecutors and the fate of those who had been persecuted. Second, the issue of the second coming. Paul focused on the mistaken view that the day of the Lord had already come. Paul told them that certain events will take place first (cf. 2

Thessalonians 2:1–12). Third, the issue of idleness; the idle were to be disciplined (cf. 2 Thessalonians 3:14–15).

The Greeting — the Senders and Receivers

Second Thessalonians opens with a greeting. Paul wrote, *“Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”* (2 Thessalonians 1:1–2). Paul, Silas, and Timothy all wrote the letters to the Thessalonians. Paul addressed the second letter, “. . . *To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*” (2 Thessalonians 1:1). This greeting matches Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians with one exception. It said, *“God our Father,”* rather than *“God the Father.”* This emphasizes the fatherhood of God for the Christians in Thessalonica.

Notice that Paul always wrote, *“grace and peace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”* (cf. Romans 1:7, 1 Corinthians 1:3, 2 Corinthians 1:2, Galatians 1:3, Ephesians 1:2, Philippians 1:2, 2 Thessalonians 1:2, 1 Timothy 1:2, 2 Timothy 1:2, Philemon 1:3). Grace always came before peace. One can assume, therefore, that one cannot have peace with God before God’s grace has been received.

Thanksgiving for Their Faith, Love, and Perseverance

Paul then gave thanks for the faith, love, and perseverance of the Thessalonian Christians (cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:3–4). Paul often thanked God for the Thessalonians. In 1 Thessalonians 1:3 he said, *“We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”* In 2 Thessalonians 2:13 he said, *“But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.”*

He also thanked God for the way they received the message. They did not receive the message as words invented by men, but as something given by revelation of God (cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:13). Paul was overwhelmed with gratitude for the Thessalonians. In 1 Thessalonians 3:9 he said, *“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?”*

Paul mentioned the growth of the Thessalonians’ faith in 2 Thessalonians 1:3. Paul thanked God for their faith which was in evidence from the beginning (cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:3). Paul also expressed his desire to see the Thessalonians again to supply them with what was lacking in their faith (cf. 1 Thessalonians 3:10). In the second letter to the Thessalonians Paul did not have the opportunity to be with them in person, but they were still able to mature in their faith.

Paul also thanked God for the Thessalonians’ love which had continued to increase more and more. He said, *“May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you”* (1 Thessalonians 3:12). Later in that same letter Paul said:

Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more (1 Thessalonians 4:9–10).

In the second letter Paul thanked God for the Thessalonians’ increasing love (cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:3). All these verses (cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:3, 1 Thessalonians 4:9–10, 1 Thessalonians 3:12) show that Christians cannot be satisfied with having loved in the past. The debt of loving others and growing in that love can never be repaid. The passage in Romans 13:8 says, *“Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow man has fulfilled the law.”* If a man were to owe a debt of \$100.00 and then repaid that debt, he would no longer be in debt. However, the

debt of love cannot be repaid in the same way. Love is a debt that can never be repaid. Paul said, “Do not leave any debt outstanding,” but the debt of love will always be outstanding.

Paul told the Thessalonians how he had boasted among the churches about how they had endured trials and persecutions without compromising their faith (cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:4). It was Paul’s habit to challenge and encourage churches by relating the faith and generosity of other congregations. The Macedonian churches were given as an example of sacrificial giving and joyful generosity to the Corinthians. Paul said:

And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God’s will (2 Corinthians 8:1–5).

Paul used the example of the Macedonians’ generosity to encourage the Corinthians in their giving. In 2 Corinthians 9:2 Paul said:

. . . I know your eagerness to help, and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians, telling them that since last year you in Achaia were ready to give; and your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action.

Remember, however, that when Paul talked about boasting, he was boasting in God. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:31, “. . . as it is written: ‘Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.’” In Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians he said, “And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the

Macedonian churches” (2 Corinthians 8:1). The Macedonian churches were great because God was working in them.

The Righteous Judgment of God

The next point Paul discussed was God’s righteous judgment. The Thessalonians patiently endured their persecution which was evident by the righteous judgment of God in their lives (cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:5). They did not look upon suffering as evil. Paul wrote in Romans 5:3–4, *“Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.”* In Hebrews 12:11 the writer said: *“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”* Paul said that the Thessalonian Christians used suffering, hardships, and trials as ways to grow spiritually. This is something all Christians should strive for. A similar passage can be found in Philippians 1:28. Paul wanted to encourage the Philippians in their trials. He told them: *“without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved — and that by God.”* Jesus taught the same message in the sermon on the Mount. He said:

“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you”
(Matthew 5:11–12).

Paul said in 2 Thessalonians 1:5, *“All this is evidence that God’s judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering.”* God is the one who will mark people worthy in Christ. As people are cleansed by the blood of Jesus, they have a high

calling in the Gospel to live up to the responsibility of a life that will glorify God. Paul reminded Christians of this truth in many passages. He said:

Encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God . . . (1 Thessalonians 2:12) . . . we pray . . . that our God may count you worthy of his calling . . . (2 Thessalonians 1:11). . . I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received (Ephesians 4:1). Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ . . . (Philippians 1:27).

Paul expected a great deal from everyone he taught the Lord's message. God will not always allow wrong to be on the throne and right to be on the scaffold. In 2 Thessalonians 1:6 Paul said, "God is just: he will pay back troubles to those who trouble you." God will pay back troubles. Christians have no need and no right to take vengeance or to retaliate for wrongs that have been done to them. Paul taught this in Romans 12:19–21:

Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Paul wanted the Thessalonians to understand that God has a will and that anyone who does not take it seriously will be punished. Paul described God as a God of grace and love, but He is also a God who respects His own will. He will give relief to those who are troubled and grief to those who live contrary to His will. The modern god that many people believe in today is a figment of their imagination. He has never existed. When a person who has been troubled is given relief, it indicates

freedom from restraints and tension. The Bible teaches that God's people have this kind of rest prepared for them (cf. Hebrews 4:8–9). John wrote in Revelation 14:13: “‘... *Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.*’ ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘*they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them.*’” Notice that rest will be given to Christians of the past as well as present day Christians. Paul included himself and his fellow workers in this category. Paul had endured persecution more than any of the Thessalonians and looked forward to the relief that he would receive at the Lord's second coming. In 1 Corinthians 4:9, 13 he said:

For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men . . . Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.

When will this relief come? Paul said, “. . . *This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels*” (2 Thessalonians 1:7). In 1 Thessalonians 4:16 Paul said, “*For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.*” Many passages in the Bible indicate that angels will be involved in the judgment scene with Jesus. For example in Matthew 25:31, Jesus said, “*When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory.*” In Matthew 13:41–42 Jesus said:

The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Paul also said it will be, “*on the day [the Son of Man] comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed . . .*” (2 Thessalonians 1:10).

What will Jesus do when He comes? Paul said that certain people will be punished. He defined those people as “. . . *those who do not know God . . .*” (2 Thessalonians 1:8). Ephesians 2:1–2, 11–12 says:

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient . . . Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision,” (that done in the body by the hands of men) — remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.

Paul also said that God will punish those who do not obey His Gospel (cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:8–9). Peter asked in 1 Peter 4:17, “. . . *if [the judgment] begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?*” Paul’s answer to this question can be found in Romans 2:8–9. He said:

. . . those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

The nature of this punishment is everlasting destruction. There are other biblical expressions or phrases that tell about the punishment for the lost. The Lord Himself said:

“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels’ . . . Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life” (Matthew 25:41, 46).

Revelation 20:15 gives another indication of the coming punishment. John wrote, *“if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”* Jude talked about punishment as well in Jude 7. He said: *“In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.”* When Jude wrote his letter, suffering was an every day occurrence. Peter said, *“. . . the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment”* (2 Peter 2:9). Punishment had already begun. There would be no end to it. Paul also said that they would be *“. . . shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power”* (2 Thessalonians 1:9). This suggests that eternal destruction is not annihilation. It will be an exclusion from the Lord’s presence. Remember Jesus’ statement in Matthew 25:41 when he said, *“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’”* This statement gives an impression of eternal separation from the presence of God. God is the standard of what is right. No one has the right to dictate God’s actions. Christians can only **guess** what God will do on the basis of what is found in the Scriptures. Matthew 25:41 says that when Jesus comes again He will punish those who do not know God, and He will send anyone who does not follow the Gospel to dwell in the *“eternal fire”* that had been created for *“the devil and his angels.”* But Jesus will reward those who know God and follow Jesus’ teachings. Paul said, *“Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory”* (Romans 8:17). In Colossians 3:4 he

said, *“When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”* Also, in 2 Thessalonians 1:10 Paul said: *“on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.”* Any fond dream or hope that can be imagined is nothing compared to what will be seen when Jesus returns. John said: *“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is”* (1 John 3:2). This included the Thessalonians because they believed Paul, Silas, and Timothy’s testimony to them (cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:10). The Thessalonians came to know God and obeyed His Gospel, therefore, they will partake of the glory that will be revealed when Jesus comes again. However, the opposite will happen to those who do not obey. In 2 Thessalonians 1:8 Paul said, *“He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.”*

Paul’s Prayer for the Thessalonians

The truths stated throughout Paul’s teachings about love, faith, patience, endurance, suffering, God’s judgment upon the lost, and the glorification of His holy people (cf. 1 Thessalonians 3:6, 2 Thessalonians 1:11, Colossians 1:11, 1 Timothy 6:11, 2 Corinthians 1:7) were all things Paul prayed for. He *“constantly”* prayed that his teachings would get through, and that God’s glory would reach all these people.

One of Paul’s prayers begins in 2 Thessalonians 1:11. Paul wrote, *“... we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling ...”* Paul would not be content with an indifferent response to the high calling of God. He expected a response of trusting, obedient faith. Paul said, *“... by [God’s] power [He] may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith”* (2 Thessalonians 1:11). The Thessalonians’ purposes were noble and their faith was active (cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:3). Their work had been demonstrated by their faith.

Paul then explained why he prayed this prayer. He said, *"We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ"* (2 Thessalonians 1:12). God is glorified in faithful men. In John 17:10 Jesus prayed to the Father: *"All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them."* Jesus recognized that even though the Apostles were not faultless, they still brought glory to Jesus. In Galatians 1:24 Paul said, ". . . [the church in Judea] *praised God because of me.*" Peter wrote in 1 Peter 2:9, *" . . . you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."* Christians will always be responsible for their actions and when they accomplish things, they do so on the basis of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. All Christians must remember this to avoid boasting in themselves. **Everything** depends on Jesus and His grace.

The Man of Lawlessness

2 Thessalonians 2:1–12

Introduction

Paul's teaching concerning the second coming of Christ was of great importance to the Thessalonian Christians. They were being "unsettled" and "alarmed" by false reports or some purported prophecy, perhaps forged documents with Paul's name attached. Paul's warning is needed to calm the fears that were weakening the faith of some and destroying the faith of others. He writes to them in 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12:

*Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for (that day will not come) until the rebellion occurs and **the man of lawlessness** is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is calling God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God. Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will*

overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

Peter said that not all of what Paul taught was easily understood in 2 Peter 3:15–16:

Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

One passage that some misunderstood was 2 Thessalonians 2:3. Paul wrote, “*Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for (that day will not come) until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction.*” Peter however expected the Christians to whom he was writing to understand even the difficult passages

. . . which ignorant and unstable people distort . . . Scriptures, to their own destruction . . . dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position (2 Peter 3:16–17).

The Bible also shows that the Thessalonians also had information regarding *“the man of lawlessness”* that readers of the Bible do not. In 2 Thessalonians 2:5–6 Paul said: *“Don’t you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? And now you know what is holding him back . . .”* Paul had already told them all that they needed to know about *“the man of lawlessness.”* They knew what was holding back the development of the *“man of sin.”* Christians today cannot be as certain about this passage as they can be about others.

Concern about the Day of the Lord

Paul wrote of the second coming of the Lord in 1 Thessalonians 4:17: *“After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.”* In 2 Thessalonians 2:1 he said, *“Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him . . .”* There will be a gathering together when the dead rise. Then those who are alive will be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air. Jesus spoke of this in Matthew 25:31–32. He said:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

Some of the Thessalonians thought that this had already happened. Paul told them *“not to become easily unsettled or alarmed . . .”* (2 Thessalonians 2:2). In Mark 13:7 Jesus said the same thing when He spoke of the destruction of Jerusalem. He said, *“When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed . . .”* This was happening to the Thessalonians. They were alarmed because of reports that the day of the Lord had already come. In Ephesians 4:14 Paul spoke of the Ephesians being tossed to and fro by different kinds of doctrines. He said,

“... we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.”

Paul made reference to the source of the Thessalonians' misunderstanding in 2 Thessalonians 2:2. There was *“... some prophecy, report or letter . . .”* a that they thought came from Paul that said *“... the day of Christ is at hand”* (KJV).

There are certain events that will take place before the day Jesus comes again. Paul said, *“Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for (that day will not come) until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction”* (2 Thessalonians 2:3). First, there will be *“the rebellion”* or apostasy. Then the *“man of lawlessness”* will be revealed.

The Man of Lawlessness

In 2 Thessalonians 2:3–12 Paul described *“the man of lawlessness.”* 2 Thessalonians 2:3 first introduces *“the man of lawlessness,”* *“the man doomed to destruction”* after the rebellion occurs. Apostasy is a rebellion. The word apostasy in the original language is ***apostasea***. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, known as the Septuagint, that word is used in a number of different cases. Rebellion, turning away, unfaithfulness, and backsliding are all words that come from the word ***apostasea***. In each case it refers to religious apostasy or rebellion against the will of the Almighty God. For example, Joshua 22:22 says, *“... If this has been in rebellion or disobedience to the LORD . . .”* The word rebellion is from the same word ***apostasea***. 2 Chronicles 29:19 says, *“We have prepared and consecrated all the articles that King Ahaz removed in his unfaithfulness while he was king . . .”* The word *“unfaithfulness”* is the word ***apostasea***. Jeremiah 2:19 says, *“... your backsliding will rebuke you . . .”* The word *“backsliding,”* mentioned in Jeremiah 3:22, 5:6, 14:7, and 15:6, is also from the word ***apostasea***. In Acts 21:21 Luke said, *“They*

*have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to **turn away** from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs.”* The phrase “turn away” is from **apostasea**, to apostatize from Moses. There is a similar word that is found in 1 Timothy 4:1 when Paul wrote, “. . . some will **abandon** the faith . . .” “Abandon” is a word closely related to turning away and is also related to the word **apostasea**. Looking at these biblical passages makes it clear that the use of this word **apostasea** points to a religious apostasy and not a political rebellion against God. Paul and other New Testament writers often warned about religious apostasy of great proportions that had already begun. In Acts 20:29–31 Paul said to the Ephesian elders:

I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

Paul said that men will come **from among you** who will lead you astray. He was concerned about the church in Ephesus and had warned them for the past three years. Peter also warned of false prophets who would lead men away from God:

But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them — bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute (2 Peter 2:1–2).

This describes a major apostasy. Imagine, “*many will follow their [own] ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute.*” There will be a multitude of people who will follow this false way. Does this sound familiar? A point to keep in mind

is that men may deny in practice what they confess with their mouths. For example Jesus said in Luke 6:46, “*Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?*” People were not saying verbally, “Jesus is not Lord,” but they were displaying that by disobeying the Lord and rebelling against His will. They denied in practice what they confessed with their mouths.

Another prediction of apostasy is found in 1 Timothy 4:1–3 where Paul said:

The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth.

In this passage Paul gave examples of what men taught to bring about apostasy. Apostasy was not something that would be developed twenty centuries later. It was already present. In 2 Thessalonians 2:7 Paul said, “. . . *the secret power of lawlessness is already at work . . .*” It is in harmony with the New Testament teachings that the last days are here. Today when men talk about the last days, they think they are talking about the 20th century or a time in the future. However, according to the New Testament, men were living in the last days in the days of the Apostles. In Acts 2:16–17 Peter said, “. . . *this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ‘In the last days . . .’*” Peter recognized that things happening on the day of Pentecost were a part of the last days. In Hebrews 1:1–2 the Bible says:

*In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, **but in these last days** he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.*

The writer of Hebrews recognized that the people in the New Testament were in the last days when Jesus gave His message. Paul described in 2 Timothy 3:1–5 what will take place in the last days. Paul said:

*... mark this: There will be terrible times **in the last days**. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God — having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.*

One might read that today and say, “Hey! That sounds like our time!” But in truth it describes people from all centuries. Paul said, “*Have nothing to do with them.*” The apostasy was already in the beginning stages. There are other verses that confirm apostasy was already beginning. In Jude 3–4 Jude said:

Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.

Men were already rejecting God by their actions. They were turning “*the grace of God into a license for immorality.*” Another example can be found in Galatians 1:6–8. Paul said:

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel — which is really no

gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!

“*The man of lawlessness*” is described in more detail in 2 Thessalonians 2:3–4. Some manuscripts call him the “*man of sin*” (cf. KJV). 1 John 3:4 says that “*sin is lawlessness.*” So whether he is called the “*man of sin*” or “*the man of lawlessness,*” it is the same problem. He is also “*the man doomed to destruction*” (NIV) or “*the son of perdition*” (KJV). Judas is described as “*the one doomed to destruction*” in John 17:12. In Acts 1:25 Luke said “*. . . Judas left to go where he belongs*” (NIV), or “*. . . to his own place*” (KJV). Judas was a person doomed to perdition because he rebelled against and rejected the will of God. Paul said in 2 Thessalonians 2:4, “[the man of lawlessness] *will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God.*” As was mentioned earlier, it is possible to do this without verbalizing it. It is not necessary for a man to say, “I am God,” or “I am sitting in the place of God.” However if a man puts aside the will of God, replacing it with his own human laws then he has put himself in the place of God. In 2 Thessalonians 2:9 Paul wrote, “*The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders.*” Paul had given detailed information about the development of “*the coming of lawlessness*” to the Thessalonians. He said, “*. . . the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way*” (2 Thessalonians 2:7). This passage shows clearly that apostasy was already in progress.

In Galatians 1:8–9 Paul said:

But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let

him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned.

A similar apostasy was written about in the Old Testament. Judges 2:7–11 says:

The people served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had seen all the great things the LORD had done for Israel . . . After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals.

Unlike their fathers these Israelites turned away, or apostatized themselves, from the way of the Lord. It only took one generation for that apostasy to develop.

Another point to notice is that the revelation of “*the man of lawlessness*” would be held back for a time. In 2 Thessalonians 2:6–7 Paul said, “. . . you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time . . . but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way.” Paul said that this person would be revealed but something was holding him back. Whenever the power that was holding him back was removed “*the lawless one will be revealed.*”

In 2 Thessalonians 2:8 Paul continued to say “. . . *the Lord Jesus will over throw [the man of lawlessness] with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming.*” In summation: “*the man of lawlessness*” was already in a stage of development. He was being held back, would be fully revealed later, and would be destroyed at Jesus’ second coming.

Paul said that “*the man of lawlessness*” has followers. He said:

... in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness (2 Thessalonians 2:10–12).

Note the tense of the phrase: “*are perishing*.” This suggests that it was happening then and would continue to happen in the future. It was not reserved only for the end time. This idea of perishing is found often in Paul’s writings. For example:

*For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who **are perishing** . . . (1 Corinthians 1:18). For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who **are perishing** (2 Corinthians 2:15). . . . even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who **are perishing** (2 Corinthians 4:3).*

The question is why do they perish. In 2 Thessalonians 2:10 Paul said that those who perish, perish because they “*. . . refused to love the truth*.” In 2 Thessalonians 2:12 he said that “*. . . all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness*.” They actually “**delighted in wickedness!**” Because of this “*. . . God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie*.” (2 Thessalonians 2:11). This is a puzzle to a lot of people. How can God send a lie to intentionally mislead people so that they will be judged and be condemned? In the Old Testament there is a story about Ahab and what led to his destruction at Ramoth-Gilead (cf. 1 Kings 22:19–23). Ahab, the king of Israel, would only listen to prophets who told him what he wanted to hear. He hated any prophet who would tell him what God was really saying. 1 Kings 22:8 says, “*. . . ‘There is still one man through whom we can inquire of the LORD, but I hate him because he never prophesies anything good about me, but always bad . . .’*” All the other prophets told Ahab that victory would be found in his

hands. The LORD had put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these prophets. The LORD had decreed disaster for Ahab, because Ahab would not love the truth. He would not believe the truth. He had delighted in wickedness. When a person does not love the truth there is only one thing left for him and that is a lie. Another example of this sort of condemnation can be found in Romans 1:24, 26, 28. Paul said:

Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another . . . Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts . . . Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done.

Three times Paul said “*God gave them over,*” because they had first given Him up. The same principle is stated in John 12:37, 39. John said:

Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him . . . For this reason they could not believe . . .

When a man says, “I will not. I will not,” the time will come when he can only say, “I cannot.”

Interpretations Concerning the Man of Lawlessness

It has been often assumed, with no real scriptural evidence, that “*the man of lawlessness*” is the antichrist. There is no reason to do this. Most of these identifications come from non-biblical writers. John the Apostle was the only writer in the Bible who used the imagery of the antichrist in the New Testament, but he was not referring to “*the man of lawlessness.*” He said:

*Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the **antichrist** is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour . . . Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist — he denies the Father and the Son . . . but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the **antichrist**, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3). Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the **antichrist** (2 John 7).*

John identified the antichrist as anyone who does not believe that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.

There is also no reason to identify the antichrist with “*the beast of the sea*” (cf. Revelation 13). The “*beast in the sea*” is a composite beast drawn from Daniel 7. Daniel 7:17 says, “*The four great beasts are four kingdoms that will rise from the earth.*” The beast out of the sea in Revelation 13 represents world governments, civil persecuting power. At that time it was the Roman empire which persecuted the early Church. Earlier in this chapter it was determined that “*the man of lawlessness*” is a religious apostate who claims divine honors. Someone who sets himself in the temple of God as if he were God. When Paul talked about the temple of God, he was talking about the Church.

Conclusion

Papacy, the system of government of the Roman Catholic Church of which the Pope is the supreme head, fits the interpretation of “*the man of lawlessness*” more than any other. Look at the reasons for that:

- The New Testament’s predictions of widespread apostasy (cf. 1 Timothy 4:1; 5:15; 2 Thessalonians 2:3–12).

- The development of a hierarchy from the local eldership of the Church in harmony with New Testament predictions.
- The usurpation of the authority of God by human traditions and commandments.
- The use of counterfeit miracles, signs, and wonders to substantiate false doctrines about the papacy especially in the exaltation of Mary.

Thanksgiving, Encouragement and Prayer

2 Thessalonians 2:13–3:5

Introduction

This is chapter eleven in the study of Paul's letters to the Thessalonians. This study is based on 2 Thessalonians 2:13–3:5. It is titled, "*Thanksgiving, Encouragement, and Prayer.*" This passage says:

But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter. May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word. Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you. And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith. But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one. We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command. May the

Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance.

Thanksgiving for the Thessalonians

In the second letter to the Thessalonians Paul's thanksgiving for them is noted often. In 2 Thessalonians 2:13 Paul said:

. . . we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.

This verse shows that there is a contrast between the followers of Jesus and what would happen to the followers of the “*man of lawlessness*.” In 2 Thessalonians 2:10–12 Paul described the followers of “*the man of lawlessness*” as those who refused to believe, accept, or love the truth. Christians are saved by their belief in the truth. The followers of “*the man of lawlessness*” **are perishing** and they will be condemned

Jesus' followers are saved. They will share in the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. God chose them to be saved. There are two things involved in the process of being chosen by God. The first is the sanctifying work of the Spirit (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:13). The Spirit separates God's followers from the world. Peter wrote about this in 1 Peter 1:2. He said, “*who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood . . .*”

Paul also said that God chooses His followers “*through belief in the truth*” (2 Thessalonians 2:13). It is man's responsibility to respond to the truth. Paul said that “[God] *called you to this through our gospel . . .*” (2 Thessalonians 2:14). The Thessalonians responded to this call. In 1 Thessalonians 1:4 Paul said, “*For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you.*” In 1 Thessalonians 2:12 Paul encouraged, comforted, and urged them “. . . *to live lives*

worthy of God . . .” The wording in this passage shows that the calling was still going on. Also in 1 Thessalonians 5:24 Paul wrote, *“The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.”* The Thessalonians were called by God to this salvation through the Gospel. Jesus provided the Gospel as a universal salvation to make the message known to every man for his acceptance or rejection. When Jesus died and then was raised from the dead, He appeared to His Apostles to send them out on a world wide commission. Mark 16:15 says, *“ . . . ‘Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.’ ”* The Gospel is for all. The Gospel is to be preached to every person under heaven. In 1 Timothy 2:3–4 Paul said, *“This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”* In Romans 1:16 Paul said, *“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.”* It is not only for those who will accept the Gospel that it is preached. It is for **“all creation.”** Acts 13:46 says:

. . . Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: “We had to speak the word of God to [you Jews] first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles.”

It was a necessity to preach the Gospel to these unbelieving Jews so that they might have the opportunity to respond to the Gospel and be saved. It did not matter that they rejected the Word. God wants everyone to have the opportunity to spend all eternity with Him, however many refuse to come to Him. Jesus said to the Jews, *“yet you refuse to come to me to have life”* (John 5:40).

Paul said that those who had responded to the Gospel had accepted the call of God. They may share in the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not just salvation from sin. It is the anticipation of sharing in the Lord and glory. Paul wrote about this in several places of the Bible. He said:

... God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory” (1 Thessalonians 2:12). Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory (Romans 8:17). When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory (Colossians 3:4).

Those who have responded to the Gospel have been saved from past sin. They are now able to anticipate the glory of being with the Lord forever.

An Exhortation to the Thessalonians

In 2 Thessalonians 2:15 Paul exhorts the Thessalonians, *“So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.”* Those who have been saved are urged to *“stand firm”* throughout their lives. Paul said:

For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord (1 Thessalonians 3:8). Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58). Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong (1 Corinthians 16:13).

Paul told the Thessalonians to *“hold to the teachings”* (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:15, 1 Corinthians 11:2 NIV) or *“traditions”* (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:15 KJV). Christians are often warned against the traditions of man which void the Word of God. For example in Mark 7:8 Jesus said, *“You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.”* In Mark 7:13 Jesus said to the Pharisees: *“... you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that.”* Paul said:

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ (Colossians 2:8). [Principles of this world] are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings (Colossians 2:22).

God's spokesmen made Christians aware of the danger of following traditions that originated in men. They explained the difference between traditions made by man and those that originated from God. The word "*tradition*" simply means, that which is handed down. For example apostolic traditions were handed down by word of mouth and by letters. They were to be kept because they were the Word of God. The word "*tradition*" emphasizes that it did not come from the person telling the message. It was received and then was passed on to somebody else. This is how Paul spoke of his writings. In 1 Corinthians 11:23 he said, "*For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you . . .*" He received information from the Lord. Then passed it on to the people he taught. In 1 Corinthians 15:3 Paul said, "*For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.*" Paul received his teachings from the Lord. In 1 Corinthians 4:17 Paul wrote:

For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.

These traditions are the Gospel message that he received from Jesus Christ. He wrote in Galatians 1:11–12:

I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.

In Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians he reminded them that he thanked God for the way they had received the message. He said in 1 Thessalonians 2:13:

. . . we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.

Paul handed down what he received from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Those were the traditions he intended for the Thessalonians to keep.

Prayer for the Thessalonians

Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians in 2 Thessalonians 2:16–17 was:

May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

Paul appealed to “our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father . . .” The prayer is not only addressed to Jesus and to the Father, but Jesus is mentioned first. This mode of address can be found several times in Paul's writings (cf. 1 Thessalonians 3:11, 2 Thessalonians 2:16, and 2 Corinthians 13:14). By addressing his letters to “the Son” and then to “the Father” Paul put Jesus on the highest level. Paul, however, did not want to make a firm distinction between the Father and the Son.

God's grace and love make it possible for Christians to have encouragement that will last throughout life and into eternity. That is why it is called “eternal encouragement.” This hope is spoken of “. . . as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure . . .” (Hebrews 6:19).

Paul's prayer was that God would encourage and strengthen the Thessalonians in "every good deed and word" (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:17). There were many good things that were being performed in the sight of God by the Thessalonians. In 1 Thessalonians 2:11–12 Paul said ". . . you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God . . ." Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 3:2, "We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God's fellow worker in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith." Paul prayed for these things many times:

May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones (1 Thessalonians 3:13). Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing (1 Thessalonians 5:11). With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith (2 Thessalonians 1:11). encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word (2 Thessalonians 2:17). I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being (Ephesians 3:16).

God recognizes that Christians have good intentions, faith, and purposes. He wants those purposes and intentions to be blessed. Paul prayed for this. The Hebrews writer wrote a similar passage:

May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus

Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen
(Hebrews 13:20–21).

Prayer Request

In 2 Thessalonians 3:1–2 Paul requested that the Thessalonians pray for him.

Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you. And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith.

Paul recognized the Thessalonians as his brothers in the Lord. Paul used the term “*brothers*” in the Thessalonian epistles 22 times.

Paul felt that he needed the prayers of his brothers. He asked them to pray for all the Apostles and for the message of the Lord to spread quickly. The Bible shows that the message did spread quickly:

so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it (Isaiah 55:11). *So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith* (Acts 6:7). *But the word of God continued to increase and spread* (Acts 12:24).

The Word of God is honored by Christians as it is received and transforms their lives from within. In Acts 13:48 Luke said, “*When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.*” The Thessalonians also received and honored the words of Paul as the Word of God. They honored the Word by continuing to keep it. Despite severe trials and persecutions

they resisted the pressure of the evil one. They continued to let the Word of God run and have free course in their lives.

Paul made a second prayer request to the Thessalonians. He said, “. . . *pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith*” (2 Thessalonians 3:2). Paul was familiar with much opposition that he faced from unbelievers. He requested on many occasions that his brothers pray for him because of this opposition:

Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there (Romans 15:31). But the Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city . . . (Acts 17:5). When the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, they went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up. (Acts 17:13).

Paul truly understood persecution. He found opposition everywhere he went. In 2 Corinthians 11:23–29 he said:

. . . I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep, I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else,

I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?

Paul continually faced the pressure of opposition and persecution. He, possibly more than most, understood the need for prayer.

The Lord's Faithfulness

In 2 Thessalonians 3:3 Paul asserted God's absolute faithfulness despite the unfaithfulness of men. He said, "*But the Lord is faithful . . .*" The Lord is absolutely trustworthy and reliable:

God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful (1 Corinthians 1:9). No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it (1 Corinthians 10:13). If we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself (2 Timothy 2:13). Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful (Hebrews 10:23).

In 2 Thessalonians 3:3 Paul said, ". . . *he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.*" Paul prayed this prayer in 1 Thessalonians 3:13. He said, "*May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father . . .*" Jesus also taught how God could keep His people from evil. The Bible says:

. . . lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one (Matthew 6:13). To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy

(Jude 24). *I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one (1 John 2:14). We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him (1 John 5:18).*

Paul concluded his request for prayer by saying:

We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command. May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance (2 Thessalonians 3:4–5).

The faithfulness of the Thessalonians is easy to see from reading both the letters to the Thessalonians. In 2 Thessalonians 1:3 Paul said, *"We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing."* 1 Thessalonians 1:6–7 says:

You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:11 Paul wrote about how the Thessalonians encouraged one another and built each other up. Paul did not have the same confidence for the people in Galatia and always expressed great concern about the possibility of apostasy in Corinth. However, the Thessalonians' reception of the Word of God was a powerful one despite opposition.

Warning Against Idleness

2 Thessalonians 3:6–18

Introduction

This last chapter will focus on Paul's warnings against idleness. He has some pertinent instructions, both for the idle and for those who must deal with the idle brothers. Paul wrote the following instructions in 2 Thessalonians 3:6–18:

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow. For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat." We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat. And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right. If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother. Now may the Lord of peace

himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you. I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand, which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters. This is how I write. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

Paul's Exhortation to Discipline the Disorderly

Paul had already warned the Thessalonians about idleness. In his first letter to the Thessalonians Paul said:

Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody (1 Thessalonians 4:11–12) . . . we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle . . . (1 Thessalonians 5:14).

However, the Thessalonians did not respond to these warnings. Therefore, Paul issued a more severe teaching:

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us (2 Thessalonians 3:6).

Paul appealed to the authority of Christ for what they should do about the brothers who were idle. He wrote to the Corinthians in a similar way. He said, “*I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ . . .*” (1 Corinthians 1:10). Also in 1 Corinthians 5:4–5 he said:

When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to

Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.

Paul instructed the Corinthians concerning what they should do about their idle brothers. The reason for their idleness can only be guessed upon. It may have come from their background. Maybe it came from the heightened sense that the day of the Lord was soon to come; leaving no need to provide for the future. Another reason may have been because of the food and other goods that were distributed to the poor, according to the practice of the early church in Jerusalem. There would be no need to work for food that was given freely by the church. Acts 2:44–45 says: *“All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.”* This is mentioned again in Acts 4:32–35. Luke said:

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

There was a daily distribution of food (cf. Acts 6:1). Men were appointed to administer this effort. It is possible that the idle in Thessalonica were taking advantage of that generosity. Paul told them to turn away from idleness and live in accordance with the teachings they had received from the Apostles. In 2 Thessalonians 2:15 Paul said, *“So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.”* These traditions had been given to them by the Lord, handed down through Paul by inspiration.

Paul and his companions used themselves as examples of how not to be idle. Paul said in 2 Thessalonians 3:7: *“For you*

yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you." Paul and his companions were faithful to the Lord in every way. Paul was toiling at the trade of tent maker while writing this very Epistle. They even chose not to accept financial support from many churches:

You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 1:6). Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you (Philippians 3:17). Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1) . . . We were not idle when we were with you" (2 Thessalonians 3:7) . . . nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you (2 Thessalonians 3:8) . . . Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardships; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you (1 Thessalonians 2:9).

Paul reminded the Thessalonians that as an example to them, he and his companions had not been a burden to anyone. They commanded them to follow that example, "*We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow*" (2 Thessalonians 3:9). As preachers of the Gospel they could have been supported by the Thessalonians, but to be a better example they were not. Paul also reminded the Ephesian elders:

"I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak,

remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" (Acts 20:33–35).

In Matthew 10:1–10 Jesus sent out His twelve. He told them: “*Do not take along any gold or silver or copper in your belts; take no bag for the journey, or extra tunic, or sandals or a staff; for the worker is worth his keep*” (Matthew 10:9–10). In 1 Corinthians 9:13–14 Paul discussed this principle:

Don't you know that those who work in the temple get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those that preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.

This passage is further proof that Paul had a right to receive help. However, he and his companions did not accept any help in order to make themselves a better model to follow. The Corinthian church never seemed to have the right attitude about accepting Paul without questioning his motives. He asked:

Was it a sin for me to lower myself in order to elevate you by preaching the gospel of God to you free of charge? I robbed other churches by receiving support from them so as to serve you. And when I was with you and needed something, I was not a burden to anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied what I needed. I have kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so. As surely as the truth of Christ is in me, nobody in the regions of Achaia will stop this boasting of mine. Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do! And I will keep on doing what I am doing in order to cut the ground from under those who want an opportunity to be considered equal with us in the things they boast about. (2 Corinthians 11:7–12).

Paul had reasons for not receiving support from certain churches throughout his ministry. He said, “. . . *when we were with you*” we did that kind of thing (cf. 2 Thessalonians 3:7; 3:10). Paul used this expression as an example several times. For instance:

. . . when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know (1 Thessalonians 3:4). Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus (1 Thessalonians 4:1–2). Don’t you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? (2 Thessalonians 2:5)

Paul went one step further in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 when he said, “. . . *‘If a man will not work, he shall not eat.’*” In 1 Timothy 5:8 he said, “*If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.*”

In 2 Thessalonians 3:11 Paul said: “*We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies*” Paul talked about busybodies in 1 Timothy 5:13:

. . . [younger widows] get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house. And not only do they become idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying things they ought not to.

In 1 Peter 4:15 Peter said, “*If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler.*” The King James Version (KJV) translates that verse as, “. . . *a busybody in other men’s matters.*” Paul said, “*Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat*” (2 Thessalonians 3:12). He had admonished them to live this way in the first letter. Paul said:

Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody (1 Thessalonians 4:11–12).

In Ephesians 4:28 Paul admonished the Ephesians, “*He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.*”

Commands to the Church

Paul emphasized in his letters that regardless of what people of the world do, Christians are to do what is right. For example, he said:

. . . as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right (2 Thessalonians 3:13) . . . Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up (Galatians 6:9) . . . Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Paul, however, anticipated disobedience. For this reason he told the Church: “*If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed*” (2 Thessalonians 3:14). In 1 Thessalonians 5:27 Paul wrote, “*I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.*” He said in 1 Corinthians 14:37, “*If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord’s command.*” If a person is disobedient to what Paul wrote in all his letters, he is being disobedient to the Lord. In 1 Corinthians 5:1 Paul wrote about a man who was

living with his father's wife. He then gave instructions on how to behave towards that man and any other like him:

I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people — not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat (1 Corinthians 5:9–11).

Paul also told the Church in Rome to withdraw from certain individuals who would teach error and lead men astray:

I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people (Romans 16:17–18).

In 2 Thessalonians 3:14 Paul said the purpose of that discipline was “. . . *that* [the brothers that do not obey the instructions] *may feel ashamed*.” Paul purposely wrote to cause them to feel ashamed, embarrassed, or guilty. For example, he said:

I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? (1 Corinthians 6:5). Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God — and I say this to your shame (1 Corinthians 15:34).

Paul wanted people to feel ashamed, embarrassed, and guilty in order that they might repent. However, Paul did not always intend to shame the recipients of his letters. In 1 Corinthians 4:14 Paul said, *“I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children.”* In 2 Thessalonians 3:14 Paul said not to associate with any brother or sister who did not obey the instructions of his letter, but he went on to say in 2 Thessalonians 3:15, *“Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.”* This command was even meant for those Christians who had been disfellowshipped. Galatians 6:1–2 shows the spirit with which Christians are to involve themselves in discipline in the Church:

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”

Paul said, *“do not treat him as an enemy but continue to warn him as a brother”* (2 Thessalonians 3:15). In Acts 20:31 He told them to: *“. . . be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.”* He said, *“And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle . . .”* (1 Thessalonians 5:14). Proverbs 27:6 says, *“wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.”* The person who is a friend to the one living in rebellion to God can encourage him and perhaps warn him into repenting and coming back to the Lord. Remember Paul said, *“I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children”* (1 Corinthians 4:14).

Final Greetings

The final greeting and admonitions to the Thessalonians can be found in 2 Thessalonians 3:16–18. Paul began that greeting by saying, *“. . . may the Lord of peace himself give you peace . . .”* (2 Thessalonians 3:16). The Lord of peace is

probably referring to the Lord Jesus Christ. In most of Paul's writings when he spoke of the Lord, he was speaking of Jesus. However, there are similar statements made about God. For example:

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through . . . (1 Thessalonians 5:23). The God of peace be with you all. Amen (Romans 15:33). The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet . . . (Romans 16:20). Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me — put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you (Philippians 4:9).

God is the God of peace. He **brings** peace. Jesus is described as One who **makes** peace for Christians between themselves and God. In Ephesians 2:14 Paul said, *“For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.”* Jesus broke down that wall and brought Jews and Gentiles together in one Body, thereby making peace. Then Jesus promised peace to His disciples. In John 14:27 He said: *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”* Then Paul wrote to the Philippians:

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6–7).

In Colossians 3:15 Paul wrote: *“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.”*

Paul said in 2 Thessalonians 3:16, *“. . . The Lord be with all of you.”* In Hebrews 13:5–6 the writer recorded God's words:

Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"

God said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." We respond by saying: "*The Lord is my helper. I will not be afraid.*" Paul said:

I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand, which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters. This is how I write (2 Thessalonians 3:17) . . . See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand (Galatians 6:11) . . . I Paul, am writing this with my own hand . . . (Philemon 19) . . . I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand (1 Corinthians 16:21) . . . I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. Remember my chains . . . (Colossians 4:18).

Romans 16:22 implies that Paul had a secretary or another person who wrote letters for him: *I, Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord (Romans 16:22).*

The last statement Paul made in his second letter to the Thessalonians was, "*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all*" (2 Thessalonians 3:18). He said almost the same thing in the first letter: "*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you*" (1 Thessalonians 5:28). In 2 Timothy 4:22 Paul again closed with these words of benediction: "*The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.*" This statement is clearly a reminder of what Jesus said in Matthew 28:20. Jesus said, "' . . . surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'"

Paul wrote these letters to real people who lived in the first century. These same needs are found among God's people today. When the letters to the Thessalonians are studied those needs are met by God.

Doyle Gilliam



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