

# 1 THESSALONIANS

*verse by verse*





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## **Bible Study Guide**

*From the leadership development ministry of*

**FELLOWSHIP BIBLE CHURCH MISSIONS**

# Acknowledgments

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Many of the basic thoughts used in this study of the Epistle of 1 Thessalonians, comes from the "Life Application Bible Commentary" published by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. We have used their ideas liberally with their permission. We alone assume responsibility for the contents here, but we appreciate Tyndale giving us permission to use their materials.

The lesson outlines and notes in this booklet were prepared and edited by Tim McManigle, Director of FBC Missions.

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02/06/07  
Revision 1

## I THESSALONIANS 1

### PAUL COMMENDS THE FAITH OF THE THESSALONIAN BELIEVERS/1:1-10

Paul and his companions arrived in Thessalonica in the early summer of A.D. 0. They planted the first Christian church in that city but had to leave in a hurry because their lives were threatened (**Acts 17:1-10**). At the first opportunity, Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to see how the new believers were doing. Timothy returned with good news: The Christians in Thessalonica were remaining firm in the faith and were unified, however, they did have some questions about their new faith. Paul did not have time to answer all their questions during his brief visit, and in the meantime, other questions had come to mind. So Paul wrote this letter to provide some answers and to commend them on their faithfulness to Christ.

**1 Thessalonians 1:1** *“Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.”*  
**KJV**



*“Paul, Silas and Timothy, “To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ; Grace and peace to you..”* NIV

Paul began this letter by introducing three men well known to the Thessalonian church – Paul, Silas and Timothy. Paul (also known as Saul), was the head of this missionary team and key writer of this letter. Paul was first mentioned in Scripture consenting to the stoning of the first Christian martyr – Stephen: **“Saul approved of their killing him”** (**Acts 8:1 NRSV**). Paul was a Jew from the tribe of Benjamin educated under a well-known teacher of the day, Gamaliel (**Acts 22:3**). Paul was also a Roman citizen, which was a great help to him (**Acts 22:27-29**). After Stephen’s death, Saul went on a vigorous campaign to wipe out Christianity: **“Saul was going everywhere to devastate the church. He went from house to house, dragging out both men and women to throw them into jail”** (**Acts 8:3 NLT**). But God had other plans for this zealous Jew; throwing him from his horse on his way to Damascus and revealing to him that Jesus truly was the Messiah (**Acts 9:1-6**). Saul’s natural zeal and passion were redirected toward the gospel message, as God had chosen him for a special mission: **“Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the**

**people of Israel” (Acts 9:15 NLT).** Silas, or Silvanus, was a prophet (**Acts 15:32**) who was held in high esteem by the Jerusalem church. Silas accompanied Paul on his second missionary journey (**Acts 15:36-17:15**) and helped him establish the church in Thessalonica (**Acts 17:1-9**). Silas was one of the men chosen to deliver the important letter from the Jerusalem Council to the church in Antioch regarding Gentile inclusion in the church (**Acts 15:22**). He is mentioned by Paul in the salutation of both letters to the Thessalonians (here and in **2 Thessalonians 1:1**), and he ministered with Timothy in Corinth (**2 Corinthians 1:19**). The young Christian Timothy, joined Paul and silas during Paul’s second missionary journey. Paul and Barnabas had visited Timothy’s hometown, Lystra, on the first missionary journey (**Acts 14:8-21**). At that time, Paul met Timothy, his mother Eunice, and Timothy’s grandmother Lois (who had previously becomes Christians). When Paul and Silas returned there on the second missionary journey, Paul invited Timothy to join them. **“ Timothy was well thought of by the believers in Lystra and Iconium” (Acts 16:2 NLT).** Timothy traveled the empire with Paul, preaching and teaching, as well as serving as Paul’s assistant and sometimes as his emissary (**3:2; Acts 19:22; I Corinthians 4:17; Philippians 2:19**). Timothy and Silas also served together, staying behind to teach the believers while Paul moved on to unevangelized cities (**Acts 17:14-15; 18:5**). At one point, Timothy, like Paul, was imprisoned for his teaching (**Hebrews 13:23**). In many of Paul’s letters, he introduced himself as “an apostle” (**Romans 1:1; I Corinthians 1:1; Galatians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1**), but not in the letters to the churches at Thessalonica. This may indicate that the relationship between Paul and the Thessalonians was strong and that they were not doubting his apostleship (as was occurring in other places due to the infiltration of false teachers). Paul wrote letters to various churches to defend his message and ministry, but he did not do so in these letters to the Thessalonians. These are letters of encouragement and affirmation.

**“To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” NIV** Paul and Silas had evangelized the city of Thessalonica. The account in the book of Acts describes the preaching of Paul and Silas in that city and the conversion of **“a large number of godly Greek men and also many important women of the city (Acts 17:4 NLT).** Most likely, these godly Greeks were Gentiles who had become converts to Judaism and had believed in the one true God. From these people came the converts to Christianity. Envious and angry Jewish leaders watched many from their synagogue follow Jesus Christ. When a riot broke out, Paul and Silas left under cover of darkness. The Acts account mentions “three Sabbaths” during which Paul preached in the synagogue (**Acts 17:2 NLT**), but Paul probably was there for much longer than three weeks (a time period that occurred between **Acts 17:4** and **17:5**). He had to have been there long enough to do everything mentioned in this letter, such as work at his trade (2:7-9), win converts, instruct new believers in the Christian life (4:1-2), and form a strong bond of love with the believers (2:17-20). Paul’s letter to the Philippians indicates that he was in Thessalonica long enough to receive financial help “more than once” from the Philippians (**Philippians 4:16 NLT**).

Paul wrote to the “church” in Thessalonica. The Greek word for church is *ekklesia*, meaning “called-out ones;” these people were part of the called-out ones in Thessalonica that was *in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ*. This set them apart from all the other assemblies that may have been meeting in Thessalonica. This *ekklesia* was a community of believers who were positioned in “God the Father” and Jesus Christ their “Lord” (or Messiah). Not only were they positioned in Christ, but they were also abiding in Christ. They were a group united by their faith, set apart from a sinful world, and because of their co-crucifixion with Christ, were eager to live out their Christianity despite persecution and an immoral culture.

**“Grace and peace to you.” NIV** Letters at this time often would begin by identifying the author, then the recipients, followed by a greeting of peace. “Grace” means God’s unmerited favor; “peace” refers to not only the peace that Christ made between believers and God through His death on the cross (**Romans 5:1**), but also “peace from God” (**Romans 1:7**), as well as the peace of God (**Colossians 3:15**). In these two words of greeting Paul combined expressions from Jewish and Gentile cultures. Jews wished each other “peace” (*eirene* or the Hebrew *Shalom*); Gentiles wished each other “grace” (*charis*). Christ offers grace in the form of every good gift that comes down from God (**James 1:17**); he offers peace that is an inner calm no matter what the outward circumstances (**Philippians 4:7**). It would be good to also ponder **Isaiah 26:3**.

**1 Thessalonians 1:2 “We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers;” KJV**

**“We always thank God for all of you and pray for you constantly.” NLT**

Paul told the Thessalonians, a young church facing persecution, that he and the other missionaries always thanked God for all of them and prayed for them constantly (**1 Thessalonians 5:17; Colossians 4:2**). Paul was not depending on his great skills or his teaching to carry the young believers; instead, he was trusting in God to guide and protect them. Paul spent much time traveling and preaching, but his entire life was a life of prayer; continually acknowledging his own weakness and trusting, resting and depending on God for all the churches and every physical and spiritual need.

**1 Thessalonians 1:3 “Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father;” KJV**

**“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.” NIV**



The Thessalonian believers had stood firm when persecuted (1:6; 3:1-4, 7-8). Paul commended these young Christians for their *work, labor, and patient endurance*. He and his companions *continually* remembered these qualities “*before our God and Father.*” These qualities might characterize any hardworking group of people, so Paul described what he knew was the motivation behind their work, labor, and endurance. It was *faith, hope, and love*. These three qualities are foundational to Christian character (**I Corinthians 13:13**).

“Work of faith” or we could say, “faith works.” The Thessalonians’ work had been produced by faith. Paul made it clear that believers are saved by faith alone (**Ephesians 2:9**) but true biblical faith will produce good works in the life of each believer (**Romans 1:5**).

“Labor of Love,” or we could say “love labors.” Because of His love, believers labor. The Greek word translated “labor” is *kopos*, meaning toil and hardship. The Greek word translated “love” is *agape*, a self-sacrificing love. The believers were willing to give of themselves (even if it meant hardship) in service to others. Only God’s kind of love could prompt such willing labor. **2 Corinthians 5:14** states, “***The love of Christ constrains (compels) us. Christ’s love for us compels, controls, and motivates us to love and good deeds.***” Thus, the Thessalonians love had been prompted by Christ’s love.

“Patience or hope,” or we could say “hope gives patience.” Finally, the Thessalonians’ endurance had been inspired by hope in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Greek word translated “endurance” or “steadfastness” (*hypomone*) refers to strong fortitude in the face of opposition or difficulty (**Romans 12:12; Hebrews 10:32; I Peter 2:20**). Enduring persecution is one of the main themes of this first chapter. Paul’s readers had remained faithful even though they had faced serious opposition and persecution from the citizens of Thessalonica (1:6; 2:14). The reason for this strength? *Hope in our Lord Jesus Christ*. This “hope” is not a vague desire, but rather a confident expectation centered on Him, and affecting every life, making it possible for us to endure all manner of difficulty and hardship; even persecution for our faith; because we know that God sees all and one day will make everything right.

**1 Thessalonians 1:4 “Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.” KJV**

**“For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he has chosen you.” NRSV**

Paul, Silas, and Timothy could resolutely say to the believers in Thessalonica (their brothers and sisters beloved by God), **“We know...that he has chosen you.”**

Regarding this whole subject of election and free will, let's take a close look at the terms used in Scripture. The word "election" is defined as a sovereign divine purpose that is totally independent of human merit. The word is used of Israel (**Isaiah 65:9, 22**) of the Church (**Romans 8:33; Colossians 3:12; 2 Timothy 2:10; I Thess. 1:4; I Peter 5:13**) and of Christ (**Isaiah 42:1; I Peter 2:6**). Chosen--this word is a synonym (mean the same) of the word election. Like election, the term is applied to Israel (**Isaiah 44:1**) and to the church (**Ephesians 1:4; 2 Thess. 2:13; I Peter 2:9**), and is also used of the apostles (**John 6:70; 13:18; Acts 1:2**).

The doctrine of election presents problems, which are actually insolvable by the human mind. Divine selection is not limited only to God choosing who will receive eternal life; because we see it everywhere in the universe. There is variety in everything God created. There are classifications among the angels. One star is bigger and brighter than another star. Men are not born of the same race with the same advantages, nor with the same abilities. Let's add this also--man's will has no part in any of this. Men do not choose their race or their life conditions, such as where they are born, rich or poor, healthy or sick, position of honor or dishonor. However, it is very important to remember that God's attitude toward every human being is one of compassion and love. Give some thought to this: Divine election and God's love cannot be reconciled within our human understanding; it is so important that we give God the first consideration. Any system of religious thought, which suggests that God is limited by the thoughts, prayers, or actions of man is just plain foolishness. The order of truth is seen in the first phrase of the Bible; "In the beginning God." It is God who planned, He executed and it is He who will do His good pleasure. **Philippians 2:13; Hebrews 13:20, 21**

The true system of Biblical thought begins with God and man is conformed to the plan and purpose of his Creator, not the other way around. Something else for us to give some thought to is God is never obligated in the exercise of His grace. He chooses whomever He pleases. **Romans 9:20,21** He sees absolutely no good in man which might form a basis for His blessings. **Romans 3:10-18**. One other thought to ponder is that Scripture makes clear that man has not chosen God. Jesus emphasized this in **John 15:16**. Even Adam, before the fall and totally free to choose, did not choose God. If that is true, then I believe we can safely say that fallen man will not of himself choose God.

**1 Thessalonians 1:5** *"For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake."* KJV

*"Because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction."* NIV

Paul and his companions had brought the message to Thessalonica. There were no believers when they arrived; when they left, a strong church had been planted. When Paul brought the gospel message to people, he spoke with words, and God used those words to ignite the Thessalonians to understand and believe that message. God has used Paul's words by enveloping them in divine power (**I Corinthians 2:1-5; Ephesians 6:17-18**). Paul's words alone could not persuade anyone to believe or open a needy heart to hear the message. But his words combined with the power of the Holy Spirit to convince, convict and convert the listeners could bring many to believe what Paul was saying and give their hearts and lives to Christ for salvation. Notice what Paul wrote, *"The gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance."* So we can clearly see that when the gospel comes into the life of an individual, power comes with it, the Holy Spirit comes with it, and much assurance comes with it. The words "much assurance," or "deep conviction" refers to the profound conviction or assurance of those who brought the message; they were convicted and convinced of the truth of the gospel. So much so that through the leading and power of the Holy Spirit, not only did they travel around the world to share the message, but they lived every day in the power of that message. Paul continued: ***"And you know that the way we lived among you was further proof of the truth of our message."*** *NLT* The last half of this verse points to chapter 2, where Paul writes of his ministry with them. The Thessalonians could see what Paul, Silas, and Timothy were preaching was true because these men lived it. They demonstrated this by their willingness to face opposition, travel under difficult conditions, and work without being paid, while dealing with severe problems in the churches.

**1 Thessalonians 1:6** ***"And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost:"*** *KJV*

***"So you received the message with joy from the Holy Spirit in spite of the severe suffering it brought you. In this way, you imitated both us and the Lord."*** *NLT*

The *message* of salvation, though welcomed with great joy, brought the Thessalonian believers severe suffering because it led to persecution from both Jews and Gentiles (3:2-4; Acts 17:5). This was to be expected, however, for Jesus himself had said:

***"When the world hates you, remember it hated me before it hated you. The world would love you if you belonged to it, but you don't. I chose you to come out of the world, and so it hates you...Since they persecuted me, naturally they will persecute you...The people of the world will hate you because you belong to me, for they don't know God who sent me...I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world."*** (*John 15:18-21; 16:22 NLT*)

Jesus had told his disciples that because he suffered, they would also suffer. The disciples had already faced much suffering: Just before coming to Thessalonica, Paul and Silas had been beaten and imprisoned in Philippi (**Acts 16:16-40**). Paul faced “severe suffering” during much of his ministry (some of these sufferings are recorded in **2 Corinthians 11:16-33**). So when the Thessalonian believers suffered for their faith, they were in good company. First Thessalonians 1:6 is the second reference to the Holy Spirit in two verses. The same Holy Spirit who gave power to the words of the gospel message also opened hearts to receive the message and then gave joy to the hearers. The Holy Spirit works in those presenting the message and those hearing and accepting it. He gives “joy” (**Galatians 5:22**).

The New Testament places a strong emphasis on following the example of godly leaders. Jesus told his followers to learn from his example of gentleness, humility, and servant leadership. **Matthew 11:20** – ***“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.”*** (**Mark 10:42-45**)

Paul urged believers to follow him as he followed Christ. (*I Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 3:17*) ***“Be followers together of me and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.”*** *Philippians 4:9* – ***“Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice.”***

The new Christians at Thessalonica received training in discipleship from Paul, and even in suffering; they modeled before others what they had learned. **I Thessalonians 1:6-7** – ***“You became followers 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.”***

Paul used his unworthiness to receive Christ as an example of grace so that no one would see themselves as too bad to be saved by Christ. **I Timothy 1:16** – ***“But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.”***

The writer of Hebrews wanted the believers to imitate the faith of their leaders. People did not have Bibles to read as they do today, so they had to look at other sources. Hopefully their leaders were worthy of emulation. **Hebrews 13:7** – ***“Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you whose faith follow. Consider the outcome of their way of life.”***

Peter taught Christian leaders to lead by example, not by commands. **I Peter 5:3** – ***“Not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.”***

**1 Thessalonians 1:7-10** *“So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing. For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye 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, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.” KJV*

*“So that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.” NRSV “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 dead – Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.” NIV*

The Thessalonians had followed the example of the missionaries as the missionaries had followed the Lord himself (1:6), and they, in turn, had become *examples to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia*. Paul praised this church because, not only were they model believers to an unbelieving world, but they were also examples to other believers. “Macedonia” and “Achaia” refers to the two provinces that made up Greece, and the area where most of the new churches were concentrated. Paul went even further by writing that *“the Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia; your faith in God has become known everywhere.” NIV* These Thessalonian believers had a worldwide reputation and were an example to all the other churches.

*“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 dead – Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.” NIV* So well known was the Thessalonians’ faith that Paul did not need to speak of it to other believers, as they were all talking about it. Their faith was universally known, and so, apparently, was the kind of reception the Thessalonians had given to the missionaries. The other churches had heard how some in Thessalonica had turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God. They had turned from dead, worthless idols to serve the one “living and true God.” The idols, the Greek “gods,” were considered to be extremely powerful. The Thessalonians, living barely fifty miles from Mount Olympus, where the Greek gods were said to live. To turn from their many false idols to the one true God had caused upheaval in all areas of their lives. No wonder they faced persecution. In addition to turning toward and serving the Lord, the Thessalonians were waiting for the Second Coming when Jesus Christ, who rose from the dead, will return and take His followers to be with Him. Thus, He will rescue His children from

“the coming wrath,” referring to when God will destroy all evil (**I Thessalonians 5:9; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10**). This “coming wrath” has been a difficult concept for many to accept; yet it is a reality that God will indeed bring wrath upon a sinful world. Some scriptures to ponder:

***John 3:36: “All who believe in God’s Son have eternal life. Those who don’t obey the Son will never experience eternal life, but the wrath of God remains upon them.”***

***Romans 1:18: “God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who push the truth away from themselves.”***

***Romans 9:22: “God has every right to exercise his judgment and his power, but he also has the right to be very patient with those who are the objects of his judgment and are fit only for destruction.”***

***Revelation 11:18: “The nations were angry with you, but now the time of your wrath has come. It is time to judge the dead and reward your servants. You will reward your prophets and your holy people, all who fear your name, from the least to the greatest. And you will destroy all who have caused destruction on the earth.”***

***Revelation 14:19: “The angel swung his sickle on the earth and loaded the grapes into the great winepress of God’s wrath.”***

***Revelation 19:15-16: “From his mouth came a sharp sword, and with it he struck down the nations. He ruled them with an iron rod, and he trod the winepress of the fierce wrath of almighty God. On his robe and thigh was written this title: King of kings and Lord of lords.”***

God’s wrath is a certainty, however, believers can trust in their Savior, who rescues them. Paul emphasized Christ’s second coming throughout this book. Because the Thessalonian church was being persecuted, Paul encouraged them to look forward to the deliverance that Christ would bring. A believer’s hope is in the return of Jesus, the “great God and Savior” (*Titus 2:13*). Just as surely as Christ was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven, he will return (*Acts 1:11*).

## I THESSALONIANS 2

### PAUL REVEIWS HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE THESSALONIANS/2:1-20

Paul and Silas had been driven out of Thessalonica by their enemies, who then slandered Paul to the young believers in the new church. This letter answers the accusations of Paul's enemies by describing what the believers already knew; the truth of Paul and Silas's message, the sincerity of their motives, and the proof of both by their actions among them. Paul was totally committed to the growth of those who had come to faith through his preaching.

**1 Thessalonians 2:1** ***“For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain:” KJV***

***“You yourselves know, dear brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not a failure.” NLT***

This refers to Paul's visit to Thessalonica recorded in **Acts 17:1-10**. The ministry in Thessalonica had begun calmly, but it had ended with Paul and Silas leaving under cover of darkness because a riotous mob of Jewish leaders and “lewd fellows” was attempting to turn the city against them. And the Jews' slander did not end after Paul and Silas had left the city. Not only did the Jews follow them to Berea and stir up trouble there (**Acts 17:13**), but evidently they continued to speak against the missionaries to the Thessalonian believers. The Jews took the occasion of Paul and Silas's hasty departure to try and convince the believers that they had been defrauded. In the following verses Paul offers his defense to these false accusations. Some may have thought that the visit to Thessalonica was a failure, but the believers there knew that it was not ineffective or worthless. Paul and Silas had arrived in a city with no believers. They left a strong church that was alive, growing, standing up to persecution, and becoming an example to believers across the world. Lives had been changed. Paul and Silas's visit had not been a “failure.”

**1 Thessalonians 2:2** ***“But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention.” KJV***

***“You know how badly we had been treated at Philippi just before we came to you and how much we suffered there. Yet our God gave us the courage to declare this Good News to you boldly, even though we were surrounded by many who opposed us.”NLT***

The Thessalonians knew how badly Paul and Silas had been treated in Philippi. Prior to their arrival in Thessalonica, Paul and Silas had visited the city of Philippi, where they had met a group of women who were meeting for prayer outside the city. One of them, Lydia, became a believer and insisted that Paul and Silas stay at her home. One day Paul and Silas were accosted by a demon-possessed slave girl who yelled at them. She continued to do this day after day whenever she saw them. Finally, Paul commanded the demon in the name of Jesus, to leave the girl. Now that the girl had been set free of the demon, her masters were angry that she could no longer make money for them by telling fortunes. They formed a mob, and Paul and Silas **“were severely beaten [with wooden rods], and then they were thrown into prison”** with **“their feet in the stocks” (Acts 16:23-24)**. Despite severe suffering for sharing the good news of Christ in Philippi, Paul explained that God had given him courage to go on to Thessalonica and *declare Christ boldly*. This “courage” did not come from within Paul but was given to him by God. Only supernatural courage could give these men the boldness to continually face such persecution. In Thessalonica, their enemies had started a riot against Paul and Silas and their teachings. The Jewish leaders had claimed that Paul and Silas were “guilty of treason against Caesar” because they were professing “allegiance to another king, Jesus” **(Acts 17:7)**. In addition, some Jews in Thessalonica had sent a delegation to Berea to follow Paul and Silas in order to stir up trouble against them **(Acts 17:13)**.

**1 Thessalonians 2:3** ***“For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile.” KJV***

***“So you can see that we were not preaching with any deceit or impure purposes or trickery.” NLT***

Perhaps the Jews who had caused the riot in Thessalonica had told the Thessalonian believers that Paul and Silas had been defrauding them **(Acts 17:5-6)**. However, Paul pointed out that he had been severely persecuted in Philippi and then had experienced persecution in Thessalonica. How then could they have been preaching with any other motive than “Christ in me?” If they had wanted to make money and please the crowds with their preaching, they had certainly gone about it the wrong way! Instead, they had faced persecution and then, with courage (2:2), had faced more persecution. No preacher hoping for easy money and popularity would take such a path. People only suffer willingly for something in which they have great conviction and Paul had great conviction. He did not preach with any deceit, nor was he trying to lead the Thessalonians down the wrong path; he had spoken the truth and suffered greatly for it. Second, they did not preach with “impure purposes”. The word “impure” may point to accusations of sexual sin or sensuality, a trait common among traveling preachers. The “impure purposes” could also refer to another trait such as greed or pride. Thirdly, they were not using trickery. They had not tricked any of the believers into converting, nor had they hidden any truth from those to whom they ministered. To state this verse



in its opposite, Paul was claiming, “You can see that we were preaching a message that is true, with motives that were pure, with methods that were completely honest.”

**1 Thessalonians 2:4** *“But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts.” KJV*

*“For we speak as messengers who have been approved by God to be entrusted with the Good News. Our purpose is to please God, not people. He is the one who examines the motives of our hearts.” NLT*

Paul and his companions were seeking nothing for themselves. Instead, they spoke only as messengers who had been approved of God to be entrusted with the gospel. This was why they presented the gospel, faced persecution, and yet continued speaking the Good News. The word “approved” (*dokimasia*) means “tested.” Paul pictured himself and his companions as having been tested by God and by His enabling power were shown to be trustworthy with the mission of sharing the gospel (**1 Timothy 1:12**). These men had been approved because God had done a great work in their hearts and had enabled them, by His grace, to be His willing servants (**Hebrews 13:20-21; Philippians 2:13**). The “heart” refers to the “inner self”, the soul, the emotions, intellect, and will. When God examines the heart, he looks deeper than any human can look and understands the person completely. After God had drawn Paul and Silas into a deeper relationship with Him, God knew that these men had no desire to simply please people; instead, their motive was to please God. Perhaps Paul had been accused of being a people pleaser because of the approach he had used to reach people (being all things to all people in order to win some; **1 Corinthians 9:19-23**). Paul’s motive was never to advance his own cause or reputation, but rather to present the gospel for Christ’s sake, as well as the good of the listener (**Galatians 1:10; Colossians 3:22-23**). Attempting to gain the approval of others will distract believers from God. The proper attitude of the believer toward others should always be; *I am your servant for Christ’s sake, but you are not my master* (**2 Corinthians 4:5**). Paul wrote to the Colossians, *“Then the way you live will always honor and please the Lord, and you will continually do good, kind things for others. All the while, you will learn to know God better and better”* (**Colossians 1:10 NLT**).

**1 Thessalonians 2:5** *“For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloak of covetousness; God is witness:” KJV*

*“You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed – God is our witness.” NIV*

The accusers could say anything they wanted, but the believers in Thessalonica could attest to the fact that Paul and his fellow laborers had never used flattery. “Flattery” is

saying kind words for selfish motives. Paul had no selfish motives in preaching the gospel. The Thessalonians knew that Paul and his fellow missionaries had not put on a mask to cover up greed. Many false teachers traveled about the ancient world saying whatever an audience would pay to hear. Paul and Silas were not out for money, nor were they greedy for fame or self-exaltation. The Thessalonians knew these facts, but more important, God Himself was a witness of Paul and Silas's motives and mission.

**1 Thessalonians 2:6** *“Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ.” KJV*

*“As for praise, we have never asked for it from you or anyone else.” NLT*

Paul and Silas had spoken only the truth in Thessalonica; no flattery to gain converts, no hidden motives to make something of themselves. They didn't need people to compliment their hard work and eloquent speeches in order to feel that they had accomplished much. They only looked for the approval of God alone.

**1 Thessalonians 2:7** *“But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children:” KJV*

*“As apostles of Christ we certainly had a right to make some demands of you, but we were as gentle among you as a mother feeding and caring for her own children.” NLT*

The apostles included the eleven men Jesus called (without Judas Iscariot), plus others, including Paul himself (**Romans 1:1**), Matthias (**Acts 1:26**), Barnabas (**Acts 13:1-2; Galatians 2:9**), Jesus' brother James (**Galatians 1:19**), Silas (**1 Thessalonians 2:6**), Andronicus, and Junia (**Romans 16:7**). As apostles, Paul and Silas certainly had a right to make some demands of the believers such as expecting a certain amount of monetary help. Paul practiced a trade (tent making) so as not to be a burden to his listeners (**2 Thessalonians 3:7-10**). It was far more important to him that the gospel reach unbelievers, and he did not want anything to hinder it. In **1 Timothy 5:17-18**, Paul establishes the right for ministers to receive remuneration: *“The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, ‘Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain,’ and ‘The worker deserves his wages’” (NIV)*. Instead of exercising their God-given authority as apostles, Paul and Silas were as gentle among the Thessalonian believers as a mother feeding and caring for her own children. Some traveling teachers may have come into various towns with superior high-minded attitudes, but this was not the case with God's missionaries. They had come with the authority of the God of heaven, yet they had served among the people with the kind gentleness of a loving and nurturing mother.

Paul expected the Thessalonians to treat each other this way, also. In his instructions at the end of this letter, he wrote, ***“Brothers and sisters, we urge you to warn those who are lazy. Encourage those who are timid. Take tender care of those who are weak. Be patient with everyone” (5:15 NLT).***

**1 Thessalonians 2:8** ***“So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.” KJV***

***“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.” NIV***

Paul and Silas cared for, and nurtured the believers because they truly loved them. Far from being preachers who used their audiences for self-exaltation, Paul and Silas were delighted to share both the gospel of God and their lives as well (**Acts 20:20**). They joined with the Thessalonians in the day-to-day struggles and joys of life and were deeply involved with the people. Such care for others could not be faked. The Thessalonian believers knew first-hand how much Paul and Silas loved them.

**1 Thessalonians 2:9** ***“For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God.” KJV***

***“You remember our labor and toil, brothers and sisters; we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.” NRSV***

Although Paul had the right to receive financial support from the people he taught, he supported himself as a tent maker (**Acts 18:3; 20:34; 1 Corinthians 4:12**). Each Jewish boy would learn a trade and earn his living with it. Paul had been trained in tent making – cutting and sewing the woven cloth of goats’ hair into tents. Craftsmen in Paul’s day worked sunrise to sunset. Paul’s ministry activities would have been at great sacrifice to him personally. Paul didn’t want to burden the young congregation by requiring financial support. In the process of working at his trade, Paul and Silas *proclaimed...the gospel of God*. The “double duty” of earning a living while preaching, teaching, and building up a body of believers in Thessalonica called for exhausting labor as they worked night and day.

**1 Thessalonians 2:10** ***“Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe:” KJV***

***“You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed.” NIV***

Again Paul appealed to what the Thessalonian believers knew about himself and Silas. The believers themselves were witnesses of how the missionaries had conducted themselves. Paul could not make these claims before the Thessalonians and before God if the claims were not true. The accusing Jews could say what they liked, but everyone knew that Paul and Silas had conducted themselves in a holy, righteous and blameless manner. A study of the three words is helpful. The word “holy” (*hosios*) refers to acting responsibly before Him. “Righteous” (*dikaios*) focuses on being justified, coming up to his standard. “Blameless” (*amemptos*) points to conduct, being without reproach. This consistent example of right living surely affected the Thessalonians. If Paul and Silas had shared the gospel message but had lived carelessly, their message would have had little impact. But they preached through both their words and their lives. **(Acts 20:20)**

**1 Thessalonians 2:11-12** ***“As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.” KJV***

***“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.” NIV***

Paul had already compared himself and Silas to a gentle and caring “mother” (2:7) as he described how they had brought the gospel message to the Thessalonians. And now verses 11 and 12 describe the role of Paul and Silas as being like a father in matters of teaching and raising these “baby Thessalonian believers.” As a father deals with his own children, so the missionaries dealt with each of the new believers, the phrase “each of you” is significant. Paul and Silas had a personal relationship with each believer in Thessalonica. They had been encouraging them, was especially important because great difficulties were facing those who converted to Christianity. They also had been urging them to live lives worthy of God. “Urging” can refer to strong encouragement applied appropriately as needed. Paul did not water down the truth. All believers are urged to conduct their daily activities worthy of God (**Ephesians 4:1; Philippians 1:27; Colossians 1:10**). In order to live “worthy of God”, we must be walking in the Spirit. As the Holy Spirit reproduces the life of Christ in us and He is living His life through us, we will indeed walk worthy of the Lord. Paul had told the believers, and here he reminded them, that God alone calls people into his kingdom and glory. God’s kingdom began when God himself entered human history as a man. Today Jesus Christ reigns in the hearts of believers, but the kingdom will not be fully

realized until all evil in the world is judged and removed. Then God will reveal both his kingdom and his glory to those who have been “called.”

**1 Thessalonians 2:13** *“For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.” KJV*

*“And we will never stop thanking God that when we preached his message to you, you didn’t think of the words we spoke as being just our own. You accepted what we said as the very word of God – which, of course, it was. And this continues to work in you who believe.” NLT*

Paul thanked God for the way the Thessalonians had received the message. When Paul and Silas had preached, the people had recognized the words as being more than human ideas and opinions, and they had accepted the gospel message as the very word of God. The gospel message reveals its divine origin and power (**Romans 1:16**) as it transforms people’s lives. The Thessalonians were experiencing how the Word continues to work in those who believe. Through His Word, God works in believers’ lives, transforming them into Christlikeness (**Colossians 1:5-6** speaks of the fruit of the gospel).

**1 Thessalonians 2:14** *“For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews:” KJV*

*“And then, dear brothers and sisters, you suffered persecution from your own countrymen. In this way, you imitated the believers in God’s churches in Judea who, because of their belief in Christ Jesus, suffered from their own people, the Jews.” NLT*

The last statement of verse 13 points out that God’s Word continues to work in believers. One evidence of this work was the Thessalonian believers’ fortitude as they suffered persecution from [their] own countrymen; the Greeks in Thessalonica. But the believers in Thessalonica had good company, for in that persecution they had actually imitated the believers in God’s churches in Judea in the way they faced and withstood persecution. While **Acts 17:5-10** seems to indicate mostly Jewish opposition, it is certainly true that the Gentile Greeks were part of the opposition because the Christians refused to participate in the imperial religion.

**1 Thessalonians 2:15-16** *“Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to*

***all men: Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.” KJV***

***“For some of the Jews had killed their own prophets, and some even killed the Lord Jesus. Now they have persecuted us and driven us out. They displease God and oppose everyone by trying to keep us from preaching the Good News to the Gentiles, for fear some might be saved. By doing this, they continue to pile up their sins. But the anger of God has caught up with them at last.” NLT***

Paul’s most recent relationship with the Jews had been when he was persecuted in Philippi (Acts 16:22-24) and driven out of Thessalonica (Acts 17:5-6, 10). In Corinth, from which he was writing this letter to Thessalonica, he had been so insulted by the Jews that he said, ***“From now on I will go to the Gentiles” (Acts 18:6 NLT)***. Persecution did not surprise Paul, for Jesus himself had warned that his followers would face just such animosity (John 15:18). The churches had grown to expect persecution from both hostile Jews and Gentiles. Paul would later write to Timothy, ***“Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12 NLT)***. Why were the Jews so hostile to Christianity? The Jewish people had a history of killing their own prophets. Jesus had said to the Jewish leaders of his day speaking of the past and predicting what they would do to His followers:

***“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees! ... You testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets....Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.... O 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.” (Matthew 23:29, 31, 34-35, 37 NIV)***

This is a brief history of Old Testament martyrdom. Abel was the first martyr (**Genesis 4**); Zechariah is the last mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, which ended with 2 Chronicles. Zechariah is a classic example of a man of God who was killed by those who claimed to be God’s people (**2 Chronicles 24:20-21**). Despite the Jews’ constant watching for the arrival of their promised Messiah, they missed him when he came, and even killed him (**Matthew 27:25**). The Jewish leaders thought Jesus was a false prophet, and they didn’t want his teachings to spread, so they opposed all who preached about him (**Acts 4:18**). The Jewish opposition to Christianity continued after Jesus’ death.

These surely were difficult words for Paul, a Jew from birth, to write about his countrymen. In another letter Paul wrote, ***“The longing of my heart and my prayer to God is that the Jewish people might be saved” (Romans 10:1 NLT)***. Paul understood that the Jews were God’s chosen people and that many of them would come to salvation in Christ. He also knew, however, that many would reject the truth (Romans 11 explains this). This pained him greatly, especially when those Jews were attacking him outright.

**1 Thessalonians 2:17** ***“But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great desire.” KJV***

***“Dear brothers and sisters, after we were separated from you for a little while (though our hearts never left you), we tried very hard to come back because of our intense longing to see you again.” NLT***

The accusers had pointed out the sudden departure of the missionaries and the fact that they had not soon returned, implying that Paul and Silas had lied and were afraid to return. So Paul explained that the separation had not been desired (they did not separate themselves but were separated from the Thessalonians). The word “separated” is also translated “torn away.” In addition, while physically separated, the missionaries kept the believers in their hearts. They had attempted to return and had an intense longing to be back in Thessalonica with the believers. The next verse explains why.

**1 Thessalonians 2:18** ***“Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us.” KJV***

***“For we wanted to come to you – certainly I, Paul, wanted to again and again – but Satan blocked our way.” NRSV***

Far from being afraid to return, Paul and Silas desired greatly to return to Thessalonica. Paul’s inclusion of his personal emphasis; ***“certainly I, Paul, wanted to again and again;”*** simply gave credence to what he had written in 2:17. Yet they could not return because Satan blocked them. Satan is real. He is called “the god of this age” (**2 Corinthians 4:4 NIV**) and “the ruler of the kingdom of the air” (**Ephesians 2:2 NIV**). What exactly blocked Paul and Silas from returning to Thessalonica; opposition, illness, travel complications, etc., is unknown. But somehow Paul credits Satan for keeping them away more than once. (Paul had wanted again and again to return, but each time had been prevented); they were “blocked” Spiritual

warfare between Satan and God constantly exists. Satan actively works to keep people from accepting Christ, and he also works to hinder God's people from doing God's work. While God is more powerful than Satan and oftentimes intervenes and overrides, he does not always do so. However, God is sovereign and He has not created something that He cannot control. Satan can only hinder to the extent that God permits.

**1 Thessalonians 2:19-20** ***“For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy.” KJV***

***“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.” NIV***

With overflowing love for this young church, Paul asked a question and then answered it himself. What was the hope, ... joy, or ... crown in which Paul and Silas would be able to glory in the presence of [the] Lord Jesus when he comes? It would be the Thessalonian believers! The word “hope” describes Paul's confidence in Christ to work in these believers. The word “joy” pictures his own inner feelings when he will see them presented to the Lord. The “crown” pictures a victor's wreath – the believers were like a victory crown, giving Paul joy in having “run the race” for their sakes (**Philippians 4:1**). One day we all will stand together before the Lord Jesus at his second coming. Paul imagined how he would rejoice with the believers who had come to faith through his ministry. The words “glory and joy” left no question about how Paul felt toward these new believers. His love for them welled over into praise to God and joy in partnering with God for bringing them the message of eternal life.



## I THESSALONIANS 3

### PAUL IS ENCOURAGED BY TIMOTHY'S GOOD REPORT ABOUT THE THESSALONIANS/ 3:1-13

Chapter 3 continues the concerns of chapter 2. Paul had been explaining to the Thessalonian believers why he and Silas had been unable to return to them. It had not been, as their detractors had said, because of fear or because they were deceiving them. Instead, Paul and Silas desired to return but had been prevented by evil spiritual forces (2:18). They did not leave the young believers in Thessalonica without help, however, as the following verses explain.

**1 Thessalonians 3:1-3** *“Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone; And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith: That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto.” KJV*

*“Finally, when we could stand it no longer, we decided that I should stay alone in Athens, and we sent Timothy to visit you. He is our co-worker for God and our brother in proclaiming the Good News of Christ.” NLT*

Since Paul was unable to return to Thessalonica (2:18), he sent Timothy as his representative. According to *Acts 17:10*, Paul left Thessalonica and went to Berea. When trouble broke out in Berea, some Christians took Paul to Athens, while Silas and Timothy stayed behind (*Acts 17:13-15*). Then Paul directed Silas and Timothy to join him in Athens. Later, Paul sent Timothy to encourage the Thessalonian Christians to be strong in their faith in the face of persecution and other troubles. Paul's inability to return to Thessalonica and support the new church weighed heavily upon him. All three of the letter's senders; Paul, Silas, and Timothy (1:1), could stand it no longer. Since no communication arrived from the church, the missionaries had no way of knowing what was happening with these young believers. The Jews had chased the missionaries out of the city, so it was fair to assume that the new Christians were under attack as well. Concern for the believers caused Paul and his companions to decide that Paul and Silas would stay in Athens while they sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to visit the believers. The word “alone” is plural in Greek; “we should stay here ourselves.” Paul and Silas stayed behind and sent Timothy.

*“We sent him to strengthen you, to encourage you in your faith, and to keep you from becoming disturbed by the troubles you were going through. But, of course, you know that such troubles are going to happen to us Christians.” NLT*

Timothy had three main tasks for his return to Thessalonica; to strengthen the

believers, to encourage them in their faith and to keep them from becoming discouraged (3:5). Paul was concerned that the opposition had caused disruption in the church, so he wanted Timothy to find out if they were standing firm in the faith. To “strengthen” them meant that Timothy would teach them to be rooted and grounded in Christ and build them up in their faith (**Colossians 2:7**). Paul had been convinced of the genuine conversion experience of these believers (1:5), but he also knew the importance of discipleship. Faith needs to be strengthened and encouraged, so Timothy went back to do just that for these believers. Paul also knew that facing “troubles” because of one’s faith in Christ should be expected. Inevitably, tribulations would come from a society opposed to the values at the core of Christianity (**John 16:33; Acts 14:22**). “*Troubles are going to happen to...Christians;*” this has also been translated “we were destined for them” (**Job 14:1**). The word “destined” is *keimetha* and conveys that God appoints those who stand for him to experience persecution (**2 Thessalonians 1:4-10**). The concept refers to the inevitability of opposition rather than God’s predetermined will that people suffer. Suffering comes with the territory. The Thessalonians were suffering (1:6), and though they had stood strong by faith, Paul wanted to make sure they understood that suffering should be expected. (**John 15:18-16:4**)

As we work our way through this third chapter, notice that Paul’s great concern is the faith of the Thessalonian believers. It is interesting to note that throughout Paul’s epistles, faith was the key issue: **Romans 1:8; Ephesians 1:15; Colossians 1:4**.

**1 Thessalonians 3:4** *“For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know.” KJV*

*“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.” NIV*

Paul’s preaching to new converts regularly included the reality of persecution. He never taught that Christ would make life easy. He had constantly faced persecution for his faith, and he explained to his converts that they would do likewise. The Thessalonians could attest to this fact, for Paul and Silas had kept telling them that they would be persecuted. Paul had said that persecution would occur in Thessalonica and it turned out that way (**Acts 17:5-19**).

**1 Thessalonians 3:5** *“For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain.” KJV*

***“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.” NIV***

For this reason, because of the persecution, and when Paul could stand no longer the suspense of not knowing how the believers were getting along, he sent Timothy (3:2) to find out if their faith was holding up, and if they were persevering in the face of difficulty. Paul was concerned that the new and struggling believers might turn away from their faith. Satan (“the tempter”) can affect both the spiritual world (**Ephesians 2:1-3; 6:10-12**) and the physical world (**Job 1-2**) with God’s permission.

**1 Thessalonians 3:6** ***“But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you:”***  
**KJV**

***“But Timothy has just now come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love. He has told us also that you always remember us kindly and long to see us – just as we long to see you.” NRSV***

Timothy had been sent to nurture the believers and also to find out how they were doing and to report back to Paul. At the writing of this letter, Timothy had just returned and *brought...good news of the Thessalonian believers’ faith and love*. Their faith was solid, their love strong, and they remembered Paul and Silas kindly, longing to see them. What relief for Paul! Far from having been beleaguered by the opposition and turned away from the faith, the believers had stayed strong; they even longed to see Paul and Silas as much as Paul and Silas longed to see them.

**1 Thessalonians 3:7-8** ***“Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith: For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord.”***  
**KJV**

***“So we have been greatly comforted, dear brothers and sisters, in all of our own crushing troubles and suffering, because you have remained strong in your faith. It gives us new life, knowing you remain strong in the Lord.” NLT***

Paul’s certain relief and joy at the good news from Thessalonica was because they had remained strong in the faith. Paul and Silas had continued to experience very difficult times of suffering, but this report of the Thessalonian’s unwavering faith encouraged and inspired them with new life and renewed energy and vigor (**Romans 1:12**). Their efforts in Thessalonica had not been in vain (3:5). The believers were remaining

strong in the Lord, and that was a great comfort. Believers' lives are bound up with one another. It should bring great joy to a believer's heart when he or she hears that another believer is standing firm in the faith despite difficulties.

**1 Thessalonians 3:9-10** *“For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God; Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith?” KJV*

*“How we thank God for you! Because of you we have great joy in the presence of God. Night and day we prayed earnestly for you, asking God to let us see you again to fill up anything that may still be missing in your faith.” NLT*

Again, Paul's main prayer concern for these believers was their faith. It brings great joy to a Christian to see another person come to faith in Christ and mature in that faith. Paul experienced this joy countless times. He thanked God for those in Thessalonica who had come to know Christ and had held strong in the faith. As mentioned before, Paul had been forced to leave while they were still immature believers with incomplete knowledge. Yet they had held on to their faith despite opposition and persecution and had come through by God's grace. No wonder Paul thanked God! “In the presence of God” refers to the context of prayer. Paul earnestly prayed, night and day, or constantly (**I Thessalonians 5:17**), for their continued growth. He also asked God to let him and his co-workers return to Thessalonica. Thus far, Satan had hindered them, but Satan's hindrances only happen with God's permission. So Paul asked God to allow them to go back *to fill up anything that may still [have been] missing in [their] faith*. Paul wanted to give them further teaching, move on to deeper truths, and help these believers mature in Christ.

**1 Thessalonians 3:11** *“Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you.” KJV*

*“Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you.” NIV*

The first half of the letter closes with Paul praying that he might enjoy a reunion with the Christians in Thessalonica. (2:17-18; 3:6, 10). He breaks into prayer here, calling upon *our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus to “make a way”* for them to return. It is unclear whether Paul ever returned to Thessalonica, but he traveled through Asia on his third journey and was joined by Aristarchus and Secundus, who were from Thessalonica (*Acts 20:4-5*).

**1 Thessalonians 3:12 “And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you:”KJV**

**“And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you.” NRSV**

Paul wanted to return, and he prayed to do so (3:11). No matter what happened, however, Paul knew that the church needed the Lord to sustain them. A great need for the church would be love among the believers, as opposed to disunity, factions, or disagreements. The church would need love to survive. Although Paul had received good news from Timothy of the Thessalonians' love (3:6), he knew that love can always be strengthened and deepened through the Holy Spirit's work in the lives of the believers. So Paul prayed that *the Lord* would make the believers *increase and abound in love for one another*, and not just one another but for all. The word for “love,” *agape*, describes the selfless love that comes from God. Such love looks out for the best interests of those loved (**2 Corinthians 12:15**); caring for fellow believers and reaching out to unbelievers. Paul and his companions already “abounded” in this love for the Thessalonians, as seen in their willingness to face persecution to bring the Thessalonians the Good News.

**1 Thessalonians 3:13 “To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.”KJV**

**“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.” NIV**

That God would “strengthen [their] hearts” refers to Paul's desire for the Thessalonians to continue to have inner strength produced by the working of the Holy Spirit. In Scripture, the “heart” refers to the soul, the inner sphere of emotion, desire, and will; included in this is the personality. Such strength would be seen in one's character and so Paul prayed that they would be blameless and holy. Complete perfection is not attainable in this life, but the process of sanctification brings believers ever closer to perfection. One day, the process will be over, and all believers will be made perfect in the presence of our God and Father. The phrase “when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones” refers to the second coming of Christ, when he will establish his eternal kingdom. There are two views about the identity of these holy ones. Some think it refers to believers; others say it refers to angels. Most likely both are true because the words “holy ones” have been used to describe angels as well as believers. Because Paul used the inclusive word “all” to describe this group, it seems that those who come with Christ at his second coming will be the angels and the believers who have died

**(Matthew 13:41; 25:31; Mark 8:38; 13:27; Luke 9:26; 2 Thessalonians 1:7).** At that time Christ will gather all believers, those who have died and those who are alive, into one united family under his rule. All believers from all times including these Thessalonians, will be with Christ in his kingdom.

## I THESSALONIANS 4

### LIVE TO PLEASE GOD/ 4:1-12

The first three chapters of this letter focus on looking back at Paul's visit with the Thessalonians and defending his ministry with them against his critics. The final two chapters look ahead to the future of the church; the end of chapter 3 is a prayer that Christ would make these believers strong, blameless, and holy before God (3:13), which is a process of walking by faith in our co-crucifixion with Christ, and trusting the Holy Spirit to produce the Christ-life which is pleasing to God.

**1 Thessalonians 4:1-2** *“ Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more. For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus.”KJV*

*“Finally, brothers and sisters, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus that, as you learned from us how you ought to live and to please God (as, in fact, you are doing), you should do so more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus.” NRSV*

The word “*finally*” signals a change in subject as Paul moves on to practical application of faith. Apparently Timothy's report (3:6) had brought Paul great joy regarding the faith of the Thessalonian believers, but also included a few noteworthy concerns, for Paul now gives instructions for right living. The believers had received instructions from Paul and his companions how they ought to live and please God (2:4-12), and had set an example of Christlike living. Evidently they had learned, for Paul mentions that they were doing just that, but he wanted them to do so even more. These instructions in right living were not made up by Paul, but rather, came “through the Lord Jesus himself” and are important for every believer of every generation. Living to please God is every true Christian's desire. However, we know that the only thing that pleases God is our faith; (**Hebrews 11:6**), trusting, resting and depending on Him to give us the power and desire to do His great pleasure (**Ephesians 2:13**). These Thessalonian Christians had learned from Paul and Silas how to walk by faith, and now Paul encourages them to abound even more (**Romans 10:17**).

**1 Thessalonians 4:3-5** *“For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God:”KJV*

***“God wants you to be holy, so you should keep clear of all sexual sin. Then each of you will control your body and live in holiness and honor – not in lustful passion as the pagans do, in their ignorance of God and his ways.” NLT***

The phrase, “*God wants you to be holy*” is a parallel passage to **I Thessalonians 4:7**. God has called us to live a holy life, but as **I Thessalonians 5:24** states, “***Faithful is he who calls us, who will also bring it to pass.***” Christianity is not a list of do’s and don’ts, but a relationship in which believers are molded into the image of Christ as the Holy Spirit reproduces the life of Christ in us. Apparently, immorality was plaguing the church in Thessalonica, as it was plaguing the Roman Empire as a whole. The many idols worshiped across the empire often had an emphasis on sex; some temples even employed prostitutes for the pleasure of “worshippers.” In general, people regarded any kind of sexual activity as acceptable. It was quite common for a man not to limit his sexual relationship to his wife. Homosexuality was common. Incest was overlooked. Slaves were kept and used for sex. Of course, God’s standards are the opposite, and Paul taught abstinence from sexual immorality (**Romans 1:24-27**). This included any kind of illegitimate sexual intercourse or relationship outside of marriage. He forbade any homosexual activity. In Corinth some of the new Christians had been prostitutes, adulterers, or homosexuals. When they came to Christ out of such perversion, they were taught to alter their attitude toward sexual activity in this particular area, and accept God’s standards which Paul was proclaiming. We live in a society similar to the one in which Paul lived and taught. Every kind of sexual activity, including violence and abuse of children, has become commonplace. As Christians, we must uphold the sanctity of sexual purity within the marriage relationship (**I Corinthians 6:13-20; 2 Corinthians 12:21**) Paul taught believers to control their bodies and live in holiness and honor, not in lustful passion as the pagans in their ignorance of God and His ways. We must keep in mind that self control is a part of the fruit of the Spirit. Paul tells us in **Romans 7:15** that he did the things he did not want to do and that which he wanted to do he could not. However, Paul also taught that as we live in the truth of **Romans 6:6**, our co-crucifixion with Christ, the Holy Spirit holds the flesh in the place of death and produces self control and ultimately holiness. Sex is to be kept within the context of marriage between a man and a woman and should be done in “holiness and honor, not in lustful passion.”

**1 Thessalonians 4:6** ***“That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified.” KJV***

***“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.” NIV***



Paul writes that sexual sin ruins the holy and honorable living to which Christian men should aspire, and it also is a sin against one's fellow man, whether they be Christians or not. To have an affair with another man's wife or member of his household wrongs the other man. It takes advantage of a trusting relationship. To have premarital sex, or a sexual affair with a woman who is unmarried, also wrongs another man, for the woman cannot bring virginity to her marriage. Paul makes it very clear that God does not overlook these sins; instead, he will avenge those who do such.

**1 Thessalonians 4:7** *“For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.” KJV*

*“God has called us to be holy, not to live impure lives.” NLT*

The Greek word translated “called” is the same word Paul used in Romans 8:30: **“And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified” (Romans 9:24; 1 Thessalonians 2:11-12; 2 Thessalonians 2:14)**. The verb means “to call forth” or “to summon.” Paul always made it clear that salvation was God's initiative and that people are called to be His. Because it is a call from God (**1 Thessalonians 5:24**) by God's limitless grace, each believer has wisdom, the power and desire to resist temptation, and to live as God desires, and our part is to believe.

**1 Thessalonians 4:8** *“He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit.” KJV*

*“Anyone who refuses to live by these rules is not disobeying human rules but is rejecting God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.” NLT*

Clearly, to live an immoral life is to reject and sin against God (**Psalm 51:4**). God is the one who said that sex is for married people (a man and a woman) only. Anyone who refuses to live by this simple rule, who treats sexual sin lightly, is not disobeying human rules because human rules change (consider the change in “sexual rules” in the American culture over the last fifty years). Paul would later write to the believers in Corinth (another sexually immoral city), **“Run away from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body” (1 Corinthians 6:18 NLT)**. As mentioned before, in **Galatians 5:22-23**, Paul describes the fruit of the Holy Spirit in believers' lives. One part of that fruit is self-control, referring to mastery over sinful human desires and ability to show restraint. When we believers appropriate our co-crucifixion with Christ, the Holy Spirit gives to us the power and desire to follow God's rules. The Holy Spirit brings out the best in us, not the worst.

**1 Thessalonians 4:9** *“But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.” KJV*

*“But I don’t need to write to you about the Christian love that should be shown among God’s people. For God himself has taught you to love one another.” NLT*

Paul told the Thessalonian believers that it was not necessary to exhort them to love one another, for it seems that they had learned that lesson from God Himself; most likely Paul was referring to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. This is a brotherly love that should be shown among God’s people (**John 13:34-35**). Not only did sexual purity set the believers apart from the culture around them, but also the love they showed for one another. Indeed, it was a trademark of the first-century church (**Acts 2:43-47; 4:32-35**).

**1 Thessalonians 4:10** *“And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more;” KJV*

*“Indeed, your love is already strong toward all the Christians in all of Macedonia. Even so, dear brothers and sisters, we beg you to love them more and more.” NLT*

Although the Thessalonian believers did not need instruction about showing God’s love, still Paul urged them forward. Even though their love was already strong, not only among themselves but also toward all Christians in Macedonia, Paul begged the believers to love more and more.

**1 Thessalonians 4:11-12** *“And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing.” KJV*

*“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.” NIV*

Another group of believers in the church needed some exhortation (**2 Thessalonians 3:11**). Apparently some of the Thessalonian Christians had adopted a life of idleness, depending on other to supply their needs. This did not show love toward fellow believers, for these folks were taking advantage of others’ hard work. The reason for their idleness is unknown; however, because a discussion of the Second Coming follows this section, these people may have decided that since Christ could return at

any moment, they would just sit back, enjoy life, and wait. Or, they may have genuinely thought they should spend all their time working to bring others to Christ, but financially they were being a drain on fellow believers and therefore were not loving them. It also appears that these people were not quietly going about life, so Paul first exhorted them to focus their attention on leading a quiet life and minding their own business rather than meddling in other people's affairs (**I Thessalonians 5:14; 2 Thessalonians 3:11**). The exhortation, "work with your hands" may have been distasteful, because Greeks looked down on manual labor as fit only for slaves. Paul was a tent maker, however, and used his hard, manual labor as an example to all believers (**2:9-11**). Paul wanted the believers to be involved in honest labor so that they might win the respect of outsiders and so they would not be a burden to others (**I Peter 2:12**). Those who work to support themselves are a positive witness, both outside and inside the church (**Ephesians 4:28**).

### **REMEMBER THE HOPE OF THE RESURRECTION/ 4:13-18**

Paul enjoyed teaching about our future hope; that salvation carried a promise of eternal life. He surely told his audiences that the same Jesus Christ who died, arose, and ascended would one day return (2:19). The believers knew that this could occur at any time and that it would be unannounced. Perhaps Paul and Silas had been forced to leave Thessalonica before they were able to finish all their teaching about the Resurrection, or perhaps this particular church had special concerns in some areas. The rest of chapter 4 and the beginning of chapter 5 seem to be addressing several questions that had come from the church regarding the resurrection of believers and the Second Coming.

**1 Thessalonians 4:13** *"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope."* KJV

*"But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope."* NRSV

The phrase, "we [or I] do not want you to be ignorant,) is a phrase that Paul used several times in his letters (**Romans 1:13; 11:25; I Corinthians 10:1; 12:1; 2 Corinthians 1:8**). These words draw attention to a topic of great importance. The question to Paul from the Thessalonian believers regarded *those who have died*. They had been taught that Christ would one day return and take his people to Himself. Apparently, in the interim, as the believers awaited Christ's return, some of them had died. The Thessalonians were wondering why this had happened before Christ's

return and what would happen to those who had died when he does come back. Some may have feared that believers who had physically died would not be with Christ and this caused them great sorrow. In Greek thought, the soul lived on but with no hope. It existed in sort of an ambiguous afterlife. This contrasts strongly with Paul's view (**I Corinthians 15:53-55; Philippians 1:21-23**). Paul wanted the Thessalonians to understand that death is not the end. When Christ returns, all believers, dead and alive, will be reunited, never to suffer or die again. Believers need not grieve as others do who have no hope. Paul recognized that the death of loved ones naturally results in grieving, but when Christians grieve for Christians who have died, this should not be. While the pain of our loss is real, the fact is that these loved ones will be seen again as the following verses describe.

**1 Thessalonians 4:14** ***“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.” KJV***

***“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.” NIV***

Paul writes in **I Corinthians 1:30**, ***“of Him are you in Christ.”*** God took us and placed us into Christ; our position is in Christ. When He went to the cross, positionally, we went to the cross; when He went to the grave, we went to the grave; when He came out of the grave, we came out of the grave and ascended into Heaven with Him; that is our position in Christ. Believers can have hope in the Resurrection because of what happened to Jesus. Because Jesus died and rose again, we can also trust that those who have died are not lost but will be resurrected as well (**I Corinthians 15:12-20**). Then God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him (that is, those who have died as believers). Christians who have died are presently with God and will come back with Jesus. They haven't missed out; in fact, they are enjoying God's presence. **2 Corinthians 5: 8 and Philippians 1:21-22** teach that believers are absent from the body and present with the Lord at death. The separation of loved ones due to death is only temporary, for those in Christ will be reunited forever. It is interesting to note that Christians are said to “fall asleep,” while Jesus “died.” Jesus took upon himself the full force of death so that he could transform it into no more than “sleep” for his followers

**1 Thessalonians 4:15** ***“For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.” KJV***

***“For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died.” NRSV***

When Paul wrote, “this we declare to you by the word of the Lord,” he wanted these believers to understand that neither the dead nor the living would be at any disadvantage with regard to Christ’s return. All believers will share the blessings of the Resurrection. Those who have died are already with Christ and will be with him when he returns (4:14); those who are alive and still on earth when Christ returns, will by no means precede those who have died. Instead, “The dead in Christ will rise first” (4:16). Paul wrote these words the believers for the purpose of comforting and encouraging one another when loved ones die.

**1 Thessalonians 4:16** *“For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:” KJV*

*“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.” NKJV*

The Second Coming will occur in God’s time. Christ the Lord Himself will descend from heaven, for that is where He has been since his resurrection and ascension. The book of Acts describes Jesus’ ascension in this way:

*“It was not long after he said this that he was taken up into the sky while they were watching, and he disappeared into a cloud. As they were straining their eyes to see him, two white-robed men suddenly stood there among them. They said, ‘Men of Galilee, why are you standing here staring at the sky? Jesus has been taken away from you into heaven. And someday, just as you saw him go, he will return!’” (Acts 1:9-11 NLT)*

In his letters Paul wrote about the Christians’ waiting for Christ’s return:

*“Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 3:20 NIV).*

*“They speak of how you are looking forward to the coming of God’s Son from heaven – Jesus, whom God raised from the dead” (1 Thessalonians 1:10 NLT).*

*“God will provide rest for you who are being persecuted and also for us when the Lord Jesus appears from heaven. He will come with his mighty angels” (2 Thessalonians 1:7 NLT).*

Christ’s return will be unmistakable. No one will miss it, for he will descend with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. Whether these are three different ways of referring to one sound, whether they happen simultaneously, or

whether they happen in sequence is unknown. But these sounds will herald his return. The “shout” stands for “word of command” such as a military officer gives to his soldiers (**John 5:28-29**). The “voice of an archangel” is the voice of a powerful angel who stands before God. Clearly the angelic hosts will be taking part in this celebration of Christ’s return to take his people home (**Mark 8:38**). A trumpet blast will usher in the new heaven and earth. The Jews would understand the significance of this because trumpets were always blown to signal the start of great festivals and other extraordinary events (**Numbers 10:10**). No one will miss the Second Coming; not the dead, not the living. Then “the dead in Christ will rise first.” They will have a prominent place, for Jesus brings them with him (4:14) as part of his second coming. Paul later wrote to the Corinthians, ***“Let me tell you a wonderful secret God has revealed to us. Not all of us will die, but we will all be transformed. It will happen in a moment, in the blinking of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, the Christians who have died will be raised with transformed bodies”*** (**1 Corinthians 15:51-52 NLT**). At that time, when the shout sounds, the angel speaks, and the trumpet blasts, Christ will return and the dead will rise out of the graves with their heavenly bodies.

**1 Thessalonians 4:17** ***“Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”*** KJV

***“Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”*** NKJV

After the dead have risen from their graves, the believers who are alive and remain on earth shall be caught up together with Christ and the resurrected believers in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. A reference to clouds in the Bible often symbolizes the presence of God (**Exodus 13:21; 14:19; 19:16; 24:15; 40:34-38; Mark 9:7; Acts 1:9**). Christ will arrive in the clouds, and believers will be caught up to meet him in the clouds as he descends from heaven. The verb translated “caught up” is also used in Acts 8:39 when ***“the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away”*** after he had baptized the Ethiopian eunuch, as well as in 2 Corinthians 12:2 when Paul wrote of being “caught up into the third heaven.” This supernatural event will cause a great reunion among the believers who are alive at the Second Coming and those who have already died. Both groups will experience Christ’s return together. This joyous reunion will go on forever. These words give a definite picture of the taking of the believers from the earth; they will be “caught up” (“the Rapture”) and they will be with the Lord forever in heaven. There are three main views regarding the timing of the Rapture of the believers:

1. Pre-tribulationists point to the period of Tribulation (described in Revelation) that occurs before the second coming of Christ and believe that the Rapture of the believers will occur before this time of Tribulation. This view sees the believers meeting Christ in the clouds but places his second coming to the earth at a later time.
2. Mid-tribulationists say that the Rapture will occur at the midpoint of the time period of Tribulation. The believers will be on earth for the first half of that time of Tribulation but then will be raptured and will escape the last half, which will be a time of intense suffering. This view also sees Christ's second coming as a separate and later event.
3. Post-tribulationists believe that the believers will remain on the earth during the time of Tribulation prior to Christ's second coming. Then when Christ returns in the clouds, believers will be caught up to be with him. Post-tribulationists place the rapture and Christ's second coming at the same time.

View #1 seems to be the most accurate, and this verse, 4:17, is a key verse for those who make the Rapture a distinct event from the return of Christ to reign (**John 14:1-3; I Corinthians 15:51-53; 2 Thessalonians 2:1**). Paul's point was not to give his readers a timeline or a literal description of how all the end-times events would fit together. Instead, he wanted to reassure the Thessalonians that their fellow believers who had died would not miss out on Christ's return and eternal kingdom.

**1 Thessalonians 4:18** *"Wherefore comfort one another with these words."* KJV

*"Therefore encourage one another with these words."* NRSV

The Thessalonians did not need to continue worrying about the spiritual state of those who had died. Paul explained that being dead or alive at the return of Christ would make no difference, for Christ would bring all his people together to be with him forever. Instead of worrying, they should encourage one another with these words (3:7; 5:11). No one is beyond God's power – no believer will be left out or forgotten. Even in the face of death, believers know that their Lord is ultimately triumphant.

## I THESSALONIANS 5

### BE PREPARED: NO ONE KNOWS WHEN THE LORD WILL RETURN/ 5:1-11

Certain questions have perplexed Christians across the ages. Many are concerned when loved ones die, and wonder when they will see them again. Others are also concerned about the Day of Judgment and what that will mean for them. The end of chapter 4 addresses the bereavement issue, stating that believers who have died will not be left out of the Second Coming. The first part of chapter 5 addresses the issue of the Day of the Lord and how believers can prepare for it. This section (5:1-11) and the previous section (4:13-18) have been the subject of ongoing debate.

**1 Thessalonians 5:1-2** *“But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.” KJV*

*“I really don’t need to write to you about how and when all this will happen, dear brothers and sisters. For you know quite well that the day of the Lord will come unexpectedly, like a thief in the night.” NLT*

The phrase “day of the Lord” refers to a future time when God will intervene directly and dramatically in world affairs. Predicted and discussed often in the Old Testament (**Isaiah 13:6-13; Joel 2:28-32; Amos 5:18-20; Zephaniah 1:14-18**), the “day of the Lord” will include both punishment and blessing. Christ will judge sin and set up his eternal kingdom. Paul had already taught at length about the day of the Lord and had just answered a question that the Thessalonian believers had concerning fellow believers who had died (4:13-18). They knew that the timing of this event was unknown, for Paul had already explained to them that the day of the Lord will come unexpectedly, like a thief in the night. Peter also made mention of that (**2 Peter 3:10**). Paul was the first to associate the “day of the Lord” with the coming of Jesus Christ (**1 Corinthians 1:8; 5:5; 2 Corinthians 1:14**). Jesus had discussed his second coming and at one point had compared it to the coming of a thief:

*“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father...But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.” (Matthew 24:36; 43-44 NIV)*

Some have attempted to pinpoint dates or prove how certain present events fulfill prophecy. Jesus made it clear and Paul also made mention that no one knows when Christ will return. It will be unexpected and in God’s time. Jesus predicted that before



his return many believers would be misled by false teachers claiming to have revelations from God (**Mark 13:5-6**). According to Scripture, the one clear sign of Christ's return will be his unmistakable appearance in the clouds. This will be seen by all people (**Mark 13:26; Revelation 1:7**).

**1 Thessalonians 5:3** *“For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.” KJV*

*“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.” NIV*

The comparison of Christ's coming to a thief (5:1-2) reveals that it will be sudden and unexpected; the comparison of it to labor pains on a pregnant woman indicates that it will be unavoidable (**Mark 13:7-8**). Some who will not be waiting for Christ will think that everything is safe; they will be lulled into a false sense of peace and safety (**Jeremiah 6:14; 8:11; Ezekiel 13:10**). However, they will find themselves facing sudden destruction. This word “destruction” (*olethpos*) is also used in **2**

**Thessalonians 1:9** and refers to separation from God: *“They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power” (NIV)*. When Christ returns, that will be the end; there will be no reprieves, no second chances, no escape. In order to be ready for the Second Coming, the Thessalonian believers may have thought it would only make sense to know when that coming would be. So Paul further explained that the Second Coming is certain and will be sudden and unavoidable.

**1 Thessalonians 5:4-5** *“But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.” KJV*

*“But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness.” NRSV*

The believers in Thessalonica were not in darkness; that is, they were not ignorant of what was to occur. God has chosen not to tell his people everything about Christ's return, but we believers know all that we need to know. God has not left his people “in darkness” so that we will be totally surprised when Christ comes back. From the moment Christ ascended into heaven, the promise remained that someday, just as he went, he would return (**Acts 1:11**). For believers, that promise is not something to fear; instead, it is a promise of hope. Because believers are all children of light and children of the day, that return will be a time of great joy. The contrasts of “light” and

“darkness” and “day” and “night” are often used in the Bible to describe the difference between good and evil, between God’s people and the people of the world. **1 John 1:5** states that **“God is light and there is no darkness in him at all”**. Light represents what is good, pure, true, holy, and reliable. Darkness represents what is sinful and evil. God is holy and true, and he alone can guide people out of the darkness of sin. Light is also related to truth; light exposes whatever exists, whether it is good or bad. In the dark, good and evil look alike; in the light, they can be clearly distinguished. Just as darkness cannot exist in the presence of light, sin cannot exist in the presence of a holy God. “Children of light,” God’s children, have nothing to fear regarding the Second Coming.

**1 Thessalonians 5:6-7** **“Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night.” KJV**

**“So be on your guard, not asleep like the others. Stay alert and be sober. Night is the time for sleep and the time when people get drunk.” NLT**

Usually thieves break into homes at night when everyone is sleeping. Jesus’ second coming is sure, and it will come with surprise like a thief breaking in, but God’s people should be on alert and sober-minded. The way to be ready for Jesus’ return is not in knowing when he will return, but rather in being alert and sober-minded. The children of the light will be awake and ready when the Lord returns. Paul describes those who constantly expect the Lord to return at any moment by contrasting them with the rest of the world; the others of the “darkness” and of the “night” who are asleep at the Lord’s return. These people aren’t interested, nor are they waiting for the Lord, nor are they caring that He could return; but rather they are getting drunk (the opposite of sober), which is a further indication of being muddled in one’s thinking. Because unbelievers are people of the “darkness” and of the “night,” their lives are focused on their own pleasures and obsessions and not on the coming of Christ.

**1 Thessalonians 5:8** **“But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.” KJV**

**“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.” NIV**

People who belong to the day, the believers who are living in the “light” of God, have a whole different reason to be alive. Life is not about personal pleasure but about a deep abiding relationship with Christ and getting to know him better. In this sinful world, the world of “darkness” and “night,” believers are different. To the Ephesians,

Paul had written about their need to put on the full armor of God. We find this in **Ephesians 6:13-18**. In this passage Paul gives a full list of the armor. (1)Gird loins with truth; (2) breastplate of righteousness; (3)feet shod with the gospel; (4)shield of faith; (5)helmet of salvation; (6)sword of the Spirit (Word of God); and (7) prayer. Here in **I Thessalonians 5:8**, Paul tells the church in Thessalonica to be “sober-minded” or as the NIV translates it, “self-controlled,” which is a fruit of the Spirit (**Galatians 5:22-23**), and then he gives a partial list of the armor of God (“breastplate and helmet). We must always keep in mind that the Holy Spirit’s role is to reproduce the life of Christ in Christians, and to put on the armor of God is to put on the Lord Jesus Christ (**2 Corinthians 3:18**). In **John 14:6** we read that Jesus is truth; so girding our loins with truth is putting on the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so it goes with the rest of the armor of God; **I Corinthians 1:30** tells us that Jesus is our righteousness. **I Corinthians 15:1-4** makes it clear that the gospel is the death and resurrection of Christ; likewise, salvation and the Word of God (**John 1:1-14**) are all about Jesus. Our part in the armor is the shield of faith.

***1 Thessalonians 5:9-10 “For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.” KJV***

***“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.” NIV***

In order to wear “hope of salvation” as a helmet (5:8), believers must know in what (or in whom) they are hoping. Christians’ hope lies secure because God is sovereign. He has made the decision and did not appoint [his people] to suffer wrath. Because God has ordained it this way, it is certain. God’s wrath is very real, and those who have refused His offer of forgiveness will indeed suffer God’s wrath (**Revelation 20:11-15**). God’s people will not face the condemnation that their sins deserve; instead, they will be the recipients of God’s grace and they will receive salvation because they have put their faith in Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross for the forgiveness of their sins. This salvation was offered through our Lord Jesus Christ. He said, ***“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me (John 14:6).*** How did Jesus accomplish this? Through his death. Jesus, the sinless Son of God, died for us, died in the place of sinful humanity, to spare us from punishment. Now all are welcome to come to God through out Lord Jesus Christ. Through his death, the promise was sealed. Christ’s sacrifice for sins was not an afterthought, not something God decided to do after the world had spun out of control. An all-knowing, eternal God set this plan in motion long before the world was created.

***“You know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your***

***forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.” 1 Peter 1:18-21 (NIV)***

Our hope rests secure whether we believers are awake or asleep at Christ’s Return. Salvation is a certainty because the Christ who is coming is the same Christ who died for sinners. All believers, those who have died and those who are still alive, will live together with God in heaven. God has appointed this to come to pass, and no power can change his plan (**Revelation 21-22**).

***1 Thessalonians 5:11 “Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.” KJV***

***“Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.” NRSV***

The words “encourage one another” repeat Paul’s words in 4:18. Despite persecution and their sorrow over fellow believers who had died, by God’s grace Christians have the privilege of encouraging one another about the certainty of their future reunion with all believers who have gone on before (4:13-18) and the promise of eternal life through Jesus Christ (5:9-10). We ought always to build up each other in the faith (5:1-8).

### **PAUL’S FINAL INSTRUCTIONS/5:12-28**

***1 Thessalonians 5:12 “And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you;” KJV***

***“Dear brothers and sisters, honor those who are your leaders in the Lord’s work. They work hard among you and warn you against all that is wrong.” NLT***

Christians in the church are to show honor to those in leadership (**Hebrews 13:7, 17**). The word “honor” is also translated “respect.” These leaders in the Lord’s work are the elders, and hold positions of leadership and responsibility. “Elder” simply means “older.” Both Greeks and Jews gave positions of great honor to wise older men, and the Christian church continued this pattern of leadership. Elders carried great responsibility and they were expected to be good examples. These men worked hard among the believers and deserved to be honored. Paul expressed a similar thought in his letter to Timothy: ***“The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching” (1 Timothy 5:17 NIV)***. The leadership structure in local churches began very early; for

as Paul planted a church and then moved on, he left behind an organized group of believers (**Acts 11:30; 14:23; I Timothy 4:14; Titus 1:5; James 5:14; I Peter 5:1**). Paul could not stay in each church, but he knew that these new churches needed strong spiritual leadership to teach sound doctrine, help believers mature spiritually and equip them to live for Jesus Christ despite opposition. **Acts 14:23** describes Paul and Barnabas's return to some of the churches that they had planted for the purpose of organizing the church leadership.

***1 Thessalonians 5:13 “And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves.” KJV***

***“Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.” NIV***

In addition to honoring leaders (5:12), believers are also to hold them in the highest regard in love. “The highest regard” conveys a forcefulness that left Paul's readers with no doubt about his meaning. Leaders are not to be ignored or argued with; they are to be held in highest esteem; not with fear but with love. These leaders are to be respected and loved, not because they do everything right, but rather because of their God-given position. Paul reminded the believers to live in peace with one another.

***1 Thessalonians 5:14 “Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men.” KJV***

***“Brothers and sisters, we urge you to warn those who are lazy. Encourage those who are timid. Take tender care of those who are weak. Be patient with everyone.” NLT***

While the leaders have a special responsibility to guide the church, believers are not exempt from their responsibility to care for one another. Paul singled out three groups in this church and “urged” the believers to look after them, but in different ways. First they were to warn lazy, idle believers. The word translated “lazy” is used only in the letters to the Thessalonians (**2 Thessalonians 3:6-7, 11**) and seems to have been a particular concern for this church. The problem with idle people is that because they are not busy with activities that have eternal value, they are often found stirring up trouble. These people must be warned to get back to using God-given gifts in service for the church. Second, they were to encourage those who were timid. The Greek word translated “encourage” (*paraklesis*) means to come alongside with helpful instruction and insight. The lazy need to be warned, but the “timid” need to be encouraged. The “timid” are the fearful people who lack confidence in Christ. They have become discouraged or worried, possibly by persecution or by the deaths of their fellow believers (4:13). These people need loving instruction from the Word to calm their fears and to build their confidence in Christ. Third, they were to support those

who were weak. The word translated “support” or “take tender care” is *antechesthe* and means to wrap arms around these folks. This is the kind of help suggested for the spiritual “weak” in faith, or those in need of Christ in their lives. These might be struggling, immature Christians who need the arms of faith-filled fellow believers to guide them, give them support, and let them know they are not alone (**Romans 5:6; 14:1; I Corinthians 8:9**). Finally, being patient (which is a fruit of the Spirit, **Galatians 5:22**) with everyone is the glue that holds relationships together. In any group where a variety of people come together, godly patience is much needed. Believers cannot write off the lazy, timid, or weak even if they do require a lot of time and energy. On the contrary, great patience must be exercised. “Patience” is an attribute of God (**Exodus 34:6; Psalm 103:8**), a fruit of the Spirit in believers (**Galatians 5:22**), and a characteristic of love (**I Corinthians 13:4**). God is patient with people, and if Christ is being formed in us, we will begin to see patience in our own lives. In addition, God has given his Spirit to produce patience in believers.

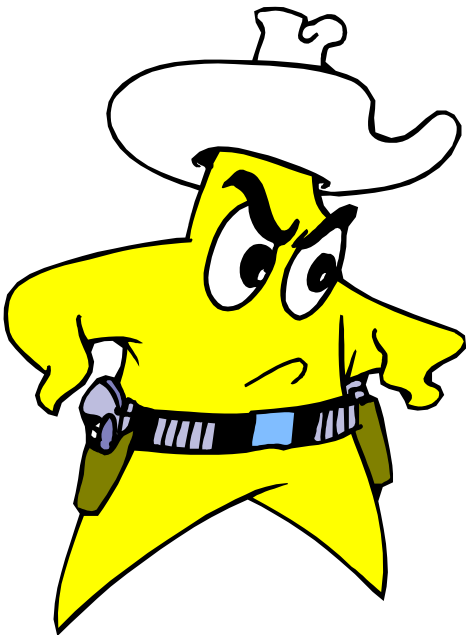
***1 Thessalonians 5:15 “See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men.” KJV***

***“Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.” NIV***

To a church under persecution, the command against retaliation is especially pertinent. No Christian should pay back wrong for wrong. Personal revenge and retaliation are clearly forbidden to those who call themselves followers of Christ. Jesus said, ***“But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also...But I tell you; Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:39, 44 NIV)***. To many Jews of Jesus’ day, these statements were offensive. Any Messiah who would turn the other cheek was not the military leader they wanted to lead a revolt against Rome. Because they were under Roman oppression, they wanted retaliation against their hated enemies. Instead, Jesus suggested a new, radical response to injustice. Instead of demanding rights, give them up freely! According to Jesus, it is more important to give mercy than to receive it. To the Romans, Paul had written: ***“Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. IF it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 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.” (Romans 12:17-21 NIV)***.

**VENGEANCE, JUSTICE, OR GRACE"**

Most times in this world, we think that we just have two choices. Either vengeance or justice...We often pride ourselves on not "getting even" (vengeance), because we know that vengeance is not the way for Christians. However, we do have "our rights" you know (justice). ***It seems in the world today, we only have two options; either vengeance or justice.***



If someone does something to me, I immediately want to get them back. ***Matt. 26:52*** This is a very pagan, uncivilized way to live which many of us seem to be going back to today; ***taking the law into our own hands.*** Often times, this is a ***lose/lose*** situation - One is dead and the ends up on death row. ***Rom. 12:19***

Moving from vengeance to a second option, justice...In America today, most of us pride ourselves on having "our rights". We really enjoy blaming someone else, you know how that goes; blame shifting goes all the way back to the Garden. ***Gen. 3:9-12***

*When something goes wrong, we may not want to get even, but we sure do know who's fault it is...If something is missing, we immediately think we know who took it. In*

the Old Testament, on the Day of Atonement, the blame was transferred to a "scapegoat"... ***Lev. 16:8-10.*** We often use that term today in our justice system "scapegoat", however, it's a win-lose situation. One wins and one loses; the idea is for the right one to win...*However, in the book of Habakkuk, it speaks of justice being perverted. Hab. 1:4*

So now, many times, the good guys get punished, and the bad guys go free, it becomes, not a matter of right and wrong, but who has the best lawyer. *In most law schools today, right and wrong are not the major issue, but rather, can you win the case...And he who wins the case, pockets the money...* Now granted, this is a little better than vengeance because it's a ***win/lose*** situation, rather than ***lose/lose***...

How do we get to a ***win/win*** situation? ***There is only one way and that is through "grace"...*** When we move up to grace, we find that the key word is ***"forgive"***, while the key phrase for vengeance is ***"get even"***, and the main word for justice is ***"blame"***. And instead of ***lose/lose*** or ***win/lose***, there is now potential for ***win/win***... However, the cost is death, death to self...All rights are set aside, whether they be scales of justice, or swords of vengeance, because vindication is left to the Lord...***Is. 54:17. It's coming to the cross/to the throne of grace naked and unashamed, no accusations or thoughts of getting even...***You see, grace gives a third option, rather than ***"vengeance"*** or ***"blame"***, by God's grace, we can now ***"forgive"***...

Let's not seek to steal from God that which is rightfully His; vengeance (dealing out just dessert for evil actions). (**Heb. 10:30; Deut. 32:35**) God's vengeance requires infinite knowledge of conditions, of motives, of results upon others, which God, the righteous Judge alone possesses. **1 Thes. 4:6; 2 Thes. 1:6; Heb. 10:30; Prov. 20:22; 1 Pet. 2:23**

**1 Thessalonians 5:16 "Rejoice evermore." KJV**

**"Rejoice always." NKJV**

The next three verses give three simple ingredients that believers ought to daily mix into their lives; joy, prayer, and thanks. When these three qualities are present, believers will be vibrant witnesses to a needy world. Paul counseled this persecuted church to rejoice always (**Philippians 3:1**). Paul had learned the secret of being joyful, even in the middle of great trial and suffering.

**Acts 16:25: "About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them."**

**Romans 5:3: "Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance."**

**2 Corinthians 6:4-10: "Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as imposters; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything."**

**2 Corinthians 12:10: "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."**

**Colossians 1:24: "Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church."**



Paul had just encouraged the believers to love one another and now he writes rejoice. Interestingly, when Jesus spoke to his disciples about loving one another, he often talked to them about joy: ***“As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. (John 15:9-13 NRSV, emphasis added)*** True joy transcends the rolling waves of circumstances. Joy comes from a deep abiding relationship with Jesus Christ. When believers’ lives are intertwined with Christ, the Holy Spirit will begin to reproduce the life of Christ in us, and we will be able to walk through adversity without sinking into debilitating lows and to manage prosperity without moving into deceptive highs. The joy of living with Jesus Christ daily will keep believers rejoicing “always.” They can rejoice because of their sure salvation and their future hope; but even more because it is “no longer I but Christ (**Galatians 2:20**). Nothing that happens on this earth can compare with the glory that awaits God’s people. But believers are not required to conjure up this joy, for the ability to rejoice has been given to us as a gift; the fruit of the Holy Spirit is joy (**Galatians 5:22; Romans 14:17**).

***1 Thessalonians 5:17 “Pray without ceasing.” KJV***

***“Pray without ceasing.” NKJV***

Paul did not expect believers to spend all their time on their knees or with their eyes closed when he said they should pray without ceasing. In fact, he was quite adamant that everyone must work (5:14; **2 Thessalonians 3:6-7, 11**). It is possible, however, for believers to have a prayerful, dependent attitude at all times. This attitude is built upon acknowledging God in everything and depending on Him. Prayer is not to be done by the church leaders only, nor is it meant to be carried out only in worship services. Instead, prayer is a part of every believer’s daily walk, and Paul noted how important this would be for one’s spiritual life (**Romans 12:12; Ephesians 6:19**). Jesus told his disciples that “they should always pray” (**Luke 18:1**).



It might be helpful to stop a moment and define prayer. **What is it?**

We could spend many hours looking up definitions of prayer, and to be quite honest, we’ll probably find that most are rather shallow.

For example - Webster’s Dictionary defines it this way: To beg, or implore; to address God; a form of worship. Other definitions were equally as confusing and vague.

Of all the definitions, John Darby seems to help us see the true meaning of prayer. (Paraphrased) – “Prayer is the great means by which we are practically kept in awareness of the Father’s presence. It is the proper expression of our weakness to the father and of our confidence in His love and care day by day and ever more. Prayer is confessing our constant need of dependence upon Him.”

### **True Biblical Prayer is acknowledging and depending on God.**

The asking and receiving is elementary; it is the part of prayer that we understand, but should not be the focus of prayer.

It would appear that true biblical prayer is not an action, but rather a life, which maintains a dependence on Him at all, times. Thus **1 Thess. 5:17** makes sense.

Our minds must be saturated by and with Him. Prayer is not an exercise, it’s a life lived occupied with Him.

***1 Thessalonians 5:18 “In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.” KJV***

***“In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” NKJV***

Notice that Paul did not say “for” everything give thanks, but rather, “in” everything. Evil will happen to believers, and it does not come from God, so we should not thank him for it. But when evil strikes, we can still be thankful for God’s presence and for the good he will accomplish through the difficult times. Paul had learned that **“God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them” (Romans 8:28)**. God uses difficult times to build character and strengthen our faith. It is easy to give thanks for the blessings; it is more difficult to give thanks for the blessings in disguise; but even more difficult to give thanks in everything; even the situations that make no sense or are extremely painful. Yet this is the assignment given to all believers “for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” Giving thanks in everything means trusting God completely, knowing that he is sovereign and understanding and all that happens is part of a larger picture that we believers may not see. When a believer can give thanks so willingly, he or she has trusted that God is completely in control of all situations and is working out his will for his glory and our good.

***1 Thessalonians 5:19 “Quench not the Spirit.” KJV***

***“Do not stifle the Holy Spirit.” NLT***

Other versions translate this verse, **“Do not put out the Spirit’s fire” (NIV) or “Do not quench the Spirit” (Ephesians 4:30)**. “Stifle” or “quench” means to douse a fire; so to stifle the Holy Spirit would be to restrain his work. Keeping in mind that God is sovereign and all powerful, and does whatever He pleases (**Psalm 115:3**). However, our part in the Christian life is faith; **Hebrews 10:38** states it this way: **“The just shall live by faith, but if any man shrinks back in unbelief, my soul has no pleasure in him.”** So we can see all throughout scripture that man’s unbelief hinders or quenches the work of God in our lives (**John 6:28-29; Matthew 9:29; Matthew 13:57-59**).

**1 Thessalonians 5:20-21** **“Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.” KJV**

**“Do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good.” NIV**

God appointed certain people as prophets to the church (**Ephesians 4:11-13; I Corinthians 12:10, 28**). These people had special gifts in ministering God’s messages to his people. At times they would foretell the future (**Acts 11:28; 21:9-11**), but more often they would exhort, warn, encourage, and strengthen God’s people (**Acts 15:32**). God spoke through prophets, inspiring them with specific messages for particular times and places. The gift of prophecy had not so much to do with predicting future events as it had to do with bringing a message from God under the direction of the Holy Spirit to the body of believers. This gift provided insight, warning, correction, and encouragement (**I Corinthians 14:3**). The Thessalonians apparently were treating some prophecies (perhaps the warnings and corrections with which they did not agree) with contempt. The gift of prophecy is highly regarded, for it edifies believers (**I Corinthians 14:5, 10-12**). Paul was not advocating blind acceptance of every word spoken by any self-styled prophet. Instead, believers were to test everything against God’s words in Scripture, discern what was true and what was false, and then hold on to the good. How are believers to test for truth and genuineness? The apostle John explained this in **I John 4:1-3**: **“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. And this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming; and now it is already in the world.” NRSV** Christians should not believe everything they hear just because someone says it is a message inspired by God. There are many ways to test teachers to see if their message is truly from the Lord. One is to check to see if their words match what God says in the Bible. Other tests include their lifestyle (**I John 3:23-24**), and the validity of their message (**I John 4:1-3**). The most important test of all is what they believe about Christ.

**1 Thessalonians 5:22 “Abstain from all appearance of evil.” KJV**

**“Keep away from every kind of evil.” NLT**

Separation from evil is real and important: Believers are to “hold on to the good” (5:21) and at the same time separate from every kind of evil. Paul did not mean that believers must literally withdraw from the world, for to do so would mean that they could not shine the light of Christ in order that more might come to Him. Christians cannot avoid contact with “every kind of evil” because this world is evil, ruled by the evil one (**Ephesians 6:12**). Believers can, however, by faith live in a way that does not give evil a foothold in their lives. This is done by living in the truth of Christ that the body of sin has been rendered powerless; and knowing that they are no longer slaves to sin. As we, by faith, live in this truth, the Holy Spirit will reproduce the life of Christ in us, and the outcome will be abstaining from evil (**Romans 12:9**).

**1 Thessalonians 5:23 “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.: KJV**

**“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.” NIV**

The conduct Paul has been prescribing is impossible from a human standpoint. People will not naturally rejoice always, pray continually, and give thanks in every situation (5:16-18), nor can they keep away from all evil (5:22). Paul did not expect the Thessalonian believers to do this in their own strength, so he prayed for them that *the God of peace, would sanctify [them] through and through*. Paul described God as “The God of peace” as he often did at the end of his letters (**Romans 15:33; 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Philippians 4:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:16**). Before his death, Jesus had told his disciples, **“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...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” (John 14:27; 16:33 NIV)**. The end result of the Holy Spirit’s work in a believer’s life is deep and lasting peace (**Isaiah 26:3**). Unlike worldly peace, which is usually defined as the absence of conflict, this peace is a confident assurance in any circumstance; with Christ’s peace, no believer needs to fear the present or the future. As God takes up residence within a believer, he begins the process of “sanctification;” the change that he makes in all believers’ lives as they grow in faith. Jesus said, **“You are to be**

**perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48 NLT).** Believers are sanctified (set apart by the work of Christ. It is initiated and ultimately carried out by God’s Spirit. While perfection will not occur until believers are in heaven, sanctification is the process of moving toward that end, moving toward Christlikeness. Because we have been crucified with Christ, we are slowly but surely being set free from sin’s control, but sin is still an issue during our lives. Victories can be experienced every day in every area of life, as God sanctifies (growing us into Christlikeness). Romans 6-8 describes the process (**Ephesians 4:13; Colossians 1:28; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2**). In order to be sanctified “through and through,” God will work in all areas of a person’s life; the whole spirit, soul, and body. The spirit, soul, and body refer not so much to the distinct parts of a person as to the entire being of a person. This expression is Paul’s way of saying that God must be involved in every aspect of a believer’s life. A person’s spiritual life cannot be separated from everything else; being a Christian was never meant to be a “Sunday only” lifestyle. The conclusion of this sanctification process is the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will bring his people to complete perfection and take them with him to his kingdom. **“But your 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” (Philippians 3:20-21 NIV).**

**1 Thessalonians 5:24 “Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.” KJV**

**“He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.” NKJV**

Why could the Thessalonians count on this ongoing sanctification, blamelessness at Christ’s return, and future perfection? Because he **“who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.”** The promise comes from God himself, the Author of the plan, the One who accomplished it through the death of his Son, the One who calls his people, and the One who cannot lie. **“God is not a human being, that he should lie, or a mortal, that he should change his mind. Has he promised, and will he not do it? Has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?” (Numbers 23:19 NRSV).** Faithfulness is a characteristic of God. God created the world, and he has faithfully ordered it and kept it since the Creation. Because God is faithful, believers can count on him to fulfill his promises to them. If God can oversee the forces of nature, surely he can see his people through the trials they face. Trusting in God’s faithfulness day by day is our little part in the Christian life. What God has promised, He will do. He calls us to a holy and righteous life (**1 Thessalonians 4:7**) and faithful is he that calls us, who will also bring it to pass (**Philippians 2:13**).

**1 Thessalonians 5:25 “Brethren, pray for us.” KJV**

***“Beloved, pray for us.” NRSV***

Paul’s life was a life of prayer; a life lived in dependence on God. He mentioned several times his own prayers for the Thessalonians (1:2; 3:10, 12-13; 5:23; 2 Thessalonians 1:11). But Paul also asked believers to pray for him and his fellow missionaries (Ephesians 6:19; Colossians 4:3; 2 Thessalonians 3:1).

***1 Thessalonians 5:26 “Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss.” KJV***

***“Greet all the brothers and sisters with a holy kiss.” NRSV***

Kissing was a normal way of greeting each other in Paul’s day. This “holy kiss,” or “kiss of love,” expressed the love and unity among the believers. Paul wanted his readers to express their love and unity to one another. Paul used the same expression in Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20; and 2 Corinthians 13:12. Peter also recommended the “holy kiss” to the believers (1 Peter 5:14).

***1 Thessalonians 5:27 “charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren.” KJV***

***“I command you in the name of the Lord to read this letter to all the brothers and sister.” NLT***

Paul’s wording here is very strong. “I command you in the name of the Lord” means something like, “I put you on oath before the Lord.” Paul did not write merely to the leaders; he wrote to everyone, so all the Body could hear every word of it. For every Christian to hear this letter, it had to be read in a public meeting; there were not enough copies to circulate. Paul wanted to make sure that everyone had the opportunity to hear his message because he was answering important questions and offering needed encouragement.

***1 Thessalonians 5:28 “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.” KJV***

***“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.” NRSV***

As Paul began this letter (1:1), so he ended it. Paul’s final prayer was for *the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ [to] be with [them]*. Paul often ended his letters this way, asking his readers to continue experiencing God’s undeserved kindness and love every day of their lives, and then to pass along that grace to others.



