

## **1 THESSALONIANS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Without doubt this epistle is one of the genuine letters of the apostle Paul. We shall not be far off from the exact date if it is considered as written in the year A. D. 51.

Just as Galatians is associated with the churches founded on the first missionary tour and at the moment of crisis in the circumcision controversy (Acts 15), 1 Thessalonians must be associated with the second journey and one of the congregations planted by Paul on the second extended missionary enterprise.

### **THESSALONICA**

From the most remote ancient times, a city located at the site of the hot springs near the head of the gulf of Salonica on the west side of the Chalcidic peninsula. Both the gulf (Simus Thermaicus) and the city (Therma) were named for the hot springs. The great Roman road, the Via Ignatia, traversed the city east to west and was spanned by two great Roman arches and extended from what is now Istanbul all the way to the Adriatic Sea, a distance of some 500 miles. The strategic position of Therma on such a vital communications artery with both shipping and land routes has made it an important city throughout history.

The city was founded in 315 B.C. by Cassander on the site (or near it) of the ancient Therma, this name was later changed to Thessalonica.

The complete record of all that is known regarding the founding of the church in Thessalonica is revealed in Acts 17th chapter. At the present time, under the name of Salonica, this city continues as a metropolis of around 17, 049. (Census of 1951).

In chapter 1 verse 8 Paul wrote, "In every place, your faith towards God has gone forth." Both this letter and 2 Thessalonians, glow with warmth and love of the apostle for his beloved converts.

The greatest fame that ever came to Thessalonica, however; derives from the two canonical books of the New Testament addressed to the church there and adorning the sacred writings with the names of 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **Verse 1**

“Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy . . .” The inclusion of Paul’s distinguished helpers, Silvanus and Timothy, in this salutation was not intended as designation of them as co-authors with Paul of his letter, but rather as a mark of friendship and courtesy on the part of the apostle for these faithful workers who had so frequently labored and suffered with him on the mission field. Silas was beaten and imprisoned with Paul at Philippi (Acts 15:19), and Timothy’s imprisonment is mentioned in Hebrews 13:23.

Silvanus was chosen by Paul following the dispute with Barnabas (Acts 15:40), and Timothy was recruited from Lystra where Paul had been stoned (Acts 16:1); thus both were identified with Paul on the second missionary journey and extensively thereafter.

“Thessalonians in God . . .” Other Thessalonians were in darkness, in sin, in the “world” and in a state of alienation from God, but these were in the true and Almighty God. This expressions identifies “the assembly in Thessalonica as non-heathen,” and the addition of “and the Lord Jesus Christ” designates them “as non-Jewish.”

“The Lord Jesus Christ . . .” Our Savior is recognized here as a member of the godhead, possessing full deity and entitled to the adoration and worship of all men. Note also that being “in God” is one and the same thing with being in Christ.

“Grace to you and peace . . .” This was the usual order in which Paul extended this double greeting. “Peace,” which is a negative concept with us means “the absence of strife.” Leon Morris, Tyndale Commentaries on 1 and 2 Thessalonians, p. 15 wrote, “The Hebrew equivalent, shalom (from which the word is

derived), is concerned with ‘wholeness,’ ‘soundness.’ and signifies prosperity in the widest sense, especially prosperity in spiritual things.”

### **Verse 2**

Paul’s amazing capacity to find the source of gratitude in the converts God had given him is a mark of the boundless love the apostle had for humanity.

“All of you . . .” is the simple plural “you” and need not necessarily be understood in the technical sense of “absolutely everyone.”

“We . . .” This is usually construed as the editorial “we” meaning “I,” but there are instances in his writings where this pronoun is used to include all of the apostles with himself. Paul was the only author of his letter, even though Silvanus and Timothy were with him.

### **Verse 3**

This remarkable Pauline triad, that is, a double triad of work, labor and peace linked to faith, love and hope. (1 Corinthians 13:13) With “I know your deeds and your toil, and perseverance” (Revelation 2:2), is one of the most interesting in the New Testament.

Thus, relating all three of the first triad with works and labor being intensified consistent work, and patience being unceasing work. This sheds much light on Paul’s use of all these terms in the New Testament; for example, he even substituted; ‘patience’ for hope.

D. A. Hayes, Paul and His Epistles, p. 158, declared, “These six graces (work, labor, patience, faith, hope, and love), properly united in the hearts of men, and thus “conjoined will regenerate the human race!”

Note: When Paul mentions faith in the New Testament, it never means anything other than an obedient, working faith.

### **FAITH ONE IN KIND**

There is no New Testament mention of “kinds of faith.” The “devils believe and tremble;” and there is no evidence that the faith of devils is any different from the faith of Christians, except in this one particular of being disunited from

love and hope, as well as from work, labor and patience. The demon at Gadara cried out, “What do I have to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God, do not torment me!” (Mark 5:7)

An analysis of the demon’s faith shows that:

- (1) he believed Jesus to be the Son of God,
- (2) that Jesus had the power to torment him,
- (3) he also believed in God’s existence,
- (4) that there was already a “time” appointed when God would visit judgment upon wickedness (Matthew 8:29), and
- (5) that such a time was yet future during the personal ministry of the Lord. Wherein is this different from what Christians believe?

Faith is spoken of in the New Testament, as great faith, little faith, much faith, more faith, etc., all such designations regard the degree or amount of faith, and in no case a difference in kinds, such as historical, or saving faith, etc. Even dead faith is not a different kind, but only the deceased state of the one kind.

### **WORKS OF DIFFERENT KINDS**

The appearance in this passage of “work of faith” emphasizes the New Testament truth of there being many kinds of works mentioned in the New Testament, thus:

- (1) the works of the flesh, (Galatians 5:19-21)
- (2) the works of men, (Mark 13:1)
- (3) the works of the Law of Moses. (Romans 3:20)
- (4) the works of moral goodness. (Cornelius)
- (5) the works of human righteousness, (Romans 10:3)
- (6) the works of the devil, (1 John 3:8)
- (7) the works of faith, (1 Thessalonians 1:3)

The distinctions here enumerated from the sacred text are the key to understanding what Paul meant by “not justified by works,” and what James meant by “justified by works” (2:24), there being in no sense any element of contradiction, there being two utterly different classes of works under consideration by the sacred writers.

## **ELECTION**

### **Verse 4**

Peter E. Cousins, *op. cit.*, p.492, wrote, "Here, as elsewhere, election derives from God's love; election to damnation is not found in the New Testament." Such views as this derive from the failure to understand that God's election works both ways, both to eternal life and to eternal death. And who are they who are thus “elected”? Those men who will love God and choose to serve Him are “the elect” foreordained before all time to inherit eternal salvation; whereas, those who will not love God and who choose to disobey Him are “elected” to eternal death.

Reuel Lemmons, *Firm Foundation* Vol. 94, No. 23, p. 354, wrote, “Nobody is predestined to be saved, except as he chooses, of his own free will, to repent of sin and trust Christ for salvation.” Nobody will be lost eternally except those who exercise their free will in the rejection of God and His message to men through Christ.

“Brethren . . .” was a favorite word with Paul. Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 36, declared that Paul used “this word twenty-one times” in the two Thessalonian epistles.

Leon Morris, *Ibid.*, regards the nature of the “brotherhood of man” as set forth in the New Testament writing, “In view of the many loose modern ideas regarding the ”brotherhood of man” it is worth noting that the New Testament concept of brotherhood is specifically a brotherhood in Christian bonds. Here it is linked with being loved by God and with election. Both are significant.”

## Verse 5

“Our gospel . . .” Paul on occasion could say “my” gospel; and therefore the thought persists that the construction here is for the purpose of affirming the oneness of the gospel the Thessalonians had received with the same gospel taught by all of the apostles.

“What kind of men we proved to be . . .” Commentators make too much of this and other passages in the letter which might be construed as Paul’s defense against “charges.”

It was the part of wisdom to place in the hands of churches the truth which could prevent such slanders from ever being propagated; and that is just as reasonable a supposition as the other. That Paul knowing the ways of Satan, would have anticipated and frustrated such slanders in advance, wherever possible, would appear to be a certainty; and there must be some of that in evidence here.

“Did not come to you in word only . . .” Paul’s preaching was accompanied by the exhibition of miraculous apostolic powers (Romans 15:19) of “signs and wonders and mighty deeds in the Holy Spirit;” such things, of course, having been the Father’s way of confirming the gospel he preached.

“What kind of men we proved to be . . .” Paul worked with his own hands to support his preaching; his conduct was righteous and holy in their presence; and it was fitting indeed that he should remind them of the Christian character he had exhibited among them.

## Verse 6

“Imitators . . .” A. J. Mason, Ellicott’s Commentary on the Whole Bible, Vol. VIII, p. 181, noted, “They did not become ‘disciples’ of Paul, but followers of him as he followed the Lord.”

“In much tribulation . . .” For a glimpse of the afflictions which attended the reception of the gospel, see Acts 17:5-8.

“With the joy of the Holy Spirit . . .” Upon conversion, every Christian receives the earnest of the Holy Spirit; and the very first fruits of the Spirit are ‘love’ and ‘joy..’” (Galatians 5:22)

This initial joy of souls newly won to Christ is in evidence here appears in the fact of its being mentioned in connection with their reception of the gospel.

### **Verses 7-8**

The faith of those Thessalonians has touched all lands. While true enough that Athens was the political capital, Corinth was indeed the commercial and business capital. What a triumph it was for Christianity to flourish in this ancient cradle of Western civilization!

### **Verse 9**

The meaning here is that “they themselves,” that is, the citizens of Greece, not having to wait for Paul to speak of the conversions of the Thessalonians, reported to Paul the amazing marvel of their wholesale conversion to Christ, dramatically pointed up by the savage beating and imprisonment of Paul and Silas at the beginning of the campaign in Philippi. Here is a glimpse of such an impression the Christian religion was making on the ancient Greek culture.

“You turned to God from idols to serve . . .” Idols were big religion in Greece, and those who thus turned were Gentiles, that is, Greeks.

“You turned to God from idols to serve . . .” Peter E. Cousins, *op. cit.*, p. 493, wrote, “This is an Old Testament term contrasting Jehovah with idols that can do nothing.” (Isaiah 41:23)

No negative attitude is sufficient in the sight of God. It was not enough that the Thessalonians had turned from idols, there was likewise a positive side to their conversion.

- (1) They had come to serve the living and true God, and
- (2) They waited for the Second Advent (verse 10).

### **Verse 10**

“And to wait for His Son from heaven . . .” It is most deplorable that scholars press this passage as proof of their allegations that the apostles expected Jesus to come in the Second Advent during their lifetime. For example, D. A. Hayes, *op. cit.*, p. 181, wrote, “We may believe that Paul was mistaken in his expectation of

the speedy advent of our Lord. After nineteen centuries of waiting, we know that he was mistaken, if he expected it in his generation, or in his century. We think the sufficient warrant for his expectation was to be found in the belief of all the apostles and in the traditional teaching of the Master Himself.”

Neither Paul nor any of the apostles, and least of all the Lord Himself, expected that the Second Advent would be “speedy,” or “in their lifetime, but none of that prevented Christians from living and dying in expectation of the return of Christ,” even as true believers do now! And yet every Christian know that the actual coming may still be centuries or millenniums in the future.

### **SPEEDY RETURN OF CHRIST**

Did Christ and the apostles believe and teach that the Second Advent would occur in their generation, at a time immediately in the future? The answer to that question is negative.

Jesus Himself declared that He Himself did not know the day nor the hour (Matthew 24:36); lest of all could any apostle have pretended to know.

Paul did not expect the Second Advent in his lifetime, because he speaks of his own resurrection from the dead, along with the resurrection of all the Corinthians, as an event scheduled for the future. (2 Corinthians 4:14)

“We shall not all sleep. . .” (1 Corinthians 15:51) refers to the ultimate fact of Christians who may be alive at the coming of the Lord, and not either to Himself or the Corinthians of his generation.

The reason that scholars often mistakenly believe that Christ taught His “speedy return” is that they misconstrue passages like Mark 8:38 and 9:1 as references to the Second Advent, whereas the reference, like some similar passages, refer not to the Second Advent but to the establishment of the kingdom of Christ, an event which did occur immediately.

“Who delivers us from the wrath to come . . .” This is a reference to the judgment of the Great Day, and the “wrath of God that falls upon the sons of disobedience.” (Ephesians 5:6)



God has a score to settle with sin, and a day has been appointed in which He will judge the world in righteousness, “through a man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.” (Acts 17:31) Amen!

## CHAPTER 2

There are three clear topics in this chapter, the first (verses 1-12) dealing with what is usually referred to as Paul’s defense against criticism, the second (verses 13-16) stressing the fidelity of the Thessalonians under persecution, and (verses 17-20) a warm expression of Paul’s affection for them.

Unlike the Corinthian letters, Thessalonians, Raymond C. Kelcy, *The Letters of Paul to the Thessalonians*, p. 38, wrote, “Has no explicit statement that elements there were misrepresenting Paul and his companions.” We feel strong agreement with Kelcy, *Ibid.*, that this paragraph, “May be no more than a defense of the missionaries . . . drawing a distinction between themselves and the wandering charlatans of the times.”

The passage may be viewed as preventive, rather than defensive. When Paul worked to support himself, he did not begin doing so only after slander compelled it, but that was his manner of preventing slander. Why not view this paragraph in exactly the same way?

### Verse 1

Leon Morris, *Tyndale Commentaries, 1 and 2 Thessalonians*, p. 42, paraphrased this as, “Our visit to you was no failure.” Ronald A. Ward, *Commentary on 1 and 2 Thessalonians*, p. 49, has a discerning insight into this word “for” which stands at the head of the chapter. He wrote, “It is a common Greek idiom in which a reason is given for a statement understood but not expressed.”

The unexpressed statement is, “This report is true” (that is, the report Paul had mentioned a moment before in 1:9, where it appears that all Greece was talking about the overwhelming success of the gospel message). Paul was say-

ing, “You do not need anyone to tell you what happened, for you yourselves know it.”

True his refusal to boast about anything, in the personal sense, Paul instead of magnifying the success, chose to dwell rather upon the character of the missionaries as it had been tried and proved through hardships and persecutions.

### **Verse 2**

“In Philippi . . .” The memory of the grossly unfair and brutal treatment Paul and Silas had received at Philippi had not dimmed.

“The boldness . . .” Peter A. Cousins, *A New Testament Commentary*, p. 493, wrote, “This word is always used in the New Testament of the proclamation of the gospel and denotes freedom from stress.”

“In our God . . .” In the greater sense, all things are in God, for as Paul said, “In Him we live and move and have our being;” but something more specific is meant here. Those who are in Christ and are working in harmony with the will of God are in a most beneficent and specific sense said to be “in God.”

“Gospel of God amid much opposition . . .” The last word of his phrase, according to Cousins, *Ibid.*, comes from “*agon*,” a term meaning ‘a contest,’ and implying strenuous activity.”

### **Verse 3**

The Thessalonians were familiar with the pretensions, deceit and gross immorality which marked the pagan worship throughout the world of those days, especially among the Gentiles; and it is the contrast with paganism, not Paul’s defense of himself from slander, which shines in a passage like this.

Commenting on the word “uncleanness,” J. R. Dummelow, *Commentary on the Holy Bible*, p. 87, wrote, “Impurity was often associated with heathen worship, and this was especially the case at Thessalonica and Corinth.”

### **Verse 4**

Some little popularity had accrued to the name of Paul because of the outstanding success he had achieved among the Thessalonians; but, in the light of

the widely circulated rumors concerning it, Paul here rejected any notion that he was overly pleased by it or that he, in any manner, coveted the praise of men. Not only did he know the fickleness of the popular mind, but he recognized the moral difficulties incurred by “men-pleasers.” He also, in this verse, called attention to the sacred responsibility of preaching the whole truth, an obligation and trust vested in him by the Father Himself.

“God, who examines our hearts . . .” It is only partially true that the “heart” in Biblical thought is the “intellect.”

David Lipscomb, Commentary on 1 Thessalonians, p. 26, wrote, “Common experience ought to show that the mind alone is not the heart. Many things are memorized and retained in the mind which the heart does not take hold at all; they do not arouse the emotions or volitions (will), consequently do not affect the heart.”

Jesus also made a distinction between “heart” and “mind.” (Mark 12:29) Following are two good definitions of “heart” as used in the New Testament:

- (1) Heart is the seat not so much of emotions as of volition (will) and intellect, the center of moral decision. (Ronald A. Ward, *op. cit.*, p. 809)
- (2) It denotes the sum total of our inward dispositions, including our intellect and will as well.” (Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 45)

The entirety of a preacher’s heart, regarding especially his motivation and intention, is constantly in view of the Lord; and Paul here declares to men that which only God could know, namely, that his soul was absolutely pure in these respects.

### **Verse 5**

Paul is not making a defense here, for he plainly said, “As you know,” indicating that there was no need at all to tell the Thessalonians these things; however, he is disclaiming any desire for human praise, pointing out that his whole life and character denied any such ambition on his part. Paul here showed them, and reminded them, how it is with a true Christian and a true preacher of the word of God.

Coveting not the praise of men, nor any glory that man might give, alleging the eternal truth of God's word in utmost sincerity, disclaiming even the meager support that might have been available to him had he consented to take it, this mighty apostle moved cross the horizon of the first century with the strides of a spiritual giant. There has hardly been another like Paul.

"God is witness . . ." So is all history!

### **Verse 6**

"We might have asserted our authority . . ." This is an unfortunate rendition, because it seems to imply that Paul did not "claim authority" as an apostle; but of course he did claim such authority; and, in places where it was challenged, defended it with the utmost emphasis.

"Apostles of Christ . . ." A. J. Mason, Elliott's Commentary of the Whole Bible, Vol. VIII, p. 132, wrote, "The title here seems to be bestowed on Silas and Timothy, as in Acts 14:14, upon Barnabas."

Ronald A. Ward, *op. cit.*, p. 61, commented that, "Andronicus and Junius were conspicuous among the apostles." (Romans 16:7) That passage, however, means that Andronicus and Junius were well-known by the Twelve in Jerusalem, there never having been an apostle in Rome before Paul arrived!

Charles Hodge, Commentary of the Epistle to the Romans, p. 449, commented, in this context that, "The word 'apostle' is never used in Paul's writings except in a strict official sense."

The office of the apostleship was too clearly set forth in the New Testament to allow the title on any except Paul and the Twelve; but the clear use of the title for Barnabas (Acts 14:14) makes it possible that Timothy and Silas were also "apostles" in that secondary sense of the word.

### **Verse 7**

This figure of a mother-nurse is one of the most beautiful in the New Testament and gives eloquent witness to the mild, solicitous and persevering love of the apostle for his converts.

## **Verse 8**

“Fond affection for you . . .” Paul’s words in this passage approach some kind of zenith of emotional impact. Someone has said “the very words seem to tremble” upon the sacred page. How strong and overwhelming was the love the matchless apostle felt of behalf of those whom he had won for Christ!

## **Verse 9**

This verse has drawn widely divergent comment.

P. J. Cloag, *Pulpit Commentary*, Vol. 21, p. 28, wrote, “Night and day . . .” Night precedes day in Jewish reckoning . . . . This does not mean that he wrought at his trade at night and preached during the daytime; but the phrase “night and day” denotes incessantly, continually.”

Adam Clarke, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Vol. VI, p. 542, wrote, “Probably Paul and his companions worked with their hands by day, and spent a considerable part of the night or evenings, in preaching Christ to the people.”

Moffatt, James, *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, Vol. IV, p. 28, wrote, “Paul means by the phrase “night and day” that he started work before dawn; the usage is regular and frequent. He no doubt began work so early in order to be able to devote some part of the day to preaching.”

There is really no good reason why all of the above comments might be true, at one time or another, with regard to Paul’s working “night and day.” We may be sure that he utilized every possible device to extend his opportunity of preaching the word.

## **Verse 10**

Paul did not imply by this that the focus of his godly living was to set a righteous example in the presence of believers.

## **Verse 11**

“Each one of you . . .” As David Lipscomb, *Commentary on 1 Thessalonians*, p. 29, wrote, “This shows that converts were not made in masses, but that the

slow, toilsome application of the gospel to individuals, one by one,” did the work.

Three verbs here outline the function of the type of father to which Paul compared himself. These were exhorting, encouraging, and charging.

### **Verse 12**

“Exhorting you . . .” This means persuading men to adopt a certain course of action and is applicable to the persuasive words by which Paul wooed and won them to Christ as well as to specific admonitions to godly living following conversion.

“Encouraging you . . .” He is a poor preacher who neglects to encourage the Christians who hear him. Nothing is more soul-killing and church-diminishing than a preacher who never has any remarks of praise and encouragement for his hearers.

“Charging . . .” Some versions of the Bible use the word “Testifying” which is an unfortunate rendition because of its usual interpretation of “sounding off” in public meetings. It is not that kind of “testifying” that Paul meant. That is not what Paul meant. “Charged is the proper word as it appears from the accounting of what was “witnessed” as recounted in verse 12, immediately afterward.

### **Verse 12**

Thus the kind of “charging” (testifying) mentioned in verse 11 consisted of apostolic preaching of God’s commandments that men should lead respectable, blameless, moral, and upright lives in the church!

“Who calls you into His own kingdom . . .” The kingdom of God presently exists in the community of Christians on earth, the kingdom having been set up on the first Pentecost following the resurrection of the Son of God from the dead; but there will be an eternal phase of the kingdom, mentioned by Peter. (2 Peter 1:11)

By using one possessive for “kingdom” and “glory” Paul indicated that just one kingdom is in view; but, since the present phase of God’s kingdom is not one of

the glory (in the ultimate sense), it is probable that Paul indicated (by the word “glory”) the same eternal phase mentioned by Peter.

“Calls . . .” indicates not only that the kingdom is a present reality but that the door is still open for all who wish to enter. It is a mistake to read this as saying that Paul expected the “glory” phase of the kingdom to start any day and that God was calling the Thessalonians into that!

A. J. Mason, *op. cit.*, p. 133, was right in the affirmation that, “The Thessalonians were at that time, by baptism, already members of the kingdom of God (Colossians 1:13), but were not yet so assured in their new allegiance as to be certain of reaching the full-developed glory of that kingdom. Note again the thought of the Advent (Christ’s second coming).”

### **Verse 13**

It is verses such as this which forbid any allegations that Paul was mistaken about the near-approach of the Advent (Christ’s second coming), or anything else. This verse reminds us of the passage from (Acts 17:11): “Now these were more noble minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so.”

Paul’s testimony in this verse 13 shows that Luke’s account in Acts was focused upon the unbelievers in Thessalonica, whereas Paul here tells the way it was with the believers.

“Which also performs its work in you who believe . . .” We are indebted to David Lipscomb, *op. cit.*, p. 31, for this tabulation of how the word works in believers:

- (1) By the word the new birth is affected. (1 Peter 1:23)
- (2) By it the soul is saved. (James 1:21)
- (3) By it we are sanctified. (John 17:17; 1 Timothy 4:5)
- (4) It prevails mightily. (Acts 19:20)
- (5) Like the seed (Mark 4:26-27), it has power in itself to produce.

- (6) It is living and active. (Hebrews 4:12)
- (7) It is like fire against that which is false. (Jeremiah 23:29)
- (8) It is like a hammer against that which is strong. (Jeremiah 23:29)
- (9) It is light in darkness. (Psalm 119:105)
- (10) It is the sole weapon in Christian warfare. (Ephesians 6:17)

#### **Verse 14**

It was Jewish persecution which first broke against the infant church; and it was conspicuously against their own countrymen; here Paul compared the persecutions of the Thessalonians which they had endured at the hands of their Gentile countrymen to that of the Jewish-Christians in Judaea, noting that both had bravely and courageously endured.

However, as a glance at Acts 17:13 will show, the Jews were those who had instigated and promoted the persecution in Thessalonica, even though the details of it were executed by Gentiles.

#### **Verse 15**

There are several important considerations that are touched upon in this verse.

- (1) All modern attempts to mitigate the guilt of the Jews in killing Jesus (by the device of saying the Romans actually did the killing).

William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary*, 1 Thessalonians p. 71, wrote, " They are crushed by this passage." Yes, the Jews were guilty. Of course, they were not alone in their guilt. All men, one way or other, were involved in the death of Christ.

- (2) This verse refutes the objections some have expressed regarding the gospel of John, affirming that John (a Jew) could not so consistently have referred to "the Jews," as enemies of Christ and Christianity; but Paul, the devout Hebrew of the Hebrews, not only exposes the error of such a view but states in this verse the reasons that lay behind God's judgment of the Jews.



- (3) The hardening of Israel had reached a final stage leading to the destruction of the city of Jerusalem, an event less than two decades future from the time Paul wrote.

“Killed the Lord Jesus . . .” The New Testament account of the opposition to Jesus had culminated in His heartless crucifixion lies behind these brief words. There was no extenuation of guilt in those who through deceit, suborned testimony, mob violence and bitter hatred contrived through intimidation and political pressure the crucifixion of the Lord of glory. Terrible as this was, however, it was not the last straw. The straw that broke the camel’s back, as far as God’s dealings with Israel were concerned, took place right there in Thessalonica, where they forbade that the gospel of God be preached to Gentiles. That did it! That “filled up” the measure of their sins, and judgment soon fell.

### **Verse 16**

There was no reason whatever behind that wandering committee of self-appointed opponents going into every town where Paul preached and stirring up hatred and persecution against the church. Having failed in their persecutions both in Judaea and upon the mission field, at Thessalonica they enlisted the Gentiles, their magistrates and leaders, and turned them against Paul and the gospel. This was the sin against the Holy Spirit Jesus had mentioned in Mark 3:29.

God had mercifully forgiven Israel the murder of the prophets (sin against God), and the murder of Christ (sin against the Son); but as Jesus said, the sin against the Holy Spirit was final.

Christ had already announced the hardening of Israel, but if they had accepted the gospel they might yet have been saved. It could only mean that the destruction of the Holy City was not too far away. Jesus had faithfully promised, “But the king was enraged and sent his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and set their city on fire.” (Matthew 22:7) That is what would happen if Israel persisted in their opposition to Christ and His gospel.

Just as Israel had their “times,” marked by innumerable mercies from heaven, so it has been with the Gentiles but our “times” too also in all probability draw-

ing to an end; and a fate even worse than that which destroyed Jerusalem looms threateningly in the not-too-distant future—unless, and God grant that there may be, a wholesale turning of the men of our day to the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Verse 17**

This is one of the most precious passages in Paul’s writings. It has a sentiment Paul often expressed as in, “For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit.” (Colossians 2:5)

### **Verse 18**

There seems to have been something particularly frustrating about Paul’s being checkmated in his intention to return to Thessalonica. Perhaps it was here that he finally saw, for the first time, that the opposition of Israel would never cease.

Paul, who loved Israel more than he loved himself, and could even have wished himself accursed for Israel’s sake, could no long contemplate the atrocious sins of the chosen people without going behind them for the cause of their sin. They had been blinded by Satan. Thus it is clear that Satan is a person, the world-ruler of the kingdom of evil, and although a being of great magnitude of powers, nevertheless a creature, who shall at last be overwhelmed by the judgment of God.

As to how Satan had hindered Paul, no specifics are possible, as the contradictory opinions of the learned effectively demonstrate.

### **Verses 19-20**

“Our Lord Jesus at His coming . . .” Raymond C. Kelcy, *op. cit.*, p. 61, wrote, “The word here rendered “coming” is the first New Testament usage of the important word *parousia*.” This word has widely come to be a favorite for the second coming of Christ.

There is no indication here that Paul expected the second coming to happen in a few days. It is true enough that some of the Thessalonians mistakenly assumed that to be the case; but Paul wrote another letter to them for the specific purpose of correcting much false interpretations.

## CHAPTER 3

This epistle was written shortly after the reunion of Timothy and Silas with Paul in Corinth.

This chapter is largely devoted to the expression of Paul's concern over the fate of the beloved converts left in Thessalonica when Paul was compelled to flee, due to Jewish instigated opposition from the city magistrates, and of the apostle's joy upon receiving the good news of the fidelity of the Lord and of their love for Paul. (verses 1-10)

It concludes with a fervent prayer that he might be spared to visit them again, and that the Thessalonians might abound and increase in their love of both God and man. (verses 11-13)

Regarding his prayerful hope to "see your face again," the prayer was answered some years later. (Acts 20:1) (J. R. Dummelow, Commentary on the Holy Bible, p. 988)

### Verse 1

The significance of Paul's being left alone derives from the fact of his enemies seeking to kill him, the threat being so serious that an escort guarded his journey to Athens. Paul recognized the danger of his unguarded journey to Athens.

Paul recognized the danger of his unguarded exposure; and as his name was already known throughout Athens following his address on Mars Hill, he must have been very apprehensive of what could easily befall him. Thus his consent to be left alone derived from a genuine love of converts and the utmost unselfishness on his part.

"We could endure it no longer . . ." "Alone" is plural in the Greek, but Paul might very well have meant that the Lord was with him and that he was never alone (in the singular); besides, in any epistolary usage, all of the members of a sentence are in apposition with the plural "we" anyway.

P. J. Gloag, Pulpit Commentary, Vol. 21, p. 55, said many scholars support the view taken here, wrote, "Some refer the Paul and, Silas, and Timothy; others to Paul and Silas, as Timothy had been sent to Thessalonica; but it is to be restrict-

ed to Paul, as is evident from chapter 3:5, and inasmuch as Paul was left alone in Athens; the plural being used here for the singular.”

Peter E. Cousins, *A New Testament Commentary* p. 494, wrote, "The word alone in 3:1 and the parallel 'we sent' (3:2) and 'I sent' (verse 5) suggest the plural here is not to be taken literally.”

Alone at the end of the verse (3:1) is also plural (*monoi*), although it is quite clear that it refers to Paul only.

### **Verse 2**

“God’s fellow-worker . . .” Some scholars insist on translating this, “God’s co-worker.” William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary, 1 Thessalonians*, p. 82, said, “The external evidence in favor of the reading, ‘God’s co-worker,’ is not any stronger than that in favor of reading ‘God’ minister.”

There were several reasons for sending Timothy (or Silas) to visit the Thessalonians. Not only was Paul most urgently concerned in knowing how they were doing and in receiving the encouragement which a good report might provide, there would also be definite benefits to the Thessalonians as well.

They would be

- (1) established and
- (2) comforted. They needed both. Young converts facing a storm of persecution might fall away unless established and comforted.

“God’s fellow-worker. . .” Adam Clarke, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Vol. VI p. 546, wrote, “There were no sinecures (office, which brings profit) then; preaching the gospel was God’s work; the primitive preachers were His workmen, and labored in His calling. It is the same still, but who works?”

### **Verse 3**

The antagonism between light and darkness is such that upright, moral behavior of Christians is alone sufficient to incur the world’s displeasure and hatred. Cain hated Abel, and why? “Because his deeds were evil and his brother’s (deeds) were righteous.” (1 John 3:12)

Paul and his co-workers had fully warned and prepared the Thessalonians for that eventuality, as indicated by the words, “You yourselves know.”

“Be disturbed . . . “ This word is used by Homer and others of a dog wagging his tail, and so comes to signify “fawn upon” or “to flatter”. . . Paul is saying that the Thessalonians should not be cajoled by smooth talk.”

#### **Verse 4**

All Christians are servants of Jesus Christ and may expect the same treatment, wherever it is possible for the world to inflict it, that was received by the blessed Lord Himself and His holy apostles. The warning that He gave the apostles (John 16:1, 4) on the night He was betrayed has its application to Christians of all generations. “A slave is no greater than his master, if they persecuted Me, they will persecute you, etc.” (John 15:20)

Ronald A. Ward, *op. cit.*, p. 85, “(Preachers) should teach basic doctrine to new converts and also prepare them for coming battles.” In saying that “we” are on the road to affliction, the author was thinking of Christians generally.”

#### **Verse 5**

“The tempter . . .” Raymond C. Kelcy, *op. cit.*, p. 69, wrote, “Only in one other passage (Matthew 4:3) is Satan thus designated in the New Testament.” Paul’s usual designation of the evil one was by his proper name, Satan.

“Our labor should be in vain . . .” If old five-point Calvinism (once saved always saved) had any proof in the New Testament, Paul could have spared himself any concern about any of the Thessalonians being lost!

#### **Verse 6**

“Your faith . . .” T. W. Manson interpreted faith in this and the preceding verse as “fidelity,” that is “obedient faith;” and, although Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 64, denies this as having been “on inadequate grounds,” he nevertheless admitted that, “The word can have this meaning; and in this verse it would not be inappropriate.”

The position maintained in this verse is that “faith” in the New Testament frequently has this objective meaning, and that sinner’s trust/faith is hardly ever the true meaning. (See Galatians 2:16, 20)

The obedient faith of the Thessalonians, their true Christian love (agape) for both God and man, and their continuing affection for the beloved apostles were sufficient grounds for Paul’s full encouragement and thanksgiving.

### **Verse 7**

“For this reason . . .” The reason was the state of the Thessalonians in the three particulars just cited in verse 6.

“Through your faith . . .” This is likewise objective, meaning faith as demonstrated and proved by their actions, in another word, “fidelity.”

### **Verse 8**

J. R. Dummellow, *op. cit.*, p. 988, commented on this verse, “Better, ‘if only you stand fast.’ The Greek expresses some doubt and anxiety.” William Hendriksen, *op. cit.*, p. 88, wrote, “This is the utterance of profound and overpowering emotion.”

Paul loved the young converts to Christ with a pure and holy passion; and this is even more impressive when understood in context of Paul’s schooling and racial background, those being so fervently loved being citizens of a once hated and despised race, degraded by centuries of idol-worship, and contaminated by pagan value-judgments.

### **Verse 9**

The thought of this passage is that Paul’s gratitude at the state at the Thessalonians was so great that it would be difficult properly to thank God for so great a joy and blessing. Paul’s joy was so great that all of the sufferings and hardships he had endured were as nothing compared with it.

### **Verse 10**

This prayer was answered yeas afterward (Acts 20:1-2), indicating that, even in the case of such a holy one as Paul, prayers were sometimes not answered at

once, but after long delay. The great admonition is always to pray and not to faint.

### **Verse 11**

These three verses (11-13), are according to J. R. Dummelow, *op. cit.*, p. 988, who wrote, “A prayer to Christ as co-equal with the Father.” The Christology of Paul is not something which developed,” but was implicit and explicit in all he wrote, even in this letter, one of the very first epistles from his pen. P. J. Gloag, *op. cit.*, p. 56, wrote, “Here we have an express prayer directed to Christ, thus necessarily implying His divine nature.”

### **Verse 12**

In verse 10, Paul had mentioned what might be lacking in their faith, and here is a hint of one area in which they were not perfect. They no doubt loved one another, but Paul prayed that they might “abound and increase” in that mutual love; and then, daringly, he extended it to require their love “toward all men!”

In this virtue, the Thessalonians, like all men, fell far short of the high and holy standards of true Christianity. As Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 70, declared, “The Christian quality of agape is never natural to man, and comes only to him who has been transformed by the power of God.”

### **Verse 13**

“Our God . . .” Paul’s God was the same as the God of all the rest of the apostles and of all Christians in all generations; and the same was true of Paul’s gospel.

“Coming of our Lord Jesus . . .” There is not a word here of any “soon coming” so frequently alleged as “the mistake,” both of our Lord and of His holy Apostles.

True, some of the Thessalonians got that impression. It was from their misunderstanding, not from any statement Paul had made to that effect. Paul wrote the book of 2 Thessalonians soon afterward for the specific purpose of correcting their false notions.

“With all His saints . . .” It is difficult to know exactly what this means. Raymond C. Kelcy, *op. cit.*, p. 79, gave the following summary of the difficulty when he wrote, “The word for “holy ones” is that commonly used for all Christians in the New Testament. On the other hand, the angels of heaven are frequently associated with Christ in the Second Advent. (Matthew 14:41, 49; 25:31; Mark 8:33) Of course, the angels are also called “holy.”

It is not safe under any circumstance, to postulate any detailed description of what will take place at the Second Coming of Christ, because the glimpses afforded of that event in the New Testament are not full reports, but only glimpses, given here and there, of that glorious and terrible morning when all men will be summoned before the great white throne for their accounting before the Lord of all creation.

Men are doomed to a lack of full understanding until that occasion arrives, because the New Testament has left out any detailed descriptions of it.

Christ will bring “them that have fallen asleep” with Him (4:14); and His holy angels shall likewise attend the event (2 Thessalonians 1:7); and, upon the basis of these scriptures, the view is preferable that holds “saints” in this passage as including both.

## **CHAPTER 4**

As in practically all of the apostle Paul’s letters, the doctrinal foundation is followed by practical exhortations: although, of course, here is an overlapping in both sections.

This chapter begins the second section of the epistle and contains an exhortation to sanctification (verses 1-8), admonitions concerning mutual love among Christians (verses 9-12), and encouragement regarding the status of their Christian dead (verses 13-18).

### **Verse 1**

“Finally . . .” The Phillips translation renders this, “to sum up;” but as Leon Morris, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, p. 72,



said, “This is not the thought; ‘finally’ is better. Perhaps ‘for the rest’ will give us the sense of it.”

“We request and exhort . . .” Raymond C. Kelcy, *The Letters of Paul to the Thessalonians*, p. 81, wrote that these two words, “Are practically synonymous though the second is stronger.” Also, there is a distinction in that “request” carries a certain note of tenderness which is not in the other.

“In the Lord Jesus . . .” This is Paul’s great phrase to indicate the status of believers in relationship to Christ. Here the thought is that all of his instructions have been conveyed to them in respect of their common bond “in Christ,” and in view of his apostolic relationship to the Lord Himself.

“How you ought to walk . . .” Paul’s use of this metaphor for living the Christian life is extensive. Implicit in this remark is the fact that Paul and his fellow-preachers had instructed the Thessalonians at the time of their conversion in the basic requirements of Christian living, making his admonitions here to be a plea that they would continue faithfully in the instructions they had already received.

“And please God (just as you actually do walk) . . .” Paul here credited them with being in the right way; and the second clause is to make that clear. One does not say to a Christian, “Do right,” except in the sense of growth and perseverance in the course already begun.

“That you may excel still more . . .” David Lipscomb, *Commentary of 1 Thessalonians*, p. 45, observed that life is never a static condition. He wrote, “There is no finality to progressive holiness while the believer remains on earth. Life is marked by either growth or decay.” Thus the only way to avoid slipping backward is to move forward.

## **Verse 2**

“The authority of the Lord Jesus . . .” Inherent is the truth that Paul’s instructions had been those of the Lord Himself.

James Moffatt, *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, Vol. IV, p. 33, wrote, The apostles have their orders on the authority of their commission and revelation

from the Lord whom they interpret to His followers. This appealed to the saying of Jesus which formed a part of “the unwritten sayings.” Thus 8a (below) is an echo of the saying preserved in Luke 10:16.”

“What commandments we gave you . . .” The words here have a military ring, meaning “the orders we gave you.” Paul was making it clear that his orders were actually those of the Lord, a fact further emphasized by the use of the great Old Testament word for “Lord.” David A. Hubbard, *Wycliffe New Testament Commentary*, p. 816, wrote, “Paul’s commandments were stamped with the authority of Jesus, who is Lord, the exalted Ruler of Life.”

### **Verse 3**

“Your sanctification . . .” Paul was about to cite three things which entered into sanctification:

- (1) abstaining from fornication,
- (2) possessing one’s vessel in a state of honor, and
- (3) refraining from defrauding a brother in his matter. The true definition of sanctification, may be summed up in a word, moral living.

Sanctification is not therefore some kind of special or second blessing, but an achieved status of upright character. One is truly sanctified when he is converted, believing, repenting, and being baptized into Christ. Raymond C. Kelcy, *op. cit.*, p. 84, wrote, “The state of sanctification is one which the Christian must be careful to maintain.”

### **Verse 4**

The meaning of this passage is disputed, but it seems to be improperly so. The RSV rendered this passage: “That each one of you take a wife to himself in holiness and honor.” The fault in the RSV derives from their adoption of meanings which would make Paul advocate a low view of marriage in which the wife is the property of her husband. This is contrary to everything in the New Testament.

Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 76, gave the meaning of this verse as “Keep your bodies pure.”

## Verse 5

Paul spoke so forth-rightly in this passage regarding the lustful sins of fornication and impurity; but, aside from the fact of every generation's needing such instructions, the low pagan culture of the Gentile world of that era made it especially mandatory that in the matter of sexual purity the Christians should maintain the position of honor which their sanctification required.

P. J. Gloag, *Pulpit Commentary*, Vol. 21, p. 74, wrote, "The moral sense of the heathen was so perverted and their natures so corrupt that they looked upon fornication as a thing indifferent." Our own age with its loose standards and vaunted "new morality" is hardly any better.

William Barclay, *op. cit.*, p. 200, wrote, "The new morality is only the old morality brought up-to-date. There is clamant necessity in Britain, as there was in Thessalonica, to place before men and women the uncompromising demands of Christian morality, "for God did not call us to impurity, but to consecration."

## Verse 6

James Moffatt, *op. cit.*, p. 34, wrote, "There is no change of subject here, from licentiousness to dishonesty. Paul is still dealing with the immorality of men, only, now, as a form of social dishonesty and fraud." Of course, Paul's use of the term "defraud" suggests business dealings; but it should not be overlooked that all sexual dishonesty and indulgence is a fraud perpetrated against another.

"The Lord is the avenger . . ." The Lord is an avenger in all wickedness; here it is especially declared that the Lord will judge and avenge against the sexual vices under consideration. Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed for gross wickedness, but it was their sexual impurity which precipitated their destruction. America needs the lesson of this in the most urgent sense at this very time. It seems nearly incredible to one brought up in the glory of a full Christian heritage that modern men could countenance and even advocate homosexuality as some in our own day are doing. May it be remembered that even if men decide in their arrogance to set aside God's law in this regard, the Avenger will still bring judgment upon them.

## **Verses 7-8**

“He who rejects this is not rejecting man but God . . .” (Note: see comment by James Moffatt, verse 2 above)

James Moffatt, *op cit.*, p. 35, also believed that “Holy Spirit” in this place does not refer to the Third Person of the Godhead, so much as it does to “the motive and power of the new life.”

## **Verse 9**

“Love of the brethren . . . love one another . . .” Paul’s use of the word *philia* here, meaning love in the natural brotherly sense of affection that is natural among families, and used even of affection among animals, seems to suggest the word “instinctively;” for it is God who instills all instinctive qualities in man and beast. Nor does the statement “taught of God to love one another” deny this.

If, on the other hand, Paul meant the love which he and his fellow-workers had taught the Thessalonians that too, in the ultimate sense is being “taught of God.”

Paul here admitted that the Thessalonians were in full possession of the grace of loving one another. **WOULD THAT ALL CHURCHES WERE SO!**

## **Verse 10**

“Excel still more . . .” A strong bond of affection had sprung up among the Macedonian Christians struggling against the pagan culture to maintain the faith and purity to which they were committed.

## **Verse 11**

The three classes addressed here are fanatics, busybodies, and loafers. William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary, 1 Thessalonians*, p. 105, wrote, “Often one and the same person is all three!” Whether or not there were special offenders in these categories, the seeds of such misconduct are in every mortal; and the admonition was needed in the preventive, if not the corrective, sense.

“Lead a quiet life . . .” Phillip’s rendition of this as “Make it your ambition to have no ambition: seems appropriate; for what is condemned here is the restless striving for attention, preferment and for what is vaguely “success.”

The quiet, tranquil life of a true Christian is to be preferred against all the more noisy life styles.

Fanatics are doomed to frustration and defeat. Striving for religious excitement requires that something new and different is encountered constantly; and this inevitably leads the seeker into error.

Fanatics are doomed to frustration and defeat. Striving for religious excitement requires that something new and different be encountered constantly; and this inevitably leads the seeker into error.

Busybodies are carriers of gossip, disturbers of the peace, troublemakers and thorns in the body of the believers wherever they appear.

Loafers are especially detestable. While doing little or nothing on their own behalf, they require attention, goods and services of others that might be far better employed than in the maintenance of idlers and spongers off others.

The antidote for all three classes is concisely stated in the great work ethic of the New Testament: “Attend to your own business . . . work with your hands, just as we commanded you.”

Ronald A. Ward, Commentary on 1 and 2 Thessalonians, p. 101, wrote, “This is the charter of dignity for manual labor . . . work is not beneath the dignity of a freeman.” Among the Greeks, work was despised as the employment of slaves; and it will be remembered that the false teachers of Corinth belittled Paul’s teaching because he labored with his hands. No wonder a civilization like that perished. Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 81, wrote, “Christianity did not hesitate to insist on the dignity of common labor.”

“Even as we commanded you . . .” This identifies the work ethic as one Paul had already stressed among the Thessalonians. Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 81, wrote, “Paul used a verb often employed in the classics of the orders of military officers. There is a ring of authority about it.”

## **Verse 12**

“So that you may behave properly . . .” Paul employed the metaphor in which “behave” is used for living the whole of life.

“Toward outsiders . . .” Paul was concerned that the Thessalonians have a good reputation among the non-Christian population, a goal which should be of concern to Christians of all generations.

“Not be in any need . . .” That person who through indolence or lack of application finds himself continually in need of assistance from others is, in fact, a parasite. It is the Christian’s first business to take care of himself and his dependents.

William Barclay, *op. cit.*, p. 202, expressed it, “The effect of the conduct of some of the Thessalonians was that others had to support them. Paul told them that they must aim at independence and never become spongers on charity. It is the Christian’s duty to help others; for many, through no fault of their own, cannot attain independence; but it is also the Christian’s duty to help himself.”

## **SECOND COMING OF CHRIST**

### **Verse 13**

“Not want you to be uninformed . . .” This was one of Paul’s favorite ways of introducing a new and important subject. The term “brethren” is used with it for the sake of conveying the idea of tenderness and affection in what he was about to say.

“About those who are asleep . . .” This should not be understood in the limited sense of “have fallen asleep,” because it purposely included those already dead and others yet to die before the coming of Christ.

## **SLEEP OF DEATH**

This beloved metaphor was frequently used by our Lord Himself, as in the instances of Jairus’ daughter (Mark 5:39) and of Lazarus (John 11:11), and was quickly adopted wherever Christianity was known. Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 84, wrote, “The very word “cemetery,” “*Koimeterion*, is derived from the word used here, *koimao*, and it means ‘place of sleep.’”

A. J. Mason, *Elliott's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Vol. VIII, p. 140, warned that no doctrine, "May be deduced with precision, from a metaphor;" and full agreement is felt with this.

Christ used this metaphor just prior to performing two resurrections, and the apostle Paul would not have used it here, except for the purpose of suggesting, A. J. Mason, *Ibid*, "A continued (even if partly unconscious) existence, and the possibility of a reawakening."

In this light, therefore, it seems safe enough to construe this metaphor as teaching:

- (1) that death is not annihilation,
- (2) that the manner of existence is changed,
- (3) that there will be an awakening from death in a resurrection, and
- (4) that there will be a rejuvenation of bodily strength in the resurrection.

"That you may not grieve . . ." It is not, "grieve not," but "grieve not, as those who have no hope." James William Russell, *Compact Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 510, wrote, "The belief held generally by the Greeks was that there was no resurrection, that death was the end of all things."

Paul was about to make an argument for the encouragement of the Thessalonians; but in doing so, he did not introduce the doctrine of the resurrection as anything new, but as something they already knew and believed in.

James Moffatt, *op. cit.*, p. 36, wrote, "Paul assumes their faith and argues from it. Their vivid and naive belief in Christ's advent within their lifetime was the very source of their distress." Thus it is certain that faith in the resurrection existed from the very first in Christianity.

#### **Verse 14**

"For if we believe . . ." There is no uncertainty implied by the use of the conditional, the same being an idiomatic way of arguing from a certainty, as when Jesus said, "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again." (John 14:3)

“Fallen asleep in Jesus . . .” A. M. Stibbs, *New Bible Commentary Revised*, p. 1159, construed the prepositional phrase in this passage as modifying “God will bring,” rendering it, “Even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep;” but this would seem to be both arbitrary and awkward. While true enough that the resurrection shall be accomplished “through Jesus,” the thing in view here is that community of souls who are “asleep in Jesus.” This passage does not deny the general resurrection of all the dead, but the general resurrection of unbelievers is not mentioned.. The glorious promises of this passage are for them that sleep “in Jesus.”

The apostle John wrote, “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord (Revelation 14:13); and the same teaching is in Paul’s words here. James Moffatt, *op. cit.*, p. 46, wrote, “Since Paul left, some of the Thessalonian Christians had died, and the survivors were distressed with the fear that these would have to occupy positions secondary to those who believed until the coming of the Lord, or even that they had passed beyond any such participation at all.”

The Thessalonians being the concern of Paul were not worried about themselves, but only about their deceased members, indicating that they fully expected to live until the Second Coming! Of course, this expectation was erroneous, and it may not be inferred that they fully expected to live until the Second Coming! It may not be inferred that they had received any such false impression from what Paul had actually taught.

### **Verse 15**

“By the word of the Lord . . .” Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 86, wrote, “The most natural explanation of this is that Paul is quoting a saying of Jesus.” Paul received from Jesus personally all that Jesus had previously delivered to the Twelve. There were countless sayings of Jesus that were not preserved for posterity. (John 21:25)

“That we who are alive . . .” Paul used the editorial “we” not meaning at all that he personally intended to survive to the Second Coming; but, as in Lightfoot’s paraphrase *Ibid.*, p. 87, “When I say ‘we,’ I mean those who are living, those who survive to that day.”



It is clear that the resurrection of unbelievers is not under consideration in this passage.

William Hendriksen, *op. cit.*, p. 115, wrote, "Anyone can see that the apostle is not drawing a contrast between believers and unbelievers, as if, for example, believers would rise first, and unbelievers a thousand years later!"

"Shall not precede those who have fallen asleep . . ." This flatly answered the question that was troubling the Thessalonians. There is no disadvantage to those who die before the coming of the Lord; it is a matter of fact, having already undergone the necessary change that must come to all, they are a step nearer the resurrection and shall, "rise first," as Paul would say a moment later. Here it is presented negatively. The living shall not precede the dead saints in receiving the glory the Lord has prepared for them.

#### **Verse 16**

"Descend from heaven . . ." This is not to be understood in a spatial (happening in space) sense at all.. Paul's words here are still the best way to declare the sudden manifestation of the Lord Jesus Christ at the cataclysmic end of this age.

The manifestation will be upon the whole earth and not merely upon some part of it; and there simply are no words which can adequately convey to finite understanding any meaningful description of it.

"A shout . . ." Jesus cried "with a loud voice" over the grave of Lazarus (John 11:43); and, in the light of the passage before us, there must be some significance in it. The shout is here identified with the voice of the archangel and the sound of a trumpet; and evidently some fantastically penetrating sound will signal the onset of the Second Coming.

The Second Coming will also be with the clouds of heaven (verse 17), the same having been mentioned at the time of the Ascension (Acts 1:9-11), with the metaphor being changed to "flaming fire" in 2 Thessalonians 1:7, and with the Savior Himself having stressed the same thing (Luke 21:27).

## **Verse 17**

“Caught up together . . . in the clouds . . .” A. M. Stibbs, *op. cit.*, p. 1159, wrote, “This event is sometimes call ‘the rapture,’ or snatching away of the saints.”

“To meet the Lord in the air . . .” We will not dwell with Him in the air, but accompany Him, to the new heaven and the new earth.

All the New Testament teachings concerning the things of the end of the world, the coming of Christ and the final judgment, were not given to tease the intellectual curiosity of believers, but they must be understood in the light of the passage before us, which comes to us in a section of exhortations; and in the light of the purpose of Paul’s words here, the passage supplies faith, confidence and certainty that death cannot rob any child of God of rewards which God may allow to be rightfully his.

## **Verse 18**

How hopeless is such a letter! And what a world of difference in the pagan “comfort yourselves” and the glowing words of Christian faith, “comfort one another with these words!”

Not only did the words of this passage allay the weeping, dry the tears and comfort the bereaved in Thessalonica, they are still doing so after twenty centuries have rolled away; and they are just as appropriate now as when they calmed and comforted the hearts of the bereaved in ancient Thessalonica.

## **CHAPTER 5**

This chapter continues, significantly, the teaching on the Second Coming, but with a difference of purpose. In chapter 4 the purpose was reassurance with reference to deceased Christians, in this it is rather an admonition to be ready for the event when it occurs (verses 1-11). Then follows a paragraph on instructions directed especially to the elders of the church (verses 12-22), with the conclusion next, containing the apostolic signature and characteristic greeting (verses 23-28).

## Verse 1

“Times and epochs (seasons) . . .” P. J. Gloag, Pulpit Commentary, Vol. 21, p. 102, wrote, “This refers to the time and precise period of our Lord’s advent (coming).”

Raymond C. Kelcy, The letters of Paul to the Thessalonians, p. 104, properly discerned the apostle’s intent here, the same being that of warning them so to conduct themselves, “That they will be ready for the Lord’s coming.”

A very similar line of thought is found in the gospel of Luke (13:23-24) where is recorded a question by the Lord’s followers, thus, “Are there a few that be saved?” Instead of answering their question, the Lord thundered the imperative, “Strive to enter in.”

Some of those Thessalonians were very concerned about the destiny of dead Christians; but, after disposing of that problem, showing that death cannot make the slightest difference in eternal rewards, Paul then thundered the warning that when the Second Coming does occur, vast numbers of earth’s population shall be totally unprepared for it and that even Christians should exercise the utmost diligence to be prepared for Jesus’ coming. It was Paul who feared that they might not be ready. This view is based on the fact that there is more of warning than of reassurance in this first paragraph.

## Verse 2

“Know full well . . .” The Thessalonians had not had the privilege of hearing Christ personally while He was upon earth; and , therefore, it may be assumed that Paul here meant that he and Silas and Timothy had fully and carefully instructed them on these things at the time of their conversion.

“Day of the Lord will come . . .” The expression was used extensively in the Old Testament; and William Barclay, the Letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians, p. 205, summarized the Old Testament meaning of the expression as follows,

- (1) It would come suddenly and unexpected,

- (2) it would involve a cosmic upheaval in which the universe would be shaken to its very foundations, and
- (3) it would be a time when God would bring judgment upon the nations.”

The adoption, from the very beginning of Christianity, of this same expression, used in the sense of the day of Jesus Christ, shows how universally the early church accepted Jesus as co-equal with God. P. J. Gloag, *op. cit.*, p. 102, wrote, “The day of the Lord here means not the destruction of Jerusalem, nor the day of one’s death, but the day of the Lord’s coming.”

David Lipscomb, *Commentary on 1 Thessalonians*, p. 63, made a wonderful comment. He wrote, “No truth seems to have been more clearly and fully taught than that the Son of man would come when not looked for by the world. Yet there is no Scriptural question upon which men bestow more attention, and no question that they seek more earnestly to determine. Only by a righteous and pure life can one be ready for His coming. We should not only be ready for Him, but should love His appearing and desire earnestly the day of His coming.”

### Verse 3

“While they are saying . . .” has the equivalent meaning of “When people are saying.” (J. R. Dummelow, *Commentary on the Holy Bible*, p. 979)

Primarily, it is the non-Christian portion of humanity in view, because the thrust of this warning is that Christians may not find themselves surprised by the Lord’s coming. James Moffatt, *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, Vol. IV, p. 39, expressed it, “While the Day comes suddenly to Christians and unbelievers alike, only the later are surprised by it. Christians are on the alert, open-eyed; they do not know when it is to come, but they are alive to any signs of its coming.”

“Peace and safety . . .” At the precise moment when humanity feels most secure in their rebellious and sinful course against God, and at a time when all of the devices of government and society may have produced the environment in which man may fancy that the peace, prosperity and safety of the whole world

have been secured—precisely then shall the Lord descend from heaven with a mighty shout, the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God!

“Like birth pangs upon a woman . . .” Ronald A. Ward, Commentary on 1 and 2 Thessalonians, p. 110, wrote, “The sudden pain of labor, even when it is expected (and a woman expects labor just as a Christian expects the Parousia), it is sudden when it comes.”

#### **Verse 4**

These passages refer not to literal darkness and light but to the state of rebellion against God (darkness) and to the state of obedience (light).

“Like a thief . . .” The Lord Himself used this figure; a thief gives no warning of his coming.

#### **Verse 5**

“Sons of day . . .” means nearly the same as “sons of light,” except as Leon Morris, Tyndale Commentary, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, p. 92, wrote, “It refers back to ‘the day of the Lord,’ with all that that means in terms of participation in the triumph of that great day.”

#### **Verse 6**

“Let us not sleep . . .” This refers to a state of spiritual deadness in which the whole pagan world of that era slumbered. It did not seem so, of course, to them that slept. They were doubtless busy with many exciting and interesting things; but, as regarded the age of debauchery in which they lived and the signal of the summary end of it in the preaching of the good news of Christ; of that they were totally unaware. They slept through it!

The person thus awake is heeding Paul’s admonition here to “watch and be sober.”

#### **Verse 7**

Immorality, drunkenness and debaucheries of every kind are practiced principally at night.

There has always been something about wickedness which makes it inappropriate to indulge in it in the daytime. Night is the time for the deeds of darkness. George Elliot has a beautiful passage on this quoted by James Moffatt op. cit., p. 40, "There are few of us who are not rather ashamed of our follies as we look on the blessed morning sunlight, which comes to us like a bright-winged angel beckoning us to quit the old path of vanity that stretches its dreary length behind us."

### **Verse 8**

As Paul was familiar with military operations, it would appear that his mention of "watch and be sober" triggered the thought of an armed sentry; and, as the "armor of God" metaphor was a favorite of his, he immediately combined it with the prime virtues of faith, hope and love.

### **Verses 9-10**

"Not destined us for wrath . . ." Some are appointed unto wrath, namely, the rebellious and sinful enemies of God and all righteousness; and a prerequisite of salvation is an awareness of its opposite. Leon Morris op. cit., p. 95, wrote, "Whoever thinks he can smile at God's wrath will never praise Him eternally for His grace. One of the things that gave salvation so full a meaning to New Testament Christians was that they were sure of the wrath of God, and knew that Christ had rescued them from a terrible fate."

"For obtaining salvation . . ." The natural meaning of this is "the acquiring of salvation." When the apostles exhorted men to "work out" their own salvation, and to "save yourselves" from a perverse generation, such were not idle words but present urgencies. Nor did any of them pause to explain with every mention of what men are to do, that of course man cannot be his own savior. Our own generation has stressed the latter fact (and as a fact) to the extent of failure to make it clear to every man that if he desires to be saved there are definitely some things he must do, the same being neither optional, unessential or unnecessary. Such a truth is inherent in what is said in his ninth verse.

“Whether we awake or sleep . . .” Here the meaning is, “whether we live or slumber in the sleep of death” we shall participate in the fellowship of Christ at His coming.

### **Verse 11**

The responsibility of Christians is to do, practice, say and engage in only those things that contribute constructively to the building up (the figure is that of a building) of fellow-Christians.

It is not enough merely to refrain from saying what will discourage or damage another, or from practicing what will offend another, or from doing what may tempt another. The mandate is to do what will help the spiritual life and growth of fellow-Christians.

### **Verse 12**

The entire paragraph beginning here and through verse 22 is accepted and explained as Paul’s instructions to the elders at Thessalonica. In all the history of true Christianity, there were never any persons appointed “over you in the Lord” except elders of the church.

A. J. Mason, *Ellicott’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, VIII p. 144, wrote, “The elders are not only organizers, managers of the corporate affairs of their church, but also spiritual guides to give practical advice. These are the two senses in which they “are over you.”

### **Verse 13**

This admonition reaches something of a superlative in sacred instructions regarding the esteem and honor to be bestowed upon men, men in possession of the office of the eldership, and charged with the Spiritual guidance of a church. This Divine order is frequently neglected, but to the hurt of all who do so. True and faithful elders of the church are the most honored men in the New Testament, aside from the holy apostles and prophets themselves. It is not for themselves alone, personally, that his honor and esteem are intended, but as a mark of respect and appreciation for their work, which is the most important on earth.

## Verse 14

While primarily the duty of elders, Paul so phrased this edict as to make it applicable to all “brethren,” thus involving every Christian in the need of admonishing, correcting and encouraging others.

“Admonish the unruly . . .” Peter E. Cousins, op. cit., p.497, wrote, “Originally a military term (for a soldier who fell out of the ranks, or failed to keep step), the term came also be used of idle and careless habits.”

The particular disorder which might have been in evidence at Thessalonica, James Moffatt, op. cit., p. 41, wrote, “The particular form of insubordination at Thessalonica was idleness.” Paul will deal with that effectively in the second epistle to the Thessalonians.

“Encourage the fainthearted . . . support the weak . . .” Where is there an eldership that is not concerned with the “weak?” People who are weak in faith, weak in commitment, weak in their attendance—these are the constant concern of elders, and should be the concern of all Christians.

## Verse 15

“Repays another with evil for evil . . .” The teaching here is that Christians must not, in their personal relationships, retaliate in kind against wrong-doers. Christianity was never intended merely for clear days and fair weather. Note: Paul said almost this same thing in Romans 12:17.

## Verses 16-18

“Rejoice always . . .” Leon Morris, op. cit., p.101, said, “Few things about the New Testament are more remarkable than this continual stress on joy.”

“Pray without ceasing . . .” This cannot mean the constant and uninterrupted utterance of petitions to God, but means, “maintain the good habit of frequent prayers.”

“In everything give thanks . . .” (See an entire sermon given on this text in, Philippians 4:6.)



These brief, hammer-blow admonitions carry the full authority of apostolic power and have been greatly honored and appreciated in all generations since they appeared.

William Barclay, *op. cit.*, p. 206, spoke of them as, “A chain of jewels of good advice.” James Moffatt, *op. cit.*, p. 41, declared that, “To comment adequately upon these diamond drops would be to outline a history of the Christian experience in its highest levels.”

### **Verse 19**

He word for “quench” was used for putting out a fire, and the thought is that the child of God should not put out the sacred fire within. This verse is parallel with the following verses: 1 Corinthians 11:30, 2 Peter 2:20-21, 1 John 5:16, Hebrews 6:4-6, 1 Timothy 5:6 and Mark 3:29.

Note: In all seven of the above references cited, the unpardonable sins is in view. Regarding quenching the Spirit; the reference here is most certainly to the earnest of the Holy Spirit given to every Christian upon his obedience to the gospel of Christ.

Just as fire may be smothered by an element such as earth or water, so the Spirit God may be quenched in men’s hearts by things which the Spirit cannot abide. The cares, riches and pleasures of life choke out the word and quench the Spirit. The blessed fire can be put out by the cold drizzle of worldliness, by the heavy blanket of selfishness, or by the companionship of evil people. The negligent student of the Holy Scriptures can let the fire go out. The stormy winds of false doctrine can blow it out!

The word here is not “discourage” but “quench” which means to put out altogether. Any sin that quenches the Spirit of God in Christian hearts is the eternal and unpardonable sin. Oh child of God, keep the holy fire alive!

How much more should men who have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit guard against those evils which continually threaten to quench His blessed presence in their hearts!

## Verses 20-22

“Despise prophetic utterances . . .” It is well known that Paul often used “the word” in the sense of teaching the Holy Scriptures. In this light, therefore, “proving all things” and “holding fast to that which is good” would be exemplified by the ancient Bereans who “searched the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so.” (Acts 17:11)

“Abstain from every form of evil . . .” Despite the traditional use of his verse to warn against “the appearance of evil” the actual meaning, in this context, is that, having tested what is true and false, the believer should cling to the true and abstain from the false.

## Verse 23

“Sanctify you entirely . . .” Despite the “setting apart” unto God that takes place in one’s conversion (faith, repentance and baptism) into Christ, the sanctification in this verse refers to the continuation of the sanctification that is begun at the beginning of the Christian life. The word “wholly” indicates that it is a perfected or completed state of sanctification that Paul desired the Thessalonians to possess.

“Spirit and soul and body be preserved complete . . .” These words indicate that man, like his Creator, is a trinity. After all, was he not made in the image of God? Spirit and soul are often confused, but as Ronald A. Ward, *op. cit.*, p. 119, pointed out, “Through the Holy Spirit man’s mind has been quickened, and Paul called such a quickened mind “spirit.” This view seems correct, and thus we have man as a creature of mind, soul and body, the mind standing for the intellect, the soul for his spiritual nature, and the body for his physical being.

“Be preserved complete, without blame . . .” The summation of the effect of salvation of men will be their presentation “without blame” before the throne of the glory of God. This can be only by the saved being presented “in Christ” (Colossians 1:28), and as being fully identified with Christ, in Christ and as Christ, and by no means in their own identity as perfect souls.

## **Verse 24**

The great achievement must ever remain the work of God. When men do all that they are commanded to do (and whoever did that?), the perfection that must be obtained prior to entering eternal life is the attainment of God in Christ, not the achievement of any man. “Unprofitable” is the word that God has written by the name of every servant; God knows how to save even His unworthy servants!

## **Verses 25-28**

Despite its brevity, this apostolic benediction and signature contains some very important teaching.

“Brethren, pray for us . . .” Despite being a giant of prayer himself, Paul always felt the need of the prayer of others; and the more one prays the more he feels such a need.

“Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss . . .” Peter E. Cousins, *op. cit.*, p. 498, wrote, “Kissing was a normal mode of greeting friends and became a sign of the mutual affection within the Christian brotherhood. Later it continued (to the present day in some liturgies) as a ritual observance. In the West today, even the most conservative are content to substitute the handshake.”

“Have this letter read to all the brethren . . .” A considerable portion of this epistle was directed at the elders at Thessalonica, Paul, by his powerful, even blunt, adjuration served notice upon them that the epistle did not belong to the elders, but to the church.

“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you . . .” With these noble and characteristic words, Paul closed this beautiful and instructive epistle. Every line of it is a gem.

This final brief paragraph presents the Christian’s right to know, his right to read and understand the word of God. O Lord, blessed is thy holy word. Amen!