



1 Thessalonians

A Verse-By-Verse Commentary
(Originally written one verse per day)

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CHAPTER 1

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Thessalonians 1:1

Welcome to the book of 1 Thessalonians! It is comprised of 89 verses, and so it will take us (one day at a time, just as the sun rises each day) only three months to analyze it. It is hoped that you will be blessed as each day unfolds with marvelous insights into this beautiful epistle from the mind of God and through the hand of Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles.

He begins by introducing himself along with Silvanus (also known as Silas) and Timothy. The letter bears Paul's name, and there is no valid reason to suggest that he is not the true author. However, he leaves off the customary term "apostle," which he uses in many other epistles, because he was already well known to those at the church. He is the Apostle to the Gentiles, and the letter is written to a Gentile-led church.

Silvanus and Timothy were Paul's companions at Thessalonica, and he included them in his opening greetings as they were still with him at this point in his ministry. They are both noted together in Acts 17 & 18. Silvanus (Silas) is noted 13 times in Acts 15-18. He was a Roman citizen as is seen in Acts 16:37. Despite this, he was also a Jew. The longer name Silvanus is used of him by Paul in 2 Corinthians and 1 & 2 Thessalonians. He is probably also the same person referenced by Peter in 1 Peter 5:12. Timothy is the better known of the two because of his being prominently mentioned throughout the New Testament, and in particular because of the two books which bear his name, being written to him by Paul.

After his introduction, Paul says, "To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." This same address is used in both 1 & 2 Thessalonians. He addresses the church as a whole here instead of the more common term "to the saints" or "to the brethren" that he uses in many other letters. The unique term "in God the Father" is probably used to ensure that there is a distinction made between God the Father and God the Son. He will say in verse 1:9 that the church "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God." By making a distinction between God the Father "and the Lord Jesus Christ," he is showing that both are God, but there is more than one Person in the Godhead. And yet, their worship of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ is not pagan polytheism.

The two are one essence, and yet there is an order within the Godhead by which access is made available. Without Christ Jesus, there is no access to God the Father. He is the Mediator between the two. Again, his coming statement in verse 1:9 is intended to show them these things. Pagan idolatry, from which they have turned, is not the same as what is presented in the Christian faith. His introductory words here are carefully chosen for them (and thus us!) to learn, and remember, what is right and appropriate in the worship of God.

After this, he says, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” It is a standard portion which is to be found in almost all of his epistles. Grace is unmerited favor; it cannot be earned. This was the common greeting among the Greek people. Peace however was, and still is, the common greeting among the Hebrew people. In their language, the word is *shalom*. This is more than a greeting for calm or quiet, but it is a state of wholeness and completion in all ways. Paul unites the two terms just as the church is being united between Jew and Gentile during his time. This grace precedes the peace because only after receiving the grace of God can a person experience the peace of God.

Paul extends this wonderful blessing to them “from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” It is a greeting from the eternal God – both the unseen Father and His Son who reveals the Father to us. Rather than being an argument against the divinity of Jesus Christ, it is an argument for it. He is tying the two in as one – Jesus being a member of the Godhead. He is not making some type of great division, but a harmonious blending of the two.

Throughout Paul’s letters, as with the entire Bible, the deity of Jesus Christ is a concept and a precept which is on evident display. It is the very heart of what God has done for the reconciliation of the people of the world. As a side note, some translations leave off everything after “peace.” Which is the true original is hard to say. Scholars argue over this, but either way, Christ Jesus is on prominent display throughout the book.

Life application: Honest daily Bible study is hard work. It takes time and it takes effort. In today’s world many people who come to 1 Thessalonians do so in order to read the “rapture verses” noted in Chapter 4. They then build up an entire theology on this issue by combing those verses with the other rapture verses in the Bible. However, this is the extent of their biblical knowledge. They cannot logically tie what they believe in with the rest of Scripture to defend why they believe what they claim they believe. What a sad and narrow approach to biblical theology. Taking the time to read and comprehend the

entire Bible may be a large challenge, but it will help solidify one's theology and keep the individual from error in the various disciplines found in Scripture.

Heavenly Father, thank You for each book of the Bible. Taken together, they form a united whole which tells us Your very heart, and which gives us a broad and blessed understanding of Your intent and will for us, if we will just come to You. Grant us wisdom to diligently study this marvelous word, and to stand fast on its precepts. Help us to never deviate from making a daily study of it our life-long habit. Amen.

We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers,

1 Thessalonians 1:2

This is a greeting which, even if slightly amended for the occasion, is common to Paul's letters. In some letters, the stress is on the thanks, in others it is on the prayers. It is rather close to the words of Colossians 1:3 -

“We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,”

However, when he wrote his letter to the Thessalonians, he noticeably gives thanks “to God” rather than “to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” He has already carefully placed Christ Jesus within the Godhead in the previous verse, and so the thanks are obviously to Him as much as they are to the Father. Therefore, Paul combines the two into the simpler term “God.”

Here he notes that he, Silvanus, and Timothy “give thanks to God always for you all.” These thanks are lifted to God, who is both Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. As always, his wording highlights the deity of Christ. There is the human Jesus, and there is the Christ of God, being God. He is the Lord Jesus Christ who issues from God the Father, and who dwells with the Father in the Godhead. It is to this God that their thanks are directed at this point.

In their thanks, he then notes that they are “making mention of you in our prayers.” Paul's idea of “praying without ceasing,” which he will state later in this epistle, is evident in words such as these. Whenever the thought of one of his beloved churches came to mind, he and those with him would utter forth a prayer to God on its behalf. When they talked about one of the churches, they would probably issue forth a quick prayer of both thanks and petition for it. To them, praying was certainly a normal extension of their regular lives and conversations.

Life application: God already knows the end from the beginning. His plan is also complete in His mind. Despite this, we should not have a fatalistic view of life where we ignore prayers. Instead, God figures our prayers into the plan, just as our free-will calling on Jesus is figured into the plan. If we don't receive Jesus, we will not be saved. Likewise, prayers that are not uttered are not heard. God's foreknowledge of all things outside of time factors in our actions within the stream of time. Pray!

Heavenly Father, one of the beautiful things You have granted to us is the opportunity to pray. When we open our hearts to You, You hear and respond according to Your grace and mercy. And because we have Jesus as our Mediator between our prayers and Your ears, we can know that those prayers which are offered through Him are acceptable to You. And so, as we offer them to You in His name, hear and respond according to Your wisdom. Thank You that our prayers are heard because of Him. Amen.

...remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father, 1 Thessalonians 1:3

Paul now details what is specifically included in the prayers concerning those at Thessalonica that he referred to in the previous verse. He says they are "remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope."

These are the three tenets which he beautifully wrote about to the Corinthians – faith, hope, and love. Each of these is in the genitive, and so they, as noted by Charles Ellicott, are "almost equivalent to a very emphatic adjective." In other words, "work of faith" would equate to "faithful activity." In this it is a kind of work which is "characterized by faith and promoted by faith" (Ellicott). "Labor of love" would equate to "loving labor." It is a labor worked out because of, and for the sake of, love. And "patience of hope" would equate to "hopefully patient." It is a patience which is grounded in hope, and which is continuously nurtured by that same hope.

Each of these traits is in those at Thessalonica, as Paul says, "in our Lord Jesus Christ." What is more appropriate is "of our Lord Jesus Christ." In all three of these traits, Jesus is the object, not the subject. We have the hope of our Lord in our work of faith. We have hope of our Lord in our labor of love, and we have hope of our Lord in our patience of hope. Because He came, because He is with us, and because He is coming again, we have this hope, fully and completely.

Finally, he notes that our hope of the Lord Jesus Christ is "in the sight of our God and Father." This means basically "before," or "in the presence of." Because of our hope in

Christ, the attentive eyes of our heavenly Father are upon us. He is pleased to have a relationship with us once again because of the merits of Christ. He is our Redeemer and Mediator, and so in Him and through Him, we are brought into the very presence of God.

Life application: Paul's words of this verse show us that our works are to be works of faith in order to be pleasing to God. Any work not done in faith will not be credited to our account of heavenly rewards. Every work, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant, will be credited to us if it is done in faith. In all ways, and at all times, our walk with the Lord comes down to faith. We are saved by faith, we are justified by faith, and our works are credited to our account when done in faith.

Lord God, help us to be people of faith. Despite what the religions of the world say, including many supposed Christian groups, our standing of righteousness before You is one of faith alone – apart from any works of righteousness. And our works will only be credited for rewards if they are works of faith. Your word tells us that faith, and faith alone, is what makes us pleasing in Your sight. And so Lord, grant us faith – even as small as a mustard seed – and we will go forth with that! Great are You, O God. Amen.

...knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God. 1 Thessalonians 1:4

The translation of the NKJV (which follows after the KJV) is completely wrong. It should read "...knowing, brothers beloved by God, your election..." The words, "by God" are tied to "beloved," not "election." As Vincent's word studies accurately states, "neither here nor elsewhere in the N.T. is there any warrant for the revolting doctrine that God has predestined a definite number of mankind to eternal life, and the rest to eternal destruction. The sense in this passage appears to be defined by the succeeding context. The Thessalonians had been chosen to be members of the Christian church, and their conduct had justified the choice."

In other words, the translation which ties "by God" to "election" is intended to support the Calvinist belief that God has pre-elected all who will be saved. To them, only those will be saved, and the others He has pre-elected to be destroyed; free will is not involved in the process. As Vincent notes, this is a revolting doctrine. It also cannot be supported by a right dividing of the word of God.

Rather, Paul says to those at Thessalonica, "knowing, brothers beloved by God..." He is stating that they are beloved by God because they have come to God through Christ. God knew this would occur, but it does not negate the fact that it occurred. God granted them the choice, they chose, and God saved. From there, Paul mentions "your election."

This is tied into “knowing.” They know their election because they have called on Christ. This is what John 3:16 shows will happen, this is what Paul’s letters say will happen, and this is how it works. When a person freely believes in Christ, he becomes the elect of God.

Life application: John 3:16 does not say, “For God so love the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever is pre-elected by God, is regenerated in order to believe, and then believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.” No, it does not say this. If you are separated from God, call on Christ, be forgiven of your sins, and be reconciled to your heavenly Father.

Lord God, thank You for the wonderful gift of free-will. You have allowed us to choose what path we will follow. It allows us to choose Your glory or to reject it. For all who choose You, through our Lord Jesus Christ, there is salvation and eternal joy set before us. What can the world do to us then? We have overcome the world through Him! Hallelujah to You, O God, for our Lord Jesus. Amen.

For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake. 1 Thessalonians 1:5

The words “our gospel” don’t indicate that it is a gospel formulated by Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, but that it is the true gospel which was first preached by them to those at Thessalonica. This occurrence is noted in Acts 17:1-3 –

Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. ² Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³ explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and *saying*, “This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.”

It is this gospel of Jesus which “did not come to you in word only.” These men came to Thessalonica with the intent of sharing the message of Jesus Christ, and they did it with words. This is the way in which the gospel is transmitted. It is a message which must be conveyed in order for others to understand. In the case of Thessalonica though, it came with more than just words, “but also in power.” The word is *dunamis*, a Greek word which, in this sense, gives the idea of efficacy. It had the ability to perform what was presented by converting the minds and souls of those who heard it.

There is no reason to assume that “power” here indicates physical manifestations of conversion. As seen from the citation above, they “reasoned with them from the Scriptures.” The power to convert was found in the word, “and in the Holy Spirit.” The Spirit is the Source of the word, and He is the one who makes the word understandable to those who hear it, converting them and sealing them when the word is believed. This conversion is a demonstration of the Spirit. When a person sees the complete change in another, he realizes that it was more than just a personal choice, but a truly miraculous event. The sex-addict, the drunkard, the morally perverse... these people become a witness to the power of the Holy Spirit when they have a complete break from the path they were on because of hearing and receiving the gospel message.

Paul then says that the gospel also came “in much assurance.” When the message was heard, there was no doubt. The changes were sufficient to provide complete assurance that the power of God is truly found in the gospel message. It is a mystery which, when revealed in the longing human soul, has the ability to fully convert and completely convince. This message was presented by these men, not as a con-game or a scam, but – as Paul says – “as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.”

Their lives and actions substantiated that what they spoke was true. They didn’t just preach the gospel, they also lived it out. They were interested in saving souls for Christ, not getting rich off of Him. They were industrious, dedicated, and sincere. The very fact that Paul continued his outreach to them after he had gone (meaning in letter), shows that his concern for them was true. His letters to them, and to all of the churches, show that he desired that they would remember the gospel, be firm in their convictions, and grow in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Such actions as these proved that he, and those with him, were not deceivers. Instead, they were sincere messengers of the most marvelous news of all.

Life application: What a shame people look for the sensational side of religion. Whether it is a crazy analysis of a passage (such as looking for aliens or UFOs in certain verses), or whether it is to fawn over someone who claims to have powers to heal or speak in garbled tongues that only he understands, it is not a sound way of approaching one’s theology. Rather, God’s demonstration of power is grounded in reality, and it is evidenced in converted lives which are holy, sound, reasonable, and dedicated to Jesus Christ. Let us live out our Christian walk in such a manner so that we too will be responsible bearers of this marvelous message.

Lord God, help us to depart from sensational theology which does nothing to convert the soul. Instead, help us to be properly grounded in Your word which is, all by itself, a

demonstration of Your power. It is fully sufficient to convert the vilest sinner into a saint. Help us to act reasonably, and in accord with this word so that others may see our actions and be willing to taste Your word, see that it tells of You, and to find that You are indeed good! To Your glory we pray, Amen.

And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, 1 Thessalonians 1:6

The word “followers” gives the sense of imitation or emulation. It is used by Paul five times and once by the author of Hebrews. Those who came to faith in Christ became imitators of Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy as just described in the previous verse. In so doing, they became imitators of them “and of the Lord.”

These three men were imitators of Christ Jesus, and those in Thessalonica followed suit, striving to emulate Him through the example they had seen in these three ministers of the gospel. Those in the church perceived the contrast between the infinitely glorious Lord, and their own fallen conduct. They noted how Paul and those with them lived differently than the world at large, having submitted to Christ, and they then emulated what they saw.

Paul then notes they did this by “having received the word in much affliction.” This affliction is partly referred to in Acts 17:5-9. There was a great conflict over the presentation of the gospel. That conflict was initiated by the Jews who refused to believe, and it caused no little consternation. But those who did believe were actually strengthened in their faith through this, even to possessing “joy of the Holy Spirit.”

The furnace of affliction can, and often does, produce great joy in those who are so afflicted. This is all the truer for those who are in Christ. They see the conflict around them and are comforted that this world is just a temporary abode. The promise which is found in Christ Jesus transcends this walk of woe, and it gives us comfort, and even joy, to know that we will be granted something far, far better when this earthly walk is complete. The choicest and richest blessings lie ahead for those in Christ, and so the joy of that thought is where we can put our hopes when the troubles of this world hem us in. This is what those in Thessalonica came to understand.

Life application: As a believer in Christ, we have the same troubles and trials as anyone else in the world. We are not exempt from times of sickness, loss, and frustration. However, these times of trial are temporary and will someday be behind us. For the world at large who believe this is all there is, of course bad times are a reason for being

down. There is nothing else to look forward to, and so any troubles rob them of the precious few moments they believe they possess. But for those in Christ, a life of troubles is a moment which will pass away into eternal glory. O faithful Christian, don't let the world overcome your joy. Instead, because you have overcome the world, be filled with joy!

Lord God, as a believer in Christ, there is no reason why the world should overcome our joy. Even if a million bad things come tumbling down upon us, it is just a temporary blip on the way to glory. Instead of being overwhelmed with grief, we need to remember that because of Christ we have overcome the world! May this surety we possess be reflected in contentment, and even joy, at all times. Amen.

...so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.

1 Thessalonians 1:7

This verse builds upon the words of the previous one. Together they read –

“And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit,⁷ so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.”

There is a minor dispute between Greek texts here as to whether this should read “examples,” meaning the individual members of the church, or “example,” meaning the church as a whole. What is probably correct is that it is the individuals who are addressed (the words are plural in the Greek) in verse 6. However, Paul could now be lumping them into one body and saying that as a group they are now an example to the others. Either way, nothing affecting doctrine is lost in either option.

Those at Thessalonica, having received the word and become followers of the Lord through that reception, had become excellent examples to the believers in both Macedonia and Achaia. They received the word in their affliction and were filled with the joy of the Holy Spirit in the process. The word “example” is *tupos*. It is the basis for the modern word “type.” Thus, they were a model church for others to see and to follow.

Thessalonica was an important city within Macedonia, and the example would be easily seen and emulated by other churches there. But their example went even as far as Achaia. That is the part of Greece where Corinth was the capital. The exemplary caliber of this group has become well known even to locations quite distant from them.

Life application: If someone is passing through your town and stops at church on Sunday, what kind of a message would they carry on with them concerning you and your congregation? Would they say, “What a great bunch of people! If you ever go through that town, stop and fellowship with them.” Or would they have words less friendly to say about you? Be aware of visitors that come to worship and make an outward effort to treat them with a spirit of fellowship and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Heavenly Father, what kind of churches do each of us attend? Are we obedient to Your word first and foremost? Or are we more concerned about appealing to the masses, despite what Your word says? Do we tolerate perversion in our congregation, or do we uphold Your will by standing firm on Your word? And how are we perceived as individuals? Are we friendly to guests, or do we quietly ignore them? Help us to be attentive to these things, and to be pleasing in Your sight. Amen.

For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything. 1 Thessalonians 1:8

The word “For” here supports his words of the previous verse which said that those in Thessalonica “became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.” He then says to them that “from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth.”

The word for “sounded forth,” *exécheó*, is found only here in Scripture. It indicates “to resound,” and it carries the idea of propagating. They had not just received the word, but they had sent it forth as well, telling the good news which they had believed. They were as the trumpet of God, calling out the word. This is similar to what is seen of the word going out to Israel in the Old Testament -

“Cry aloud, spare not;
Lift up your voice like a trumpet;
Tell My people their transgression,
And the house of Jacob their sins.” Isaiah 58:1

Likewise, Jesus’ voice is said to be like a trumpet in Revelation 1:10. It is obvious that they possessed a desire concerning that which they had obtained. It was something they wished all others to believe in and grasp as well.

Paul then goes even further than his words of verse 7 by saying, “not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place.” Paul could see that the conversion of those in

Thessalonica was so strong, that wherever one of them traveled, he joyfully shared the good news, even in areas which were not culturally similar. They became, as it were, a missionary church. Just as Paul had gone as a missionary to them, they followed the pattern as they went forth from their home.

Paul then sums up the thought with the words, “Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything.” It is a statement of the surety of the faith of those in Thessalonica. Their faith toward God was valid, and it then conformed to the words of the Great Commission given by Jesus. He said that His disciples should go and make disciples of all nations, and this is what they were willing to do. In the genuineness of their faith, Paul says, “so that we do not need to say anything.”

This is a phrase Paul will use three times in this epistle, but nowhere else. It is an indication that where those from Thessalonica had gone and told the good news, there was no need to go and re-tell it. The word went forth, it went forth correctly, and it had met its intended purpose. Paul could feel satisfied in the surety of what the recipients of the message from those at Thessalonica had heard.

Life application: How excited are you about the gospel you heard and received? Are you willing to open your mouth and speak it out? If you’ve lost the fire you once had, redirect! Your words may be the only chance precious souls will ever have to hear the good news about Jesus. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so.

Lord God, help each of us to be bold in our proclamation of the good news which we once heard. Help us never to keep inside that which can lead others to a restored relationship with You. Precious souls are going off to their final destiny, and our words may be the only thing they ever have to be granted the blessed salvation which is found in Christ Jesus our Lord. Help us to be bold and speak. Amen.

For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 1 Thessalonians 1:9

“They” of this verse is speaking of those noted in verse 8. It includes those in Macedonia and Achaia and “in every place.” Wherever people had come across the believers who were from Thessalonica, Paul says they themselves declared “concerning us what manner of entry we had to you.”

What this means is that Paul and those with him didn’t need to speak of anything about their time spent at Thessalonica. Instead, wherever they went, they found that the

message which they had originally brought to the Thessalonians had taken root and was effective. This was testified to by any and all who encountered a person who was from Thessalonica. Paul, and those with him, had a most effective entry. The door was opened, and they, along with their gospel message, was heartily received. The evidence was, as he says, “how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.”

There are two parts to this. First, they turned to God from idols. This was a necessary part of the equation, and it is something that they did with zeal. Pagan idolatry is something warned against throughout Scripture. False idols are nothing, and serving such a thing shows a complete disconnect with any notion of there being one true God.

However, this is only one half of the equation. Many people will turn from idols in order to serve “God,” but they do not worship Him in the proper manner. An example of this is Mormonism. Mormons go around the world to make converts. They convert people from pagan idols, but they do not lead them to the truth of God as is revealed in Jesus Christ. But Paul notes next that those in Thessalonica not only turned to God from idols, but they did so in order “to serve the living and true God.”

He will explain this more in the next verse. The conversion of the Thessalonians was away from idolatry, and toward God, and it was done without having been duped into a false idea of what God is like. Their service was to Him as the true God. Salvation had come to them, and then this truth about them became evident to all.

Life application: There is one God, and many believe this, but they do not serve this one true God properly. They fail to come to Him through His Mediator. But this is what God has ordained for us, and this is what is expected of us. No other path will do. We must approach God through Jesus Christ, and it must be Jesus as Scripture reveals Him. There is the true Jesus, and there are false Christs. Let us be sure to trust in the true Christ.

Lord God, Your word reveals Christ Jesus in both testaments, in every book of those testaments, and on every page of every book. It is all about Him. Until we accept this, it is a mysterious book which doesn't seem to make much sense. But when we realize Who and what is being revealed, it all comes together beautifully. Praise You, O God, for showing us Your heart through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

...and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come. 1 Thessalonians 1:10

This verse is a continuation of the previous one. Together they read –

“For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,¹⁰ and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *even* Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.”

The verbs “serve” and “wait” are both infinitive, and thus they reflect the condition in which the Thessalonians stood by turning to God from idols. In particular, Paul will focus on the second coming of Christ in this epistle, and so the condition of waiting is highlighted here now. Even their serving is set in anticipation of His coming again. If Christ were not to come again, and if we were not to be gathered to Him at His coming, then what would be the point of serving Him. This serving in anticipation of His coming is more specifically detailed in chapter 4, just before the magnificent details of the rapture are provided.

This is what Paul now refers to with the words, “and to wait for His Son from heaven.” It is the great and blessed hope of the Christian. We believe that Christ is coming again, and that He will lead us to a new and better life than anything we could ever now imagine. It is also the purpose of taking the Lord’s Supper. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11 –

“For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.” 1 Corinthians 11:26

It is Christ Jesus the Lord, “whom He raised from the dead,” that we remember in this sacrament. We proclaim His death until He comes because He is alive. Otherwise, if He were still dead, He would not be coming. But God raised Him from the dead, “*even* Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.” Rather than “deliver” and “to come,” it should say “is delivering” and “is coming.” The verbs are present participles. Jesus gave His life for us, bearing the wrath that we deserve for the sins of this life. It is His cross which paid the penalty for our sins and covered them. Because of this, there is no coming wrath for us. For those who reject Him, however, that is all that can be expected. God is righteous, and He must judge sin. It is His judgment upon man which is the wrath to come.

It is an important consideration, though, that Paul is tying in the coming of the Lord for His people with wrath which is coming. It is true that we are individually saved from God’s wrath in judgment. But Paul, in so tying the coming of the Lord with wrath, is pointing to a particular wrath which will be poured out on the world as a whole. He will build on this thought in Chapter 5, and also in 2 Thessalonians. Christ saves us from

individual wrath, but He will also deliver us from the collective wrath which is coming upon the whole world at some future point.

Life application: It is rather sad that many Christians claim the rapture will come before war or calamity will occur in their own land. This is especially true in America. They act as if we are exempt from such things. This is naive, and it is harmful. Christians have been butchered for 2000 years, and if the Lord tarries, we may also face great persecution and death. The left, even in America, would like nothing more than to exterminate faithful Bible-believing Christians. If this happens, we must be prepared for it. But there is a time of great wrath, beyond our ability to imagine, which is coming upon the world. Before that time comes, the Lord will return for His people at the rapture. This is our hope, and this is what the Bible promises.

Lord God, we sure look forward to the day You send Jesus to swoop us up and out of here. Should we face war or major persecution before that day, give us the strength to endure it as so many faithful believers have done in the past. We do know though that the time of wrath which will come upon the whole world is also coming, and that You have promised to keep us from that time. What a blessed hope we have. Thank You for Christ Jesus who will deliver us from that day. Amen.

CHAPTER 2

For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain.

1 Thessalonians 2:1

The word “For” here is referring back to verses 1:5 and 1:9. In both of those verses, Paul spoke of himself, and those with him, and the results that came about because of their ministry. Now, to confirm what he has spoken and as a lead-in to his comments of verses 2:2-12, he will give his words of this verse. His note of confirmation comes from the words “For you yourselves know...”

There was nothing hidden in their coming, and the believers at Thessalonica saw everything that occurred, as well as all that resulted from it. Because of this, they were fully aware of what Paul is referring to. Next he says, “brethren.” In more modern translations, the masculine is being dropped for political correctness, but that is a silly way of translating Scripture. The masculine is used, just as it is in English, when speaking of the whole. It includes females if they are present. If only females are present, or if females only are being spoken to, then the words will be so addressed.

He then finishes the verse with, “that our coming to you was not in vain.” Charles Ellicott notes that the words “not in vain” draw a bit too much attention to the result of their coming. Rather, it should be translated, “not vain.” It then appropriately gives the sense of “not purposeless.” Their coming was not powerless, but rather it was effectual in bearing fruit as was hoped for by any missionary who has the desire and intent of obtaining converts.

As noted above, Paul will spend the next verses explaining to them the conduct that he and his associates demonstrated among them, thus setting themselves as examples to be emulated.

Life application: When one wants to obtain certain conduct from others, it can be with a heavy hand, as if a bully, or it can be as one who sets an example for others to follow. Paul chose the latter when he came among a new group of people. He explained the gospel, and he lived out how one converted by the gospel should act. Rather than dictating to others what they should do, we should follow Paul’s lead and act in accord with being a true saint, in a gentle manner and caring for those we minister to.

Lord God, help each of us to display a caring, gentle, and loving attitude towards those we encounter. Help us to not be bold and direct unless the situation demands it. There

are, of course, times when we need to speak firm words of correction for those who are obstinate or dull, but until they demonstrate such qualities, help us to be gracious and kind. It isn't always easy when we face our own limitations, and so give us strength and wisdom in this, O Lord. Amen.

But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict.

1 Thessalonians 2:2

Paul had just said that his arrival, along with his associates, was not vain. Now, building on that, he says, “But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know...”

What this is saying is that such treatment would have caused most people to just give up. The spiteful treatment at Philippi that he is referring to is recorded in Acts 16:6-40. It included a public beating and imprisonment. After this, they next went along their mission route, arriving at Thessalonica. This is recorded in Acts 17:1-10. Despite this truly shameful treatment at Philippi, these men were not deterred in continuing on with their missionary work.

The words “as you know” are written as much for us as they are for those at Thessalonica. If what he said wasn't true, then any person who knew it could have simply said as much. But history bears out that the account occurred, and those at Thessalonica were fully aware of it. In other words, they knew what had occurred in Philippi, and it only more poignantly demonstrated the high caliber of Paul and his associates. They had no idea what type of reception they would receive as they proceeded, and yet they boldly continued on where no Christian missionary had gone before.

With their fortitude evident, he says that they “were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict.” With a full trust in God that they were meant to continue the mission trip through Macedonia, they proceeded onward. Paul knew this to be true because of what it says in Acts 16:9, 10 –

“And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.”¹⁰ Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.”

The Lord would not prompt them to go on such a mission if He were not going to be with them. The spiteful treatment at Philippi turned out to be exactly what was needed anyway. It bolstered confidence of those there who believed, it continued to confirm the legal proclamation of the gospel, and it brought salvation to the jailer who was given charge over Paul and Silas (Silvanus).

Rather than being negatively affected and weakened by what occurred, Paul and those with him, understood that these things were divinely orchestrated. Thus, they were further emboldened. This was despite “much conflict.”

The Greek word translated as “conflict” is *agōni*. As you can see, it is where our modern word “agony” is derived. It indicates a contest or a struggle. In secular Greek, which his audience would have been thinking of, it speaks of a gathering to the Greek games such as the Olympiads. It is a great struggle as if they were in a battle or a wrestling match against the spiritual foes of the church, fighting for the precious saints that they were called to minister to. And yet, despite this struggle, they continued on, emboldened by God.

Life application: The book is written, the future is set, and we have an absolute surety that Christ is in complete control of our destiny. No matter what happens in this earthly life, we are safe and secure in His capable hands. As this is so, why would we be timid in our proclamation of Christ Jesus, or why should we care about what could happen because of it? Get up, go out, and speak! Jesus. It is all about Jesus!

Lord God, Christ Jesus died for our sins, and He was raised to eternal life. This is what we believe. And we believe that we too will be raised in the same fashion. And so why on earth should we be timid concerning what people think when we speak about Him? How silly. They can kill the body, but Christ already possesses our soul! Grant us the fortitude to stand up and speak! Jesus... it is all about Jesus. Why should we keep that precious news quiet? Help us in this, O Lord. Amen.

For our exhortation *did* not *come* from error or uncleanness, nor *was it* in deceit.

1 Thessalonians 2:3

The word “For” is based upon the words of the previous verse. Paul and his associates were bold in speaking the gospel. It was an exhortation based in the truth of God. The word exhortation, *paraklésis*, is “a personal exhortation that delivers the ‘evidence that stands up in God’s court’” (HELPS Word Studies). Paul knew this. Therefore, the words of the gospel message they proclaimed, having been pronounced because they are God’s

plan of salvation “*did not come* from error or uncleanness.” The preposition he uses, *ek*, gives the sense of “from” or “out of.”

If they are of God, then there could be nothing of error in them, nor could there be anything profane in them. The word for “error” gives the sense of deception which causes one to wander into sin. Obviously, if God’s plan is to bring man out of the bondage of sin, then His message will be completely free of such error.

The second word, translated as “uncleanness,” gives the sense of ritual impurity. This can come about by leprosy, an open infection, childbirth, touching a corpse, and so forth. Each of these was something described in the book of Leviticus. If such uncleanness required a sin-offering when it was over, then obviously it speaks of the general sin-nature of man evidenced in such uncleanness. Again, the gospel is God’s plan to bring man out of sin, and therefore the gospel is – in itself – completely free of uncleanness, and it is what makes complete cleansing possible.

Paul then changes the preposition for his last noun. Instead of *ek*, he uses *en*. It means “in.” Their message did not stem from personal deceit, as if they were trying to bait their audience. Here the word used is *dolos*. It gives the sense of using a decoy to snare people through deception in order to exploit them in their naive state. Paul is saying that the motives of himself, and those with him, were pure and without any cunning. Instead, they genuinely presented the gospel from their hearts, knowing that it is the one thing that can remove from them the emotional pain of a fallen life.

Elsewhere, Paul speaks of people who present false gospels, and also people who present the true gospel, but in deceit. The first he warns against in the most vehement terms. We are never to allow a false gospel to be presented without challenging it, and we are to have a sound enough knowledge of the real gospel to be able to do the challenging when necessary. For the second category, Paul shows little care. If the true gospel is being proclaimed, even if it is by someone who simply hopes to profit off the message, he knew that God would deal with such a person. His words concerning this are found in Philippians 1:15-18 –

“Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill: ¹⁶The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; ¹⁷but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁸What then? Only *that* in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.”

Life application: Let us be fully versed on the true gospel, and also let us be ready and willing to defend against any false gospel. The soundness of the gospel message is far more important than trying to determine the heart of the person presenting the message. The Lord will deal with those whose hearts are not right with Him, but we have an obligation to deal with those whose message is not in accord with His word. Be prepared; know your Bible.

Lord God, how can we determine if the gospel we have heard is true or not unless we check it out? And how can we defend against a false message unless we study and know Your word? Grant us wisdom enough to simply pick up the Bible, read it and study it, and then apply its truths to our lives. And help us to warn those who are being misled by false words. Help us to follow through with this, to Your honor and glory. Amen.

But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. 1 Thessalonians 2:4

Paul, on several occasions, completely disregards the opinions of others concerning his doctrine. For example, in 1 Corinthians 4:3,4, he says –

“But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. ⁴For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord.”

Again in Galatians 1:10, he says –

“For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.”

This is his same train of thought here in 1 Thessalonians 2:4. He begins with “But.” That is given as a contrast to the thought of the previous verse. He, and those with him, did not proclaim the gospel from error or uncleanness, nor did they proclaim it in deceit. Instead, he says, “But we have been approved by God.” The words of verse 2 were given to show how fallen man conducts his affairs. But Paul shows the contrast in how he and those with him conducted theirs. They were approved by God, being led by the Spirit and having been examined and found faithful in their proclamation, as the Greek word translated as “approved” implies. They had passed the necessary test of God by holding fast to His message, and thus they were “entrusted with the gospel.”

The gospel is God's message of redemption to the people of the world. Its source is from God, and the message which Paul proclaimed was fully in line with that divine source. He did not deviate as others were prone to do. He makes this evident by saying, "even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts." While others had fallen, human reasons for proclaiming salvation messages, Paul and those with him completely rejected such things. Pleasing men was of no value to them when they knew that it is "God who tests our hearts." In these words, he repeats the same word which was just translated as "approved." God had tested them, and they had passed His most stringent examination.

Life application: Time and time again, the Bible says that God searches the hearts and minds of humanity. As He is omnipresent, this is an obvious truth. Do you consider this as you conduct your life's affairs? There is nothing unknown to Him; even your darkest secrets are fully exposed to Him. Remember this as you go about your life. Consider your ways and align them with what is pleasing to God. That alone is a mark of faith worthy of rewards.

Lord God, though we know that you are all-knowing and all-present, we often don't consider that. We try to hide our secret faults and sins from You. But this is a futile effort indeed. Help us to be people of faith who constantly consider that You are with us, watching us, and evaluating us. In this, we will be more mindful of doing the things which are pleasing to You, and avoiding those things which You find wrong. Yes, be with us in this, O God. Amen.

For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness—God is witness. 1 Thessalonians 2:5

Paul has been defending his presentation of the gospel message, and the sincerity of himself and those with him as well. He continues with this by saying, "For." He had just said that they spoke, not as pleasing men, but as tested by God. The word "For" builds upon this by saying, "For neither at any time did we use flattering words." The word translated as "flattering," *kolakeias*, is not found anywhere else in Scripture.

There was no flattering, or buttering up, of the those they talked to. They didn't tell them how smart they were, or note anyone who lived a lavish lifestyle, as if fawning over them. Instead, they came without any pretense at all, and they simply presented the gospel. It was probably a presentation similar to that made in Acts 17 when Paul spoke to those in Athens. While there at the Areopagus, he told them their state, he told them of their need for Jesus, and he explained to them in their common language how they

could be saved. At the end of his discourse, it says that many rejected him, but some believed.

He continues on in this verse by saying, “as you know.” They were fully aware of how he dealt with them, and so his words in the letter are to remind them of this, not to convince them of something they were previously unaware of. After this, he says, “nor a cloak for covetousness.”

The word he uses for “cloak” gives the idea of that which is evident to anyone who sees. In other words, if they had a cloak for covetousness, their true state would be hidden under a false covering of piousness, but underneath would be greedy hearts of covetousness. Rather than this, their outward appearance matched what lay below in their hearts.

He then finishes up the verse with “God is witness.” He can only expect those in Thessalonica to accept his testimony at face value in matters which concerned them. Any other places they went to evangelize, and their attitude towards those people, would be unknown to the Thessalonians. Therefore, Paul calls God as his witness to confirm that what he says is true. His words are reliable, and his testimony is sound.

Life application: It should be that our lives are lived in such a way that we are always the epitome of integrity. We should never have a false cloak which covers up hearts which are covetous or deceitful. Let us remember that we live in the Lord’s presence at all times, and that we are accountable to Him for how we live out our lives.

Lord God, You are always with us, and you always see our deeds. You search our hearts, and You test our ways. Because of this, help us live in fear of being displeasing to you. Help our hearts not to be covetous or deceitful. Instead, help us to be faithful followers of You at all times. May we stand accepted and approved concerning our deeds when we stand before You and receive our fair and impartial judgment. Help us in this Lord. Amen.

Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. 1 Thessalonians 2:6

Paul continues on with the things they did not do when they came to Thessalonica. In the previous verse, it was seen that they didn’t use flattering words, and they didn’t wear a cloak for covetousness. Now, he says, “Nor did we seek glory from men.” Despite their bringing the good news of Christ and having made converts of those he is now

writing to, they never claimed some type of special recognition because of it. There was no need to give them praise or applause, as if they were somehow special in some way.

Today, titles such as “apostle” and “bishop” precede some people’s names on their social media profiles. People like this are looking for glory from men. They desire to be recognized as bearing a special position which entitles them to honor and accolades. Stating an official title to someone while he is conducting his official duties may be a mark of respect, but to simply claim a title for all the world to see at all times is not exalting of Christ, but of self. Paul is telling those in Thessalonica that he, and those with them, shunned such glory “either from you or from others.”

Not only did they not look for such glory there, but it was their standard way of dealing with all people. They simply came as men with a message greater than themselves, humbly telling of the glory of Christ. However, despite coming in this way, he does acknowledge that “we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.”

The Greek here literally says, “to be in weight.” It is a term unique to the Bible, and it means to be burdensome. As apostles, or sent ones, they could have expected to be paid for their services. Paul writes about this elsewhere, noting that those who minister in the gospel should be recompensed for their efforts, but these men did not ask for pay, lodging, or anything else. They let go of the rights which they were due in order to not be a burden on their hearers.

As a note of doctrine, the term “apostles of Christ” does not necessarily mean that they were all designated to the apostolic office as Paul was. Instead, it is being used of Silvanus and Timothy in connection with Paul. He uses the plural to speak of all of them, while he is the only official “Apostle” by designation. Even if the title is spoken of all three of them, as some assume, it is only in the sense of being a messenger of Christ (as the term means), but without the authority of the true apostolic office, of which Paul alone, among the three of them, possessed. There is no definite article in front of “apostles,” and so the rendering of the King James Version, “the apostles of Christ,” is incorrect. It leads to a faulty view of the status of Silvanus and Timothy.

Life application: In the last chapter of Hebrews, the writer twice encourages his readers to acknowledge the spiritual leaders among them. He says to remember them and consider their conduct, and also to obey them and be submissive to them. This is good and proper, but it must also be mixed with discernment. If a ruler does not display the biblical character of a leader then that person obviously doesn’t deserve the respect of the office he holds. Be discerning first, and then grant to your spiritual leader’s respect

and submission. Assuredly, they get a lot of grief in the office they hold, and so deal gently with them in regard to their position.

Lord God, how good and wonderful it is to share in the fellowship of Christ our Lord with other believers. There are faithful followers in every nation, and who speak every language imaginable, and yet we are united through our faith in His work. Help us to put aside divisions which should not exist, and to come to you as brothers and sisters united through the common bond of what He has done for us. All glory to Christ our Lord. Amen.

But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing *mother* cherishes her own children.

1 Thessalonians 2:7

For the past two verses, Paul has explained how he and those with him did not act towards those at Thessalonica. They didn't use flattering words, they didn't seek to be glorified by their hearers, etc. Now he tells them how they did act by starting with the contrasting word, "But." In this, he is ensuring that they see a difference in their approach than others who may have come to them with other religious beliefs. Instead, he says they "were gentle among you." There was nothing overbearing in their nature, nothing demanding, and nothing which would indicate expecting payment or special attention to their needs.

It must be noted that he could not have written this if it were not true. If the Thessalonians received a letter which did not match what really occurred, they would have laughed, torn up the letter, and tossed it in the fire. Instead, it has been carefully maintained for 2000 years, testifying to the truth of the words it contains. And so, Paul continues. Not only were they gentle, but it was "just as a nursing *mother* cherishes her own children."

The word for "nursing" is *trophos*, a word unique to the Bible. It signifies a care-giver who sustains someone by nourishing and tending to them like a nurse. It can mean a mother or any other such care-giver. However, in this case, the added word "mother" is probably correct. One reason is that the thought of a mother caring for her children is one of an especially close bond. But another particular reason is that Paul will return to the parent symbolism in verse 11 when he says, "as a father."

Their care of those in Thessalonica was displayed in different ways in order to obtain different outcomes. One was as a mother, one was as a father, at other times it is as brothers. In the case of their gentleness among the church, they cared for them even as closely and as tenderly as a mother would care for and nurse her own children. The

metaphor is heart-warming and touching. And again, he could not have written this in a letter back to the church if it was not so. The words themselves confirm the truth of the claim.

Life application: How willing are you to act in a gentle and humble manner towards those who have less understanding of the Lord than you? It is true that there are plenty of people who are not well-versed in Scripture, and yet they act as if they are the finest of biblical scholars. Plenty of them, plus. Just ignore those folks. Don't get into debates with them as you will only waste your time. But for those who are truly seeking to know the truth, if you possess it, pass it on to them in a kind and gentle manner.

Lord God, thank You for those kind and gentle teachers of the word who carefully explain what You are telling us, and who are willing to repeat things, even many times, until it sinks into our heads. Keep us from know-it-alls who know nothing and who just want to hear themselves speak. Instead, direct us to the right teachers who will lead us down the proper path of Your precious word. Amen.

So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.

1 Thessalonians 2:8

These words tie back to the simile of the mother nursing and caring for her children of the previous verse. The Greek word translated as "So" is even stronger in intent. It means, "Because of this," or "Along with this." What he says is following along in the same train of thought. In this state, and as a nursing mother to those at Thessalonica, Paul says he, and those with him, were "affectionately longing for you."

They had come to Thessalonica and had developed such a closeness with them that there was a yearning to share in life with them. This was so much the case that, as he says, they "were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives."

As nursing mothers, Paul and those with him not only imparted the spiritual milk of the word of life, the gospel, but they also were willing to expend themselves completely. Just as a mother would tirelessly give her all for her children, so were they also willing to do. They were prepared to exhaust themselves, or even lay down their lives, for their beloved church in Thessalonica. This was, as he continues, "because you had become dear to us."

The bond of affection which had grown in their hearts was so close and personal that they were united as a family – parents caring for children and expending their lives for them. Paul will continue to explain this in the next verses.

Life application: When you lead someone to the Lord, do you consider it as something that is done and over with, or do you consider it as a first step in their new lives? It is good to offer your phone number or email address and to express to them that you will make the necessary time available to them to instruct them in this new life which they have received. In so doing, you will be ensuring that their life in Christ will develop properly. Try to remember to do this if you are honored enough to lead someone to acceptance of the gospel message.

Lord God, it's a new day, and a new chance for us to go out and tell people about Your wonderful goodness. Help us to open our mouths and share the marvelous story of redemption which is found in the giving of Your Son. Help us not to be timid, but to be bold and willing to speak. Who cares if people are offended? Better offended in life than remorseful at the end of it. Grant us the fortitude to speak! Amen.

For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God.
1 Thessalonians 2:9

“For you remember, brethren” is Paul’s way of recalling what he is about to say to the minds of those in Thessalonica. As has been previously noted, he could not write these things if they were not true. When asking another to recall something that didn’t occur, a person only makes himself look foolish. But Paul’s words are true, and they are tied to what he just said about not only imparting the gospel, “but also our own lives.” He is expanding on that now by showing the extent of the labors he and those with him went through.

They exhausted themselves in “labor and toil.” This is how they imparted their lives. The labor is a description of the kind of work they engaged in, and the toil explains the intensity of it. They worked physically, and they did so heartily. They earned their own wages, and did not rely on the assistance of the newly established church.

He then notes that they were “laboring day and night.” Surely this included work such as Paul’s profession in tent-making, and it also included teaching of the gospel. They did these things all day and into the night for a specific reason which was, as he says, “that we might not be a burden to any of you.”

Their intent in this was to let them know of the sincerity of the message they brought. If they had come into town, shared a message of redemption, and then relied on those who followed them to support them, it might call into question the truth of the message, or at least the truth of their sincerity concerning the message. But by laboring in order to meet their own needs, Paul demonstrates that they were wholly sincere about the words of the message, and their devotion to those words.

In saying that “we preached to you the gospel of God” without being a burden, he is calling all this to their minds. In doing this now in the letter, he is once again establishing in their hearts and minds the sincerity of their actions then and asking them to believe in the sincerity of the words of the epistle now. Why would they be so sincere in person, and then make up a false message while absent? There would be no profit in it, and so his recalling their former conduct is solidifying their truthfulness now as well.

Life application: Once you present yourself in an insincere manner to someone, it will be long remembered. There will always be a question in the back of that person’s mind about whether you can be trusted now or not. By demonstrating an honest, hard-working, and sincere attitude at all times, you are able to establish yourself in a positive way in all of your future dealings with others. By recalling your actions of the past for them to remember, you give them a baseline by which they can continue to go forward while trusting you.

Heavenly Father, help us to be people of integrity that will never bring a stain upon Your name through acting dishonestly, or through a lazy or uncaring attitude. Once such an attitude is evident, it will always be remembered. Trust is a hard thing to obtain, and it is a harder thing to get back once it is lost. And so be with us as we interact with others. May they see our actions in a positive light, and be willing to search You out because of it. Amen.

You *are* witnesses, and God *also*, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; 1 Thessalonians 2:10

Just as in verse 2:1 where he said, “For you yourselves know,” Paul again reminds those in Thessalonica that they were “witnesses” of the conduct he, Silvanus, and Timothy displayed among them. But further, he says, “and God also.” It is a reminder that they conducted themselves in the manner they did for the sake of the Thessalonians, but they did it with a conscience towards God, knowing that He is always aware of all actions, and even the motives behind those actions. This then is a reaffirmation of the statement in verse 5, “God is witness.”

With the eyes of all of the new believers on them, and with God's ever-watchful gaze as well, Paul reminds them of "how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves." The word "devoutly" gives the sense of that which is sanctioned by the Lord, and thus worthy of reverence. The word "justly" gives the sense of being judicially approved. And finally, the word "blamelessly" gives the sense of being morally pure, and thus above reproach.

Paul asks the Thessalonians to remember the conduct that he and those with him displayed, and which they personally saw, for a particular reason. As they so acted, it was setting the example for those who believed to act as well. This will be explained in the verses to come. The thought actually begins, however, with the words, "among you who believe." This does not mean that they didn't act this way among unbelievers, but that those who came to believe were aware of their conduct. It was something they saw and felt was worthy of their attention and further investigation.

Nobody would voluntarily follow someone they had no respect for in regard to their conduct. As the Thessalonians followed them, received the message, and believed, it shows that the conduct of Paul and those with him had a positive effect on them.

Life application: One of the most common criticisms of Christians is that they are hypocrites. People note that they believe one thing, and yet they act in another way. It is true that this occurs, but if hypocrisy is a sin, and Christians first and foremost acknowledge that they are sinners, then there is often a misconception or a misunderstanding about the Christian by those who make such accusations. He has already acknowledged his imperfections, among which may be a seemingly hypocritical attitude at times. Despite this, it is important for believers to do their very best to act in accord with their words. This is the example that Paul sets in his epistles, and it was because of the premier example of Christ Jesus. Let us do our very best to live our lives in accord with His perfect conduct.

Lord God, Christ has come, and He has set the example for us to follow. We are to be devout, just, and blameless in our conduct. But we are also fallen and stumble from time to time. Help us in this. Give us the sense to walk in straight paths of righteousness, and to keep our eyes on Jesus. In this, we will certainly act in accord with Your will for us. Amen.

...as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father *does* his own children, 1 Thessalonians 2:11

Paul is continuing the thought of the previous verse which started with, “You *are* witnesses, and God *also*...” From there, he has been explaining how his conduct, along with those with him, was when they arrived at Thessalonica. And so continuing, he says, “as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you.”

Here the beginning word “as” is emphatic. It is an adverb which indicates “just as,” or “even so.” Further, he now goes from the plural address when speaking to the whole, to speaking to each individual by saying “every one of you.” Not a single person is passed over, and so each person individually could receive this letter as his own. Each one of them was instructed to remember how he was personally exhorted, comforted, and charged.

The church is a group of people, and so certain things are done collectively in it, but it is a group of individuals, and so there should be an attention given to each member as well. Paul not only did this when in person, but he is continuing that pattern in his letter to them. It is a beautiful touch from the Apostle’s heart. So much so that he tells them his care for each was given “as a father *does* his own children.”

He changes the metaphor here from the nursing mother of verse 7 to a caring father. Paul treated the church as a family, and he treated each person within the church as an individual family member who should be given special attention.

Again, he could not have written this to them unless it was true. If it were not so, they would have simply laughed at the letter and tossed it in the fire. But it was received, it was treasured, and it has been passed down to us as a reminder of the care given by Paul, and those with him, towards the church at Thessalonica.

Life application: Paul’s use of the family metaphors in this epistle should remind each of us that the church we attend is, in fact, like a family. As this is so, we should attempt to treat the other members of this family in that manner. Let us carry one another’s burdens and let us treat them with respect and care.

Lord God, You have given us the church so that we can share in You with other people collectively. And the individual church that we attend is a group of people who should remember this and tend to one another with respect and care. Help us not to be back-biters and troublemakers, but rather to act as brothers and sisters united in a common bond of love and caring. In this, surely You will be pleased. Amen.

...that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.
1 Thessalonians 2:12

This verse reads differently than Galatians 1:6 –

“I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel...”

As you can see, that is in the past tense – “who called you.” For this reason, the translators of some versions, such as the KJV, erringly changed this verse in 1 Thessalonians to “hath called.” They probably did this to clear up a seeming theological inconsistency, but that results in an incorrect translation. The verb here is a present participle, active. It should read “calls” or “is calling.” There is not any inconsistency. Paul was telling the Galatians that they had been called into the grace of Christ, and they stood in that grace which they were then turning away from.

Here in 1 Thessalonians, he is telling the congregation that though they have been called into God’s grace, they are still here in this life and must live it out until that grace is fully realized in their being gathered together to Him. Thus, they needed to (right now and continually) “walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.” As you can see, there is no contradiction. There is the calling, which is already granted, but it is not yet actualized. It is sad that translators will often change what the literal reading is because of misunderstandings about theology. Translators are to translate, not presuppose and then translate.

The purpose of this life in Christ is not merely to be called and then sit around waiting for Jesus to swoop us up and out of here, but to work out our calling daily. We are to tell others about Christ and do that in a spirit of grace and in a manner worthy of God. He has called; we have received; now we need to act in accord with that. Someday we will enter into his kingdom and glory, and so let us not now act in a manner which will bring regret, but in a manner which will show that we are truly thankful for having been called out of darkness and into His marvelous light.

Life application: Reading several translations of the Bible is always wise. The translators of the King James Version knew this and said as much in their preface remarks. They say that a “variety of Translations is profitable for the finding out of the sense of Scriptures.” Let us be wise and discerning, and let us not get captivated by one, fallible, translation of Scripture.

Lord God Almighty! Through Christ Jesus, You have called us out of darkness, and into the light of Your marvelous kingdom. Because of this, you have asked us to walk in a manner worthy of You while we are still here. Help us in this. Remind us of the great salvation which has been granted to us and help us to be proper stewards of our time that remains. May You be pleased with the conduct of our lives, lived out as sacrifices honorable and holy to You. Amen.

For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed *it* not *as* the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

1 Thessalonians 2:13

The words “For this reason” refer to the godly instruction and careful labors that Paul and those with him exerted in their evangelism of those in Thessalonica. It is “For this reason we also thank God without ceasing.” It is evident, even from these words, that their labors were not in vain. Instead they were a source of rejoicing. As he says, “because when you received the word of God which you heard from us.”

Here, the Greek reads in a different order, more accurately saying something like, “when you received the word *of your* hearing from us, even the word of God.” The reception of the word into the ear is directly equated with the word of God. In other words, they heard the word of God, and they understood it to be the word of God. This then is explained by the next words, “you welcomed *it* not *as* the word of men.” When the Thessalonians heard the word, it was as reasonable and obvious a presentation of the word of God as it could be. In hearing the gospel, it made such sense that it was, without a doubt, not something men had conjured up. Rather, Paul notes, “but as it is in truth, the word of God.”

It was understood, based on the conduct and labors of Paul and his associates, that they were transmitting a truthful message. The two things – the efforts of the evangelists, and the soundness of the message – made it perfectly clear that it was the word of God and not of men which they had been presented. It is this message as Paul says, “which also effectively works in you who believe.” The words “effectively works” are referring to the word, not to God. They are in the middle voice, and as is the case when used by both Paul and James, this middle voice is only of things. In this case, the thing is the word of God.

The word had effectively worked in Paul and his associates, and once it was heard and received by the believers in Thessalonica, it then effectively worked in them as well. This

will be further explained by Paul in the coming verses. The word will be shown to have changed them into new people with a new direction. Instead of being enemies of God, they had become people pleasing to Him.

Life application: Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. People's conduct will never be directed to that which is pleasing to God without them being presented the gospel message. There are people all over who do "good stuff," but without a conversion to Christ, the wall of enmity remains. Only in Christ is that removed. The church age seems to be ending. The world is taking a terrible path into utter wickedness, and many will be eternally separated from God unless they hear and receive the message of Christ Jesus. Speak and share while there is time!

Lord God, it should be pretty evident that the world is becoming exactly as Your word says it would. Wickedness is running rampant, people's love has grown cold, and the lines of morality are being butchered before our eyes. It is a sign that the time of this age is, in fact, coming to an end. Help us to be sound and faithful witnesses now while we can. Maybe some will turn and open their eyes to the truth of Your word before it is too late. This is our prayer for those who cross our paths. Help us to be the lights of faithfulness to Your word in this ever-darkening place. Amen.

For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they *did* from the Judeans, 1 Thessalonians 2:14

Paul just spoke of the favorable reception of the gospel message by those in Thessalonica, receiving it as the word of God. In that reception, they then spiritually joined together with the church in a sobering way. He explains this beginning with, "For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus." Paul is showing that there is a spiritual bond which has arisen between these Gentiles and those Jews who first received the gospel in Judea and who established churches there.

However, he is careful to note that they are being compared to the churches in Judea which are "in Christ Jesus." The word "church" in Greek is *ekklésia*. It simply means an assembly or a congregation. To a Greek who had never heard of Jesus, it wouldn't carry the meaning of "church" at all. And so for Paul to say *ekklésia*," but to not include the term "in Christ Jesus," could mean pretty much any assembly in Judea, even a synagogue.

He is specific with his words to ensure that those in Thessalonica understand that their actions imitate the actions of the Christian churches of Judea. He then next explains what that imitation is by saying, “For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they *did* from the Judeans.”

The book of Acts precisely details the ill treatment of the Jews who received Christ Jesus. They were made to suffer in various ways because of this newly found faith. Even Paul persecuted the churches, probably more than anyone else. It is this persecution by one’s own countrymen that Paul highlights as a bond of imitation between the church in Thessalonica and that in Judea.

The word he uses to describe the countrymen of those in Thessalonica is *sumphuletés*. It is a word used only this once in the Bible, and it indicates “of the same tribe.” Those who were close and of the same stock persecuted them in the same manner as the Jews who followed Christ were of the same stock as those by whom they were persecuted.

But there was an underlying truth which is often seen in the book of Acts. It was originally the Jews of the surrounding areas who spurred the Gentiles on to persecuting their own countrymen. In other words, the persecution normally originally stemmed from the Jews because of their hatred of the message of Christ. They would rile up the Gentiles to persecute their own countrymen, just as they themselves did to their own countrymen in Judea.

Life application: It is often the case that the most vehement resistance which Christians face, either directly or indirectly, comes from one’s own closest relatives. If you are facing this type of hatred, or even persecution, remember that it has been going on since the beginning of the church. Pray for them, don’t be contentious with them, and know that you are in the company of 2000 years’ worth of saints who have done likewise. It is to be an expected part of the life of faithful believers in Christ Jesus.

Heavenly Father, for those of us who have called on Christ Jesus as Lord, there are some who have family and close kinsmen who are actually hateful of their faith. In some instances, they are even persecuted – verbally or worse – simply because of a love of Jesus. Give those facing such trials the wisdom to handle things well, and to not lose their own testimony, but to stand firm on their faith while demonstrating patient love and kindness. Help each of us in this. Amen.

...who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men, 1 Thessalonians 2:15

Paul continues his thought of the previous verse which spoke of the persecution that the Thessalonians faced. They suffered from their own countrymen just as the church in Judea suffered at the hand of the Jews there. Expanding on that now, he says (of the Jews) that it was they “who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets.”

Paul, a Hebrew of Hebrews, and an Israelite from the tribe of Benjamin, now identified more with the believing Gentiles in Thessalonica than he did with his own countrymen according to the flesh. And this is even more poignant because he was once one of those who “killed the Lord Jesus.” He had rejected Christ, just as did most of his countrymen. Though he didn’t literally kill Jesus, he was a part of the group of people who did. It was they who also killed “their own prophets.”

These words ring back to the words of Jesus Himself when He spoke against the leaders of Israel in Matthew 23 –

²⁹“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, ³⁰ and say, ‘If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.’ ³¹ “Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. ³² Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers’ *guilt*. ³³ Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell? ³⁴ Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: *some* of them you will kill and crucify, and *some* of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, ³⁵ that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. ³⁶ Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.

-Matthew 23:29-36

After stating that the Jews had killed both Jesus and their own prophets, he then says that they “have persecuted us.” This literally says, “and have driven us out.” As noted in the previous verse, it was the Jews who normally incited the original persecution against Paul and those with him as they spoke to the Gentile believers. They would stir the Gentiles up and speak against the gospel, causing the Gentiles to then take matters into their own hands. It is a repeated pattern in Acts which shows the great enmity between the Jewish people and this newly established faith in Christ Jesus, the One who had fulfilled and thus nullified their law. They could not accept such a thing was possible, and they riled against the very notion of it in every way possible. The Thessalonians were

fully aware of the truth of this statement because it happened to Paul there as well. He and Silas were literally driven out of the area by the Jews.

But, in rejecting the message of Christ, which says that the law is fulfilled and annulled in Him, they became a group of people who “do not please God.” It is impossible to be saved through the Law of Moses. It was given as a temporary system to lead all people to an understanding of their need for Christ Jesus. In rejecting Christ, they could not be pleasing to God, because Christ – not the law – is God’s complete and final means of salvation for mankind, Jew and Gentile alike. Thus, they are “contrary to all men.”

They are contrary to believers in Christ because they have not come to accept that Christ is the fulfillment of their law. Instead, they speak against the Christian faith. Any Jew who comes to faith in Christ is shunned and is often even excommunicated from family and friends. They are contrary to all others because they feel that their law (which is actually annulled in Christ) sets them apart from all others. They feel that because of the Law of Moses, their sign of circumcision, and their adherence to the Sabbath, that they are righteous before God while all others are unrighteous. Thus, they are “contrary to all men.”

Life application: Pray for the eyes of all unbelievers to be opened to the truth of Christ. And pray for the Jewish people, collectively and individually, to see their need for the Messiah and call out to Him for salvation.

Lord God, Your word says there is but one way to be reconciled to You, and that is through the shed blood of the Lamb of God, Your Son and our Lord, Jesus. Help us to be brave in this world which is contrary to that message to speak out the truth about it. Help us to never waffle in our convictions, but to stand firm on them. Surely with this, you are pleased. Even in our dying moments, may we never lose faith in what we possess because of Jesus. Amen.

... forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up *the measure of their sins*; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.

1 Thessalonians 2:16

In the previous verse, Paul put a heavy blame on the Jews who “killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets.” He then said that they continued on by persecuting His apostles. In their actions, they did “not please God” and they were “contrary to all men.” One can see the bitterness he felt at their attitude towards God’s revelation of Himself throughout their history and even to the present time in which he was living.

He now further explains their conduct towards the apostles, and what that means, by saying that they (meaning the Jews) were “forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles.” As noted in previous verses, this is specifically highlighted, time and time again, in the book of Acts. The Jews doggedly pursued Paul and those with him. They came between them and the Gentiles, stirring up arguments and fomenting every kind of trouble possible for them.

However, the message of the apostles to the Gentiles was so “that they may be saved.” These words are speaking of the inclusion of Gentiles in the plan of salvation. In other words, the Jews not only didn’t want the saving message spoken to the Gentiles, they didn’t even want the Gentiles to know that they could be saved.

This is certainly at the heart of why the Jews riled against the message. They so disdained the thought of the Gentiles being saved by God’s grace, that they were willing to do almost anything in order for the message to be stopped. It meant that there was an ending of their law, and a new dispensation of grace and mercy apart from that law – for any who simply believed by faith, Jew or Gentile. The very notion of it seemed incredible, and thus impossible to tolerate.

But Paul continues by saying that the striving of the Jews only brought trouble upon themselves. The result was “always to fill up *the measure* of their sins.” The words here need to be understood properly. They literally mean “unto the filling up.” There is a certain amount of sin that the Jews could expect to be dismissed by God through His grace and mercy, but there is a point in which that amount would be filled up, and beyond which only destruction could be the result. This same concept is true with any given nation, church, or person. There is a point where sin finally fills up to its measure, and then only wrath can be the inevitable result. This is what Paul is saying concerning his people of national heritage. They had filled up the measure of their sins, and he knew, as he says, “that wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.”

Paul knew that the time had come, that Israel had rejected Christ, and that there was no remedy left for them as a nation. The cup was full, the wrath had been ordained, and it was only a matter of time before the wine would be poured out. This would be realized at the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, and the dispersion of the nation to the four corners of heaven.

Life application: The Law of Moses told the nation of Israel what they could expect as they heaped up sins against God. Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 give exacting details of what the Lord would do to them. These things were fulfilled once in the Babylonian

exile, and the second time in the Roman dispersion. However, God promised restoration for Israel after their time of punishment. It doesn't matter if they deserve it or not. What matters is what God has promised. How terrible that Christians ignore the decision of God because of their hatred of the Jews. God has spoken, God has performed, and so we simply need to accept what He has done and watch as history unfolds marvelously before our eyes.

Lord God, Your word told Israel what would happen to them if they rejected what You offered to them; punishment and exile. It happened once in exile to Babylon, and it happened a second time as they were dispersed to the four corners of the earth. But that time of punishment is ending, and You are regathering Israel for the final demonstration of Your merciful hand towards them. Who are we to fight against that? Instead, we can see Your word fulfilled, Your goodness displayed, and the soon to be converted hearts of Your people. Great stuff for us to behold. Thank You for the confidence we have because of the surety of Your word. Amen.

But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire.

1 Thessalonians 2:17

Paul has been speaking of the Jews who had been opposed to the gospel message, and who had done their best to keep him and those with him from sharing it with the Gentiles. After his thoughts about them, he now says, "But we." The words are set in contrast to what he said about them. Instead of fighting against getting the message to the Gentiles, their longing was not only to share it with them, but to continue fellowshiping with them. He deemed them as brothers, united in Christ, not as "Gentile sinners" who were unworthy of being fellowshiped with.

He then continues on with the word "brethren." It is his way of identifying himself with them, personally. He has actually set a partition up between himself and the unbelieving Jews, and he has united himself, and his associates, with these Gentiles. The bond with them is stronger than his previous bond to his people of national origin. As brethren, he says they have "been taken away from you for a short time in presence." Here he chooses a word, *aporphanizó*, which is found nowhere else in Scripture. It literally means "bereaved." It is as if they had left the Thessalonians defenseless as orphans. This then is a return to the parent metaphors of verses 7 & 11.

In this state, he then uses a strong term to define the time of their separation. The words "for a short time" are literally, "for time of an hour." It is his way of defining the

time of separation exactly, as if they counted the minutes that they had been separated, just as parents would when separated from their children. There was a longing to return and see their beloved face to face.

However, he then notes that this bereavement was “not in heart.” Though they were separated because of the enmity of the Jews, the hearts of Paul and his associates remained united with their beloved brethren in Thessalonica. Because of this heartfelt and brotherly bond, he says that they “endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire.”

The time of their separation didn't result in, “Out of sight; out of mind.” Instead it resulted in, “Distance makes the heart grow fonder.” Their hearts were truly longing to return to Thessalonica and be united in personal fellowship once again.

Life application: If you are a part of a church which has missionaries being supported by you, remember them in your prayers, and also remember them with a blessing in the mail once in a while. They are certainly lonely at times, frustrated often, and desiring to reunite with those they love. And yet, they continue on because they have a duty which is more important than any other. Be mindful of them and be sure that they know they are appreciated.

Lord God, how tough it must be on missionaries who are out in the field, often alone, surely missing their families, and wondering if their efforts are of any value in Your eyes. They may not be making great headway, and the level of frustration would then be a source of consternation for them. And even if their field is productive, there are countless ways in which they must yearn for the comforts of home and family. Be with these wonderful souls, and make it known to them that their efforts are never in vain. Amen.

Therefore we wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but Satan hindered us. 1 Thessalonians 2:18

The verse begins with “Therefore.” It is based on Paul's sentiment that he, and those with him, greatly wanted to see the faces of those in Thessalonica. The words, “we wanted to come to you,” are in more than just a conditional tense. Instead, it was their full intention to come, and they had meant to do so.

Paul then places a stress on the thought by saying, “even I, Paul, time and again.” The use of his name here in no way implies that the others were less intent. Rather, as the author of the letter, he is showing the intensity he felt. That is then transferred to the

others in what is known as an epistolary plural. It is where one speaks for all, just as he did at his introductory comments in verse 1:2. In this case, the singular “I,” speaks for the whole.

His further stress, “time and again,” shows that it wasn’t just one attempt to return and then the attempts ended, but that they had made a real and concerted effort to make it back to their beloved brethren.

However, despite their attempts to return, “Satan hindered us.” He doesn’t elaborate on what this means, and so only speculation can be made. However, for the Thessalonians, he simply leaves the reason with these words alone. Satan is a word which any Jew among them could explain the meaning of, but it is a word which does not necessarily mean the devil himself. It could simply be a written personification of that which is opposed to God.

Paul does elsewhere speak of personal, fallen, spirits that hinder believers in their actions, and who pull them away from their faith in Christ. But that does not necessarily mean that he is referring to Satan in this way now. In the Old Testament, from which Paul draws his theology, the term “Satan” is used when speaking of a man on several occasions. It also speaks of an actual entity, especially in the book of Job. Therefore, as Vincent’s Word Studies notes, “It is clear that Paul here as elsewhere employs the word in a personal sense; but any attempt to base the doctrine of a personal devil on this and similar passages is unsafe.”

This does not mean Vincent is arguing against a personal devil, but he is arguing for the term to possibly be applied in a broader sense of that which is opposed to God. It can simply be wicked people who are hostile to the spreading of the Gospel. And this is exactly what Paul referred to in earlier verses of this very chapter.

Life application: There is a whole world full of enmity to the message of the Gospel. People will do pretty much anything to stop its spread. And yet, in that persecution, the message spreads even faster. The deaths of the saints are tragic, but their eternal life will infinitely overshadow their temporal loss. Be strong if you are facing persecution. Good times lay ahead!

Lord God, the world truly is against the spreading of the Gospel message, but the more it fights, the more the message spreads. When people hear of the promises which are found in Christ Jesus alone, they are freed from the temporary, fallen world in which we live. Whatever trials result from faith in Christ will be well worth it. In the end, a

marvelous, eternal procession of joy lies ahead for Your faithful. Thank You for these sure promises! Amen.

For what *is* our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? *Is it* not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? 1 Thessalonians 2:19

Paul just noted that he and his associates had been hindered from coming to Thessalonica despite their great desire to see the church once again. Understanding that, he now says, “For what is our hope...?” In this, hope is the object of their efforts, which in this case is the church there and the people in it. He continues, “or joy...?” What is it that they will rejoice in when they stand before the Lord? It is those whom they brought along to likewise stand before Him. And then he says, “or crown of rejoicing?” A crown is something that denotes honor. In the Greek games, a crown was bestowed upon the champion. It is what all strived for, but it is what only the winner would receive.

The word translated as “rejoicing” gives the sense of “glorying” and “exultation.” It is what one revels in. In the Old Testament, the book of Proverbs shows that a person with gray hair had such a crown –

“The silver-haired head *is* a crown of glory,
If it is found in the way of righteousness.” Proverbs 16:31

The reason for this crown of glory was the satisfaction of having lived a long life. Paul and his companion’s crown of glorying is that they had lived a fruitful life in Christ. What could a true evangelist revel in more? And to explain that clearly to the Thessalonians, he then rhetorically asks, “*Is it* not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?”

His word “you” should be taken in an inclusive sense to mean those converts at Thessalonica, and all others that had been converted by their ministry. What he is saying is that there will be a great rejoicing when the Lord comes for His people, and those who were faithful in leading others to Christ would stand before Him with a multitude who had been brought to Him through their efforts. It would be as if they were decorated with a crown of glory. The Thessalonian converts would be a part of that crown when that day comes.

The reason for Paul’s saying this is to show how much being able to visit the church in Thessalonica really and personally meant to them. Despite their being hindered by

Satan, he wanted the believers there to know that it was not an intentional snubbing of them, but a source of true sadness.

Life application: When we stand before the Lord, there will be a sense of exultation for each person who has been productive in their Christian life. Those who bring others to Christ will be rewarded. Those who minister to others in Christ will be rewarded. Teachers, preachers, and those who give... all efforts for Christ that are done in Christ will receive their due. Be pleased to work now for this marvelous cause; the rewards and the joy will be heavenly.

Lord God, grant us wisdom to use this life now for Your honor and for Your glory. Let us not be so consumed with temporary things that we forget that there is an eternity ahead of us which will find our position based on what we do now. May our proclamation be, "Use me up now, Lord. This life is Yours. I can rest when I arrive at my new home." Amen.

For you are our glory and joy. 1 Thessalonians 2:20

A question was just submitted, and it was followed up with an answer: "For what *is* our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? *Is it* not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?"

Now, Paul restates the thought again in an emphatic form. The Greek more closely reads, "You indeed are the glory of us and our joy." He and his associates literally reveled in the converts they brought to Christ. They were a source of rejoicing because they knew they would share eternal life together. For the ages of ages, there would be no struggles such as we face in this current walk. Instead, there will be an eternity of fellowship, glory, and joy. Because of what is ahead, Paul could say that now, at this time, they were a source of glory and joy.

Life application: This world is one marked with sin. That leads to all kinds of other troubles. People we once got along with are now our enemies. This includes many Christians. The fellowship is divided over some really, really petty issues. Divisions are even noted in Paul's letters, among the earliest of converts. But it won't always be this way. A time lies ahead where all such things will be behind us, and there will only be understanding, agreement, and perfect fellowship. Therefore, let us strive for these things even now.

Lord God, it isn't always easy to love fellow believers. Petty differences arise and cause trouble and division, even within small churches. It seems that harmony is something

that is just out of reach. But we are told that it won't always be this way. Some marvelous day when we walk in Your presence, there will be joy, peace, and perfect fellowship among the saints. Won't that day be great! Thank You for this wonderful hope we possess. Amen.

CHAPTER 3

Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone, 1 Thessalonians 3:1

This verse is hard to reconcile with the account in Acts, but only because not everything that occurred is recorded there or here. Paul is using the plural “we” here, but as has been seen already, it is certainly referring to himself alone. This becomes evident in verse 3:5. The use of “we” is because the letter as a whole was from himself, Silvanus, and Timothy. It is how we speak and write in English as well, and there is nothing that proves a contradiction in the biblical account in his words.

He says, “Therefore.” This is based on the ending words of the previous chapter. Paul had spoken of how eagerly he had wanted to come to Thessalonica, but he was hindered in doing so. But they were to him as his glory and joy. It caused him no little anguish. As he says, “when we could no longer endure it.” The word he uses gives the sense of a vessel which is over-filled and which is bursting, or as something which is covered in order to keep water out, but which is ready to give in.

In the words, “...when we could no longer endure it,” the “we” as noted is speaking of himself in the sense that he would be left alone in Athens while the other two would conduct other affairs. Almost as soon as they all arrived, Silvanus and Timothy were sent back to Macedonia. Silvanus went to one area, probably Berea or Philippi, and Timothy went back to Thessalonica. What is left out of Paul’s words in this epistle was simply not of importance to the church. They would have already heard from Timothy concerning where Silvanus had gone. As they were gone, he says, “...we thought it good to be left in Athens alone.”

This is not speaking of the three of them being alone in Athens, but the agreement by the three of them that Paul alone would stay. Timothy, as we will see, and as noted above, was sent back to Thessalonica while Silvanus went elsewhere. During this time, Paul was alone in Athens. It is something which is rather unusual. He was normally conducted from one place to another due to some unknown affliction. Therefore, while alone in Athens, he would have been greatly inconvenienced, and certainly very lonely.

Life application: At times, there are needs which must be considered as more important than our own personal comforts. When these times arise, we can look at what occurred with Paul here and know that it is right and good to allow ourselves to suffer

inconvenience for the sake of the gospel, and for the sake of those who need attention in that precious message.

Gracious and merciful heavenly Father, thank You for those who are willing to set aside their own personal comforts and needs in order to minister to others. You have faithful missionaries around the world, telling the good news of Christ even through times of loneliness and want. You have set up leaders in the church who give and give at every need that arises. And there are people in the church who also give beyond even their ability to give for each need that arises. Surely this is because of our great love for what You have done for us in Christ. Thank You for the greatest giving of all... our Lord Jesus. Amen.

...and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith,
1 Thessalonians 3:2

It is evident from these words that Paul had sent Timothy from Athens. As noted in 3:1, there is no contradiction with this and with the account in Acts as long as Paul's terminology in the use of singular and plural pronouns is properly understood. He then calls Timothy "our brother." This makes a fraternal connection between Timothy and the church in Thessalonica. Paul didn't send someone disinterested in the church, but rather someone who was intimately united to it.

Further, he then calls him a "minister of God." It is again a set of words intended to show Paul's care for the church. He didn't just send someone with a note in his hand which was filled with a bunch of directions. Instead, he sent a minister who was both learned and experienced in ministerial duties of preaching, teaching, and exhorting. And to add to the special personage of Timothy, he then says, "...and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ."

Timothy was personally useful to Paul, and he was a person who worked directly along with him in spreading the gospel. It wasn't at all the case that Timothy was of no use to Paul at the time. Rather, he was someone that Paul heavily relied upon and found useful at all times. But the weight of his care for the church at Thessalonica was of greater importance to him than having Timothy stay with him to evangelize.

Everything about Timothy's credentials which has been stated here is to show the superlative nature of Paul's love for the Thessalonians, and how much it meant to him that they be properly ministered to by someone that bore even his own abilities. All of

this was done “to establish you.” The word “establish” is one which means “a support that fixes plants down.” Thus, it is to solidly plant. Paul’s intent was the church that He had established would now be more deeply rooted by the coming of Timothy.

And more, Paul’s desire for them in sending Timothy was to “encourage you concerning your faith.” Paul knew that they were suffering trials for their faith. They were persecuted by unbelieving Jews, and they were ridiculed by unbelieving Gentiles. Like all of us, those at Thessalonica were not super spiritual. Rather, they were common people who needed encouragement and uplifting in their faith. Paul knew this, and he sent his trusted companion and fellow worker, Timothy, to accomplish this in them.

Life application: Those who say they don’t have moments of doubt or times of weakness in their faith probably think too much of themselves. It is human nature to face such times, and it is exactly why we need to remain united to a body of believers that we can go to when they arise. Let us not forsake the gathering together of the body.

Lord God, thank You so much for the people around us who are there to encourage us and strengthen us in our faith when we are struggling. Doubts arise about many things in our walk, because it is a walk of faith and not of sight. But when our faith is weak, someone else might be at a high point in his faith; able to strengthen us. And thank You for Your word which also is there to build us up and establish us. How good You are to us to give us these things. Amen.

...that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. 1 Thessalonians 3:3

In the previous verse, Paul noted that he had sent Timothy “to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith.” He now notes that this was so “that no one should be shaken by these afflictions.” In the coming verse, he will note that he had previously told them that they would suffer tribulations. Thus, the afflictions are being used in a comparable manner to “tribulations.”

In saying that “no one should be shaken,” he uses a word unique to Scripture, *sainó*. It literally means, “to wag the tail.” Hence it by implication can mean to greet, flatter, or disturb. However, it appears from the context that the original meaning is appropriate. Just as easily as a dog shakes its tail, so could a believer be shaken if they were not prepared for what lies ahead in the afflictions that are sure to come.

Paul then reminds them of something he has obviously already told them about (and as will be explicit in the next verse), which, as he says, “you yourselves know that we are appointed to this.” No Christian is exempt from tribulations, and anyone who was brought to Christ with a message of security and prosperity was brought to Him under a false presentation of the gospel. These things may come, but the opposite is what should normally be expected.

The world hates the gospel message because the world belongs to the devil. And the devil will do everything possible to destroy the faith of God’s people, and to undermine the spreading of this message. Any church that teaches the prosperity gospel will be held accountable for the mishandling of God’s word. The one who receives Christ is to be instructed in the epistles of Paul, and the instruction is to be by maintaining proper context.

In such instruction, they will learn that tribulations are to be expected, but they will also be prepared for those tribulations by being grounded in the words which have been given to prepare them for those things.

Life application: Are you having trials and troubles in your Christian walk? If so, then it is something that the word said would come.

Lord God, as faithful believers in Christ, Your word tells us that we are to expect afflictions and tribulations, not wealth and prosperity. The latter may come, but there are no promises of that in this life. Rather, the prosperity gospel is a false gospel. Help us to realize this, and then to study Your word and be grounded in it so that when trials arise, we will be prepared for them. Surely You are with us, even in such dire times. Thank You for this reassurance. Amen.

For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know. 1 Thessalonians 3:4

Paul begins this verse with “For.” In this, he is confirming why “no one should be shaken by these afflictions” from the previous verse. He told them also that as a body “we are appointed to this.” This is the context of the word “For.” From there, he adds in “...in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation.” As always, Paul could not write this to the church there unless it was true.

If they were never told this, they would read the letter, look at each one another in surprise, and comment, “He’s been in the funny juice.” But the words themselves bear

witness to the fact that Paul and his associates had warned those in Thessalonica of what lay ahead. When the tribulation came, it became a confirming note to them that what they were experiencing was meant to be. In fact, Paul goes on to say, "...just as it happened, and you know."

No prophecy was needed for this. He had been a persecutor of the church, and he had been persecuted after coming to Christ. As he evangelized, persecution faithfully followed after him, trying to despoil his efforts. Each new convert was a person who was set for tribulation. The warning was given because it was an expected and customary part of this new faith. The devil wants it destroyed, and so he uses all means possible to have it ended. Attacking new converts is one expected, and surely effective, way of this coming about.

The book of Acts shows this persecution, and the epistles warn us of it even to this day. But there is a way of standing firm against it given in the epistles as well. If we read and study the word, we will be able to stand against these things firmly and without wavering in our faith.

Life application: A believer who is not persecuted in some way for their faith is no threat to the devil's influence. In other words, they are probably ineffective Christians who accepted Christ and then do nothing for Him. The more we are willing to step out and proclaim Christ, the more we will be the brunt of jokes, the target of attacks, and the focus of the devil's attention. Let's give that sorry fellow a black eye for his efforts.

Lord God, if we are going to face persecution for our faith, isn't it worth it? We are the redeemed of Christ who is the only avenue of reconciliation to You. So why should we care if the devil comes after us? Instead, we should rejoice that we are having a positive effect for the name of Christ Jesus. If we can give the devil a black eye in the process, that is to our joy and rejoicing. In fact, it would be great if we could give him two! Help us to be sound, faithful proclaimers of the gospel of Christ. Amen.

For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain.

1 Thessalonians 3:5

The words "For this cause" are speaking specifically about being "shaken by these afflictions" which Paul mentioned in verse 3. He had told them such things would arise, and he knew that they had arisen. But just because someone is warned of something, it

doesn't mean that he will bear up under what was warned against. He was concerned, and his concern is reflected in the next words, "when I could no longer endure it."

One can just imagine Paul, fidgeting about and mumbling in his state of anxiety (be anxious for nothing, Paul!) at what may have happened to his beloved congregation. He and his associates had been driven out by the foes of the gospel, and he wondered if the congregation had seen this and lost hope. This is what he means by saying, "lest by some means the tempter had tempted you."

There could have been a false gospel introduced to counter the true gospel he had presented. There could have been false teachers who had more eloquent oratory skills who had come to steal them away. There could have been doubts leading to distrust of the message they heard. The tempter has an entire arsenal of weapons at his disposal which are intended to destroy the faith, and to pull true believers away from what they had originally received.

The term "tempter" is given in this verse to show that his nature is not just one of tempting, but that this is his constant manner of behavior. He tempts and he continues to tempt. With this constant attack, Paul was concerned for the people of the church. Could they bear up? Had they borne up? He needed to know whether they had, or if (as he says) "our labor might be in vain."

All the effort, the love of his Lord and of the people he ministered to, the knowledge he had imparted – all of it – was possibly washed away by the tide of the tempter's flood. If there was a chance of this, he needed to have his associates go back and correct the situation, if possible. Their faith was too precious to be lost, even at the expense of his own loneliness.

Life application: How concerned are we for those who are susceptible to being drawn away from the faith they once professed. The Bible does say that they will not lose their salvation, but it does note that they can lose their joy, and also their rewards as well. Further, those with whom they come in contact will never be evangelized if they have fallen away from their own faith. There are serious repercussions in allowing someone to be neglected in their young faith.

Heavenly Father, help each of us to be caring towards those who are new in the faith. Unless they are built up and established, they can easily be drawn away by the tempter. They can lose their joy, and they can lose their hope of great rewards for a life of faith that they otherwise would have had. Be with us and give us caring hearts to lead young

believers to a greater and more perfect understanding of who You are, and of what Your word tells them. Amen.

But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you— 1 Thessalonians 3:6

Paul's words of this verse are as if a spring of cool water has broken forth in the midst of a dry desert which he had been walking upon. There had almost been anxiety over the state of those at Thessalonica, and that troubled state had ended. This is first felt in the words, "But now that Timothy has come to us from you." His words of the previous verses highlight the stress that was felt –

- no longer endure it
- shaken by these afflictions
- suffer tribulation
- no longer endure it (again)
- lest by some means the tempter had tempted you
- our labor might be in vain

Each of these built up a feeling which became determining factors in Paul's sending Timothy to them to ascertain how they fared. Upon the return of Timothy came relief. He had "brought us the good news of your faith and love." In this, "faith" is to be noted as a confidence in God, and in His gospel message concerning Jesus Christ, which gave them the ability to remain strong and fixed on the gospel, despite what had occurred with Paul, and despite his absence from them.

The "love" is certainly speaking of their love of Christ first and foremost. But it must also include their love of one another which was able to strengthen them in pursuit of Christ. And it must finally be referring to a love directed to Paul and his associates as well. This is evidenced by the next words, "and that you always have good remembrance of us."

The report is from Timothy, and so he conveyed to them what he heard and saw. Therefore, "a good remembrance" goes deeper than just, "We sure miss Paul and the rest of you guys." Although this is certainly the case, it must be inclusive of holding to the doctrine which Paul instructed them concerning Christ. Those precepts which had been given were being adhered to as if they were the instructions of God, because this is

what they are. In being observant to what was communicated to them, they were demonstrating a good remembrance of them.

Finally Paul notes that those in Thessalonica were “greatly desiring to see us, as we also *to see you.*” There was no animosity in them because Paul and his associates had left and gone on with mission work elsewhere. They remembered the persecution, and they knew that his departure was not a shunning of them, but a reasonable choice to make. They were led to Christ through their ministry, and they had a strong bond of attachment to them, just as Paul and his associates did toward the church there in Thessalonica.

Life application: It can be very tough on a pastor to have those he ministers to suddenly turn on him over some minor point of disagreement. He spends his time counseling, preparing sermons, putting up with many issues of grief which arise, etc. And yet, when such a time of disagreement arises, congregants will often get up in a huff and go off to another church. If the pastor cares about his flock, he cares about losing them as well. He will carry the memory of those he served all his life, hopefully with good memories, not sad ones.

Lord God, give us the ability to show ourselves as humble and forgiving while dealing with others in our congregation. People are filled with error. As we are all people, then we are all filled with error. How easy it is to get in a huff and take off for other pastures, but how much better it is to resolve differences, to demonstrate grace, and to be attentive to those we fellowship with. Help us in this, Lord. Amen.

...therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith. 1 Thessalonians 3:7

What is apparent here, is that having the knowledge that the church in Thessalonica had maintained the faith was a source of great joy to Paul and his associates. To them it was so wonderful that it actually relieved them through their own times of affliction and distress.

The word “therefore” is given based on everything thus far in chapter 3. There was a sense of uncertainty in what the state of the church was. There was the sending of Timothy to establish and encourage them in their walk. There was the truth that the tempter was out to destroy the faith of believers. Each of these things weighed heavily on Paul and those with him. But upon receiving the news from Timothy concerning the

positive state of the church, Paul says that even “in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you.”

The heavy weight was lifted, the burden was gone, and joy of heart and soul was now felt. The gospel had prevailed in the hearts of the brethren, and their walk had not wavered. Paul says to them that they were “comforted concerning you by your faith.” When faith is grounded, all else that is sound and proper will naturally follow suit.

They had kept their eyes on the Lord, their hearts tuned to His gospel, and their lives on the right and proper path. It was a welcome thing to have received this wonderful news.

Life application: How often do we hear someone say, “My son has stopped going to church,” or “My wife says she just doesn’t believe in the Bible anymore.” People’s faith is challenged, they take their eyes off the Lord, and they lose their footing on the proper path. When this happens, it is a source of great consternation for those who know the logical end of such things. When this arises, we need to be ready to provide words of empathy and compassion. And we need to also be willing, if asked, to help speak to the wayward person about turning back to the Lord. Always be ready, as this is a common thing. If we can be a help in such a time of need, let us not be found either unable or unwilling to help.

Lord God, this is a woe-filled world, and it is one which so easily can take our eyes and our hearts off of You. We can get consumed in our own trials and afflictions, and our faith can be challenged. Certainly, this is why you would have us read and know Your word, treasuring it in our hearts. When times of difficulty come, we can be ready for them by refusing to have our faith distracted. Instead, in such moments we can actually get closer to You. Help us in this, Lord. Help us to never fall away from the faith we profess. Amen.

For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord. 1 Thessalonians 3:8

Paul has written of his state which bordered on despondency, wondering how the Thessalonians fared, and if they had maintained their faith in the Lord, or if they had gone astray. The burden of this was so great on him and his traveling associates, that it was as if life itself was sucked out of them. One can imagine nights where the mind is consumed with distress, and where sleep flees away. In the day, there is no joy. The bird’s song doesn’t bring happiness, and food has no taste. This is how Paul’s emotions probably were. As he said in verse 3:1, “...when we could no longer endure it.”

But there is now a marked change in his tone. Timothy had returned from Thessalonica, and he had brought with him good news of their faith and love. Their faith was grounded, and their love of Paul and his company was strong. In a note of joy, which can almost be felt by the reader, he says, “For we now live.” The life that had been drained from them was restored. The sleep that they had lost was now sweet. The sound of the morning bird brought delight, and the food at the table had its flavor returned. Life had sprung anew!

To show how much he wanted this condition to last, he then adds on a conditional note, “...if you stand fast in the Lord.” The joy of Paul’s group was conditioned upon the soundness of the faith which the churches maintained. It surely wasn’t just those in Thessalonica, but each church that they had ministered to. Paul’s words to the Galatians show a man beside himself because of their sudden turning from the truth to the lies of the Judaizers. He did not want this in Thessalonica, and he rejoiced that it was not the case, but his life would be drained once again if they took a turn onto Apostasy Avenue or down Heresy Highway.

Life application: When congregants turn away from sound doctrine, or when those who proclaim false messages are on the attack, it is surely a source of great consternation. Be sure to pray for those who hold to sound doctrine and be sure to hold fast to the truths of Scripture. Don’t let Satan get a foothold in your life, but rather stand fast on the grace of Jesus Christ the Lord.

Heavenly Father, praises to You in the highest. You are great and greatly to be praised. We thank You for Your marvelous word which tells us of Christ Jesus, and which leads us in sound doctrine, if we will but open it and apply it to our lives. And we thank You above all for Jesus Christ our Lord who is the fulfillment of all that Your word proclaims. All glory to You, O God. Amen.

For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God, 1 Thessalonians 3:9

Paul had just said “For now we live.” This verse is given in response to that, and that response is, “For what thanks can we render to God for you[?]” It is not an affirmation, but a question. It is similar to the words of the 116th Psalm which first asks the question, and then provides an answer -

“What shall I render to the Lord
For all His benefits toward me?”

¹³ I will take up the cup of salvation,
And call upon the name of the Lord.

¹⁴ I will pay my vows to the Lord

Now in the presence of all His people.” Psalm 116:12-14

After asking this, and still a part of the question itself, he then begins to fill in what the blessings they have received are in conjunction with “For now we live.” He says, “...for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake.” Paul and his associates were literally filled with joy, and they went about rejoicing for the sake of those in Thessalonica. They had been found to have held fast to the truth and had not deviated from the gospel. In this, the church would live on, passing the word on to others just as it has been passed on to them. This gave Paul and his companions such great joy that they rejoiced, as it says, “before our God.”

Their rejoicing wasn't just a rejoicing as if they had merited it – “We won converts and they are obedient to us!” Rather, it was a rejoicing before God – “The gospel which we were blessed to share has taken root, and God is glorified through it!” This is what Paul is telling them. They were elated to know that the message of Christ had taken root and would continue on.

Life application: Are you willing to rejoice with other churches that you do not attend when they bring souls to Christ. It is not an “us against them” thing that occurs in the church. It is always a “for Christ” thing which should occur. Let us be content to see any properly run church, which is grounded in the word of God and directed to the true gospel, flourish and grow.

Lord God, help us in the church not to be in a battle of “us against them,” but rather that we will be “for the name of Christ and for Your glory.” May those in one church not be jealous of the success of another but rejoice in it – as long as You are glorified, and the word is rightly divided, then may it be so. Petty differences which have nothing to do with sound doctrine solve nothing, and only detract from what we should be doing for the lost of the world. Help us in this, Lord God. Amen.

...night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith? 1 Thessalonians 3:10

Paul's previous words were, “For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God.” Now he completes the thought,

beginning with “night and day praying exceedingly.” At the end of this epistle he says, “...pray without ceasing.”

He was not one to exhort without actually living out what he urged in others. From the words, “day and night,” we see that he and his companions truly did pray without ceasing. When talking about something, they would pray. When walking along and thinking on their beloved brethren, they would pray. When desiring to see those in Thessalonica again, they would pray. This doesn’t mean they stopped and got on their knees every time they prayed, but that their words were simply inclusive of prayers uttered to God for the subject they talked about or contemplated.

For now, he continues by noting that their prayers were first, “that we may see your face.” It was a true longing of Paul to return to his beloved brethren. Any evangelist or pastor who has formed a bond with those he ministered to will naturally have a desire to see that person again, and to share in fellowship with him. This was their desire as well. But it was also to “perfect what is lacking in your faith.”

The words of the epistle contain doctrine intended to increase the faith of the brethren. This is certainly a part of what Paul is referring to. If he could not be there in person, then he would at least convey his thoughts in written form. Chapter 4 will fill in many of the things concerning what is lacking in their faith, chief among them being what is the state of the dead in Christ. Paul will instruct them on this, and in his instruction will come words concerning the return of Christ for His church. They are marvelous words of hope and encouragement which are intended to perfect what is lacking in the faith of the believers.

Life application: If one is lacking faith, or if his walk has gotten off track, the first and best way to get that corrected is to get into the word of God. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. From there, we can add in many other avenues of getting ourselves grounded and redirected to the proper path. But without the word of God, how will we be able to discern if the path we have chosen is the correct one or not?

Lord God, certainly we all have times where our faith gets misdirected or weakened, and our walk goes astray. In such times, help us to redirect ourselves by refocusing on Your word. This is first and foremost our rule and guide for faithful living, so how do we think that we can do without it? And how can we know if the path we take to redirect ourselves to You is right if we don’t know what You expect of us! Help us to be diligent in the study of Your word. Open our minds to it now and always. Amen.

Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you.
1 Thessalonians 3:11

What seems like a straightforward and simple verse actually has wording of great interest. Paul begins this prayer of supplication with, “Now may our God and Father Himself.” The petition is to God, but a note of specificity is then given by saying, “and Father Himself.” Three times in this chapter, he has already referred to God, first in verse 2 and then in verse 9. However, he also referred to “the Lord” in verse 8. Now, in this verse, he makes his solemn petition to “our God and Father Himself.” But then he next says, “...and our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Here, there is definitely a distinction made between God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. They are two separate entities. It is something the Bible teaches, and we take it at face value. However, Paul then gives us the beginning of the substance of his prayers. May God “direct our way to you.” In verse 2:18, Paul noted that Satan had hindered their travel to Thessalonica. He is certainly showing us a contrast then between that thought and what he now desired – “As Satan had hindered us, so we now petition God to direct our way to you.”

The verb he uses is one which is found only three times in the New Testament. It is seen first in Luke 1:79. It is then seen here, and once again in 2 Thessalonians 3:5, both in the form of an optative verb; one expressing a wish or desire. The verb itself gives the sense of going straight and in the most direct route. In this, there would not be any loss of time or effort. The sincerity of Paul’s words is fully evident. He truly desires that he, and those with him, would be completely unhindered in their travel back to this beloved congregation.

However, what is most important here it that the verb translated as “direct” is singular, not plural. Therefore, it can be taken in no other way than that in Paul’s mind Jesus is equal to God the Father, they are One, and yet He is not the Father. They are separate Persons with equal authority to grant the petition. And that thought then opens up another theological truth which is seen elsewhere. Can we pray to Jesus? The answer is found right here. Paul is petitioning both God the Father and Jesus Christ equally. For full emphasis, he is petitioning them together. Words have meaning, tenses have meaning, and in this case, the number of the verb (singular) is of special importance.

Life application: This is a good verse to highlight as another of the myriad proofs found in Scripture that the Apostle Paul believed Jesus to be on equal standing with the Father, being fully God Himself. If someone who is confused about this issue is really willing to

accept the word at face value, it will give him something to consider. Also, let us never feel that we are in the wrong by praying to God through Jesus and to Jesus. Paul has already set an example for us to follow.

Lord God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Great are You, and You are greatly to be praised. Amen.

And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we *do* to you, 1 Thessalonians 3:12

There is an emphasis in the Greek of this verse which is lacking in this translation. The word “You” begins the sentence. It reads, “You moreover, the Lord may make to increase and to abound...” In the previous verse, Paul spoke of himself and his companions – “Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you.” This verse then contrasts that thought with the emphasis on “You.” What can be inferred is the thought, “Whether we come or not, this is for you to do.” From there he explains what that thing is. They are to “increase and abound in love toward one another.”

This petition is made to “the Lord” by Paul. In the previous verse, it was seen that he addressed God and the Lord Jesus Christ together, using a singular verb. For this reason, it is probable that “the Lord” in this verse is speaking of both again. Thus, the term Lord indicates “God” and not just one member of the Godhead. Although that may not have been what was on Paul’s mind, it does fit properly.

After petitioning love between the brethren, he then adds in, “and to all.” This could mean everyone in a general sense, or it could be referring to all believers, not just those in the church at Thessalonica. The latter is probably the case. Paul has harsh words for many outside of the scope of believers, as did the Lord Himself. However, the bond of love should not be ignored among believers, even if they are of a different church, culture, or creed.

To show what he means, he concludes with the words, “just as we *do* to you.” The love of Paul and his associates towards the church in Thessalonica was perfectly evident in how they ministered (and continued to minister) to them. Despite being apart from them physically, the love between them grew steadily. Paul’s desire was that this same type of increasing love would characterize them as well. The fellowship of believers should be built up, not torn down.

Life application: It is true that in a general sense, we should have a sense of love for all people. If they are unsaved, we should want their salvation. However, Paul places a stress on the love between believers that should exist. It is something that we should strive for, even when they are really irritating know-it-all's or contrarians in ways that cause our skin to grate. A little lost skin is not worth dividing the fellowship.

Lord God, it sure can be hard to love other believers. The world abounds with backbiting and strife, and often the greatest display of it comes from people who profess faith in You. Help us, O God, to attempt to maintain a civil attitude towards all, and especially our fellows in the faith, even if they rub us like sandpaper. Maybe we just need an imperfection smoothed out anyway. Help us in this, O God. Amen.

...so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints. 1 Thessalonians 3:13

The previous two verses, tied together with this one, will give the full sense of Paul's thought –

“Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you. ¹² And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we *do* to you, ¹³ so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.”

Paul has petitioned for direction for those in Thessalonica which will make them increase and abound in love. Requesting the fulfillment of this was “so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father.” It is through the abounding in love that this will come about. The New Testament repeatedly says that love is the fulfillment of the law (Matthew 22:40, Romans 13:8 & 13:10, Galatians 5:14, and James 2:8).

In loving, meaning towards God and towards fellow believers, we will be found “blameless in holiness.” There can be no charge against someone who is fulfilling the divine law, because they are dealing with hearts that are pure. And this is deeper than an outward display, but it is with sincerity. One sets themselves apart (holiness), just as they have been set apart by God, in acting in love. On that day which is set for Christ's return, the intent is that this is how we should be found. As He says, we should be this way “before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The day isn't known, and the church has waited 2000 years so far, but the day will come. Christ will return to bring the church to Himself. At that time, we will stand before Him to make an account of our lives. This is known as the bema seat judgment. It is a judgment for rewards and losses, but not one for salvation or condemnation.

Paul then adds in that Christ is coming "with all His saints." Two main views are possible with this. The Greek says, "the holy ones." Therefore, some believe this is angels that are being referred to. Those who hold to this would choose a verse such as Matthew 25:31 to support their view. This is not what Paul is thinking of. Matthew 25 was spoken to Israel, still under the law. Paul is more likely preparing the way for his words of Chapter 4. In verse 14, he notes that "God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus."

In other words, they are already dead and awaiting the resurrection at the rapture. Jesus will bring them, and together we shall meet Him. The "blameless and holiness before our God" is referring to those who are still alive. Once someone has died, they simply await the resurrection. But while living, this is how saints should conduct their lives, and this is the intent of Paul's words concerning Christ returning with His saints.

Life application: There is a lot of infighting and backbiting in the church. A lot. We have enough of this in the secular world. Let us strive, as much as is possible, to live at peace with our brothers and sisters in Christ. It isn't always possible, but this is what we are asked to do.

Lord God, there is enough division in this world where there is little agreement on anything. In the church, we have Your word. It is given to set parameters in doctrine and to provide guidelines for conduct. As long as Your people are conforming to that, we should try, our very best, to live at harmony with one another. Help us in this Lord. We humans can be an irritating lot, and so let the abrasiveness stop with us in hopes that peace will spread to others. Amen.

CHAPTER 4

Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God; 1 Thessalonians 4:1

Chapter 4 begins the instructional part of the letter to those at Thessalonica. Until this point, no true note of instruction has been given. Rather his words have been greetings and calling to remembrance things which have occurred. His words, "Finally then," Give the sense of "For the rest, then..." In other words, there are other matters which require his instruction, and they are now to be submitted for this purpose. This is to be a new subject and a new direction.

Of course the word "brethren" is given to indicate that his words are intended for believers. And this will certainly become evident as he continues on through the chapter. It is a chapter which provides immense hope, and which is probably cited as much as any other passage from Paul's pen over the church age, especially when dealing with the issue of believers who have died. In this, it is obvious that the words are intended as pertaining only to those who have died in Christ. Thus, they are "brethren" that he will speak about there as well.

After this, he says, "...we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus." To urge is to request, but it is a request which bears a note of strong desire or impulse to ensure that what is presented is followed through with. In this case, the Greek word indicates, "to ask on special footing," and thus there is a sense of intimacy coming from one in a preferred position. To exhort is to prompt to action. This Greek word indicates making a call from a close and personal relationship. Both of these words are used in connection with "in the Lord Jesus."

In other words, "This urging and exhortation is given because of and by our close and personal union in the Lord. We are brothers, we are family, and the Lord is our Head. Therefore, take heed to what I now state." He then defines his exhortation by saying, "that you should abound more and more." What this implies is that those in Thessalonica have been given guidance to abound in their Christian walk. They have, thus far, been living by that guidance as is evidenced by Paul's words of rejoicing of Chapter 3 when he heard this was so. Now he petitions them to continue in this life, but growing in it from day to day and even moment to moment.

All of this is evident from his closing words of this verse which say, “just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God.” Paul and his companions had visited Thessalonica, they had established the church and given instruction, the Thessalonians had accepted the teaching and had continued on in it. All of this was a walk pleasing to God. Paul’s great hope for them is that this walk would continue.

Life application: We are either moving forward in our Christian walk, or we are moving backward in it. Paul’s exhortation to all is that we always move forward, abounding more and more. Let us endeavor to do so.

Lord God – all powerful and all marvelous! Thank You for having granted us salvation, and a hope of a marvelous new life in Your presence. What was lost in the Garden shall be restored, plus. We shall have the knowledge of what You were willing to do in order to reconcile us to Yourself by the giving of Your Son. With this knowledge, we will certainly rejoice forever, even as we do now! Praise You, O God, for what You have done. Amen.

...for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 4:2

As normal, the word “for” is given to either explain or confirm something just stated. The same is true here. He just said, “just as you received from us how you out to walk and to please God.” That is the basis for saying “for” now. It is those commandments which Paul and his associates gave to those in Thessalonica “through the Lord Jesus.” Paul’s words must be true as he is stating in the letter that they had really been told these things. If no such commandments were given, then he couldn’t call them to memory now. Further, he was with them such a short time earlier that they would certainly be able to recollect those things he had said to them.

This is important because the longer someone is gone, the duller the memory gets. Eventually, ten people would have ten different ideas about what was said. Paul is asking them to consider those commandments and apply them to their walk. As they are “through the Lord Jesus,” meaning they carry the weight of His instruction to Paul, which he in turn passed on to the Thessalonians, then it is this very set of commandments which will guide their walk and make them pleasing to God.

The inspiration of Paul’s teaching as an apostle is seen in these words, and it carries throughout this letter and all of his letters. It is confirmed by Peter as well. Peter says that Paul’s letters are on an equal footing with Scripture in 2 Peter 3:16. It is an important precept to remember. What Paul says is doctrine for the church age.

Life application: There are many things in Scripture which are hard to remember. In fact, if we aren't in the word daily, we will quickly dull in regard to them. Anyone who thinks they can pick up the Bible once, read through it, and assume that they are now fully prepared for living out a proper Christian walk is deluded. It must be read continuously, and it must be meditated on always.

Most gracious and merciful heavenly Father. Your love for us is apparent in ten thousand ways each day. The good food we have, the beautiful sunrises that inspire, the call of the birds to one another, and even the twinkling of the stars at night... each of these shows that you really care for us. How much more when we consider the cross. It is the most wonderful demonstration of the Father's love. Thank You for bringing us home through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; 1 Thessalonians 4:3

This is the second "for" in a row from Paul's hand. He just said, "...for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus." He then immediately explains why they were given and begins explaining the reason for those things, along with the first of a list of some of those commandments.

"For this is the will of God." The commandments are God's will for us, and they bear a specific purpose in being given, which is, "your sanctification." The idea of sanctification is holiness. Believers in Christ are to be set apart and live lives of honor towards God. The Law of Moses contains five books. The first three follow in a particular order to show us what is being relayed here by Paul –

- Genesis – creation; God the Father/Creator.
- Exodus – redemption; God the Son/Redeemer, Savior, and Justifier.
- Leviticus – sanctification; God the Holy Spirit/Sanctifier & Purifier.

The main theme of the entire book of Leviticus is found in Leviticus 11:44 –

"For I *am* the Lord your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I *am* holy."

Notice what it says there, "You therefore shall consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy." This is something the Jews missed and continue to miss to this day. When they

pray their feast blessings, Sabbath blessings, etc., they repeat the words “who has sanctified us with His commandments.” But one of His commandments is that they too are to be sanctified; they are to be holy. A partial, or selective observance of the Law is to make the law void and to nullify the sanctification needed on their part.

The same is true with those in the church now. What was only pictured in the dietary laws of Israel in Leviticus 11 is seen fulfilled in the precepts given to us by the apostles. Things considered unclean in the dietary laws pictured people and acts which are unclean and immoral. Staying away from immorality is then for our “sanctification.” The first thing Paul then notes as being immoral and to stay away from is explained next by him with the words, “...that you should abstain from sexual immorality.”

The Bible set the pattern at the very beginning. Man + woman, in marriage = proper sexual conduct. Anything else is immoral. This is explained and reexplained in the Bible. Anything not within these narrow confines is to be abstained from. The highly perverse sexual conduct of the world today is completely opposed to the sanctification process which is expected of us. There are no exceptions.

Life application: Attempting to justify sexual sin, meaning any sexual intimacy apart from a man and a woman in the bonds of marriage, is an affront to God, and it is opposed to the sanctification process which is outlined in Scripture.

Lord God, Your word ties in our sanctification with abstaining from sexual immorality. This is defined in your word as any sexual intimacy which is other than that of a man and a woman in the bonds of marriage. Your word is set, and it is not confused. Oh, but we are. We will do anything to justify the unjustifiable. May we live our lives in holiness, not engaging in that which You have forbidden. Help us in our weakness. Amen.

...that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, 1 Thessalonians 4:4

This verse begins to explain the “will of God” Paul mentioned in the previous verse. That will of God for the believers in Thessalonica (and thus us!) is “sanctification.” After noting this, he began the idea of sanctification with abstaining “from sexual immorality.” In order to meet this goal, he now explains it with “that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel.”

Paul likens our body to a vessel. Elsewhere, he calls it “an earthen vessel” (2 Corinthians 4:7). We are a soul which is transported around by an earthly shell, thus it is a vessel. In

2 Corinthians 4:7, the vessel is explained as containing something, meaning the Holy Spirit. In this verse now, it is a vessel for doing something. We are to “possess” it. The wording doesn’t just mean “to grab hold of,” but “to gain hold of.” We can grab something and not have control of it, like a rider in a rodeo who gets bucked off the bronco. Or, we can gain hold of something through continued diligence, thus subduing the horse and making it a useful tool around the ranch. The same is true with our bodies.

When we come to Christ, our soul is reconnected to God; it is our spiritual rebirth. It is contrary to the notion of being reconnected to God to continue to live in a worldly manner. Instead, we are to use our members in a life ever leading towards holiness. Paul gives a description of how to do this in Colossians 3 -

“Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, ⁷in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.” Colossians 3:5-7

In living this way, and in the other ways that the Bible explains to us concerning a life of holiness, we will each possess our “own vessel in sanctification and honor.” The sanctification is for us in accord with what the Holy Spirit has already done for us, sanctifying us before God. The honor is as an outward display to glorify God. The word translated as “honor” is one which carries the meaning of a price. Thus it is a perceived value. Of what value is the glory of God to us? This is the idea of what Paul is saying. Christ paid the ultimate price for our sins, and so we should deem His work in this manner as most precious, showing others what we believe the price means to us.

Life application: If we continue in sexual sins after accepting Christ, what type of value are we placing on the work of Christ, and what does the sanctification of the Spirit mean to us? We were called in our sin, but with the idea that we are to come out of our sin. By remaining in, or returning to, whatever sin we saved from, it demonstrates that we hold this way of life in a greater esteem than the new life we have been called to? Is this earth our home? Or are we looking for a return to Paradise which we lost so long ago. Let us ever strive towards holiness, sanctification, and honor.

Lord God, what value do we place on the precious blood of Christ when we return to the sins which He saved us from? Help us to place our sanctification and Your honor above this earthly life we live. Our first father lost paradise. Since then, we’ve been in a fallen world full of woe. Is this the place we want to linger in? Or should we set our hopes and

goals now on a return to that wonderful place You have prepared for us? Help us in this Lord. Amen.

...not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; 1 Thessalonians 4:5

Paul's previous words showed that each person should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor. Now, in contrast to that, he says, "...not in passion of lust." The word translated as passion, *pathos*, indicates strong feelings which are not guided by God. Rather, they are those sensual feelings which draw one away from Him. He then combines in a word translated as "lust" which is not limited to sexual desires but includes all sorts of desires. They can be positive or negative, but in the context of the verse, they are negative. One of the main uses of the word is that of covetousness.

What Paul is describing is completely contrary to "sanctification and honor." To sanctify oneself is to be separated from the surrounding, worldly things we face. If one is consumed with the passion of lust, they are going full steam ahead into those worldly things, not away from them. Likewise, there is nothing honoring of God in such lusts, but rather choosing the path of the devil is what is seen. To confirm this, he then says, "...like the Gentiles who do not know God."

Here he is writing to Gentile believers, but he contrasts them to Gentiles who do not know what they, as believers, know. The difference has set them on a completely different path. They have come to Christ and have been instructed in what is pleasing to Him. The path they have chosen is one which follows the sanctification and honor that he spoke of. The only way the other Gentiles are going to know how to conduct themselves before God is by their example. Otherwise, how could they ever come to know the truth?

Life application: Our conduct in the presence of others should be as Paul describes. Reading his epistles is the way to come to a right understanding of proper church-age doctrine. Let us read, meditate on, and apply these words to our daily lives – to the honor of God and for the sanctification of ourselves.

Heavenly Father, it sure is precious to be in Your marvelous presence. Because of Christ Jesus, we can speak to You without fear of our prayers being hindered by the mistakes we make. Instead, we have full and unfettered access to Your attentive ear at all times. It is an honor and a joy to know this. Thank You for such a wonderful freedom to interact with You in this way. Amen.

...that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified.

1 Thessalonians 4:6

In verse 4:3, Paul wrote, “for this is the will of God, your sanctification.” After that, he noted sexual immorality as being opposed to sanctification. Now he goes on to a conclusion of this thought, and notes that which would hinder sanctification. It is if one would “take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter.”

The word translated as “take advantage” is one which is found only here in the Bible. It means, “to go beyond.” In the previous verse, Paul had spoken of the “passion of lust.” As noted, that phrase is not limited to sexual desires, but includes all sorts of desires. They can be positive or negative, but in the context of the verse, they are negative. One of the main uses of the word is that of covetousness.

What he is now saying is that we are not to allow our hearts to be filled with covetousness in this way. In allowing this, we would then be impelled to “take advantage and defraud” one another in this matter. As he says elsewhere –

“Now godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷ For we brought nothing into *this* world, *and it is* certain we can carry nothing out. ⁸ And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. ⁹ But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all *kinds of* evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” 1 Timothy 6:6-10

Rather than have hearts filled with covetousness, we are to be content with what we possess, and not look to those things which we have not rightly earned on our own. For those who would act in a manner contrary to this, he then provides a warning by saying, “because the Lord *is* the avenger of all such.”

One must remember that Paul is writing to believers, but the principles which he writes also pertain to non-believers. Any such negative actions will be judged by the Lord. For those who are saved, they will be judged at the bema seat judgment of rewards and losses (Romans 14:1 & 2 Corinthians 5:10). For those who are not in Christ, they will be judged and then cast into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:11-15). No matter what, all transgressions will be judged.

To finish the thought, he then adds in, “as we also forewarned you and testified.” It is obvious that Paul preached the grace of Christ throughout his ministry, and it is confirmed throughout his epistles. However, he also preached that sin will be judged. He never teaches that grace grants a license to sin. Instead, he speaks clearly and carefully about the need for believers to be molded into the image of Christ, and to stay away from sin. His words here show that he taught it to young believers right along with their salvation message, and he continued to warn them as a part of their regular instruction.

Life application: The Bible asks God’s people to be holy because He is holy. Let us endeavor to live in this manner at all times, ever striving to be the best examples of righteousness and holiness that we can be – to the glory of God!

Almighty heavenly Father, we come to Your glorious throne to confess our shortcomings and to petition You, because of the marvelous gift of Your Son, for forgiveness and restoration. Help us to not have hearts filled with covetousness, but to be content with what we have. Help us to strive for holiness and righteousness. And may we be people of thanks for the many blessings You have given to us. Help us in these things, O God. Amen.

For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. 1 Thessalonians 4:7

The word “For” is given to confirm what has been stated in verses 3-6. We are to abstain from sexual immorality as described, and we are not to take advantage of and defraud our brother as noted. The reason is “For God did not call us to uncleanness.” The things he stated in the previous verses would do just that; they would render us unclean. Further, what is more appropriate is that the words “to uncleanness” should be stated as “for uncleanness.” The preposition denotes God’s intention for us, not the state that we may or may not be in at any given time. He has called not called us “for uncleanness” even if we act in that way after being called.

In contrast to this, he says instead that we have been called “in holiness.” The Greek preposition is different than the previous one – *epe* or “for” and then *en* or “in.” We have been called by God, who is holy. Therefore, we have been called in holiness, and so we are to act in that same manner. Holiness and sanctification should be the characteristic elements of our Christian lives. This is perfectly stated by the Lord to Israel in Leviticus 11 –

“For I *am* the Lord your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I *am* holy.” Leviticus 11:44

What Israel missed, and what we continue to miss in the church, is that we have been sanctified so that we may then sanctify ourselves. To not follow through with what the Lord has done is contrary to what is expected of us. We are to be holy because the Lord who called us is holy.

Life application: How sad it will be when we stand before the Lord and see how truly unholy we were at times when we should have acted in holiness. If we can just remember this now, it will help keep us on the right track. Keep the holiness of God in the forefront of your mind, and then endeavor to emulate that holiness at all times.

Lord God, You have called us to be holy, just as You are holy. How often we fail at this! Help us to carry the sense of Your infinite holiness before us so that we will then be reminded of how we are to act. May we emulate You to fullest degree possible at all times. It is so easy to be distracted from this, and so be with us and help us in this endeavor to which You have called us. Amen.

Therefore he who rejects *this* does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit. 1 Thessalonians 4:8

The word translated as “Therefore” is rare, being used only here and in Hebrews 12:1. It is a combination of three separate words which come together to form an emphatic “what must follow.” It extends the same thought which precedes it. It covers everything from verse 1 which said, “exhort in the Lord Jesus.” After that, Paul mentioned the commandments that were given “through the Lord Jesus,” and then he mentioned “the will of God.” Each of these was explained, but now he emphatically states, “Therefore,” and then he says, “...he who rejects this does not reject man.”

The word “this” is inserted by translators, but it was purposefully left out by Paul to add emphasis to the second clause. It actually then reads, “Therefore he who rejects does not reject man.” It causes the mind to reach forward in anticipation of what it then must reject. He then immediately explains it by saying, “but God.” The highlighting of Jesus and “the will of God” in the previous verses was given to lead us to this.

Those who conduct themselves in the ways he has presented in verses 3 through 7 are not rejecting Paul, as if he alone made up the commands. Rather, they are rejecting God Himself by rejecting His commands. The word translated as “reject” signifies “to break faith with.” In conducting our lives in a manner contrary to the words given, we demonstrate a lack of faith in God’s word, and we cancel His authority over us. We become rogue agents with a perverse agenda.

Paul then notes as a confirmation of this that God “has also given us His Holy Spirit.” Those who came to Thessalonica and instructed the new believers were filled with the Spirit’s gift of inspiration. It logically follows through then that Paul’s words continue to be inspired. He is writing on behalf of the Lord. And what then follows is that all of Paul’s letters that are included in Scripture are, in fact, the word of God. He was selected by Christ Jesus (Acts 9), he evangelized and ministered to the Gentiles, and he wrote letters of instruction as inspired by the Holy Spirit. Those letters have been saved in the pages of the Bible, and they are doctrine for the Gentile-led church age.

Life application: Ignore Paul’s writings, and you have no sound doctrine at all for the conduct of your life in Christ during this dispensation. Don’t ignore Paul’s writings.

Lord God, the more we look into Your word, the more we see it confirms that it is, in fact, Your word. You are the only God, You have spoken Your one and only word to the people of the world, and You have confirmed it through fulfilled prophecy time and time again. What a great comfort it is that we have the surety of knowing this, and thus that our pursuit of You is not in vain. What a sound and wonderful anchor we have for our souls! Amen.

But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; 1 Thessalonians 4:9

In verse 12 of the previous chapter, Paul said, “And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we *do* to you.” Now in this verse, he again brings up the subject of love among the brethren. It is obviously something heavy on his mind, and something which he feels must not be left unaddressed in its fullness. His words, “But concerning brotherly love,” contrast what he said in verses 6-8. There he began with, “that no one should take advantage and defraud his brother in this matter.” Now, he shows what is right rather than that which is improper.

However, he elevates the thought to highlight the importance of this fraternal bond by saying, “...you have no need that I should write to you.” In other words, “This is something you already are aware of, and something that exists between you already.” And how is this the case? He then adds, “for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another.”

The word he uses for “taught by God” is unique. It is not found in classical writers, and it is only used here in Scripture. It is thus a word coined by Paul to make his point. The word is *theodidaktos*, and it means exactly “God taught.” What Paul is speaking of here

obviously must be speculated on. Does this mean they have already heard the substance of the words of Jesus in his prayer for unity among the believers (John 13:34)? Does it mean that the instructions given by Paul and his associates, being the very words of God, have been received and acted upon by them? Or does it mean that the indwelling of the Spirit has taught them this?

What is probably the case is a combining of two or three of these things. They were taught the very truth of God by Paul and his companions, the Holy Spirit prompted them in their own Spirits, and they may have had the very words of Jesus explained to them as well. In receiving Christ, they understood the family unit of believers in a new way. If they are adopted children of God because of the work of Jesus, then they are brothers in a real sense.

Just as children of the same father and mother are united in a unique way, loving one another even when they disagree, so those in the church are united under a Father and a mother (Galatians 4:26) in a unique way. The bond is so close that love is expected to be the natural result. Thus they are God taught because of the situation they are in.

Life application: How unfortunate it is that Christians are so quick to tear one another apart over minor differences. There are many major doctrines which we must stand on, but churches have been divided over things as stupid as whether the congregation should stand, kneel, or sit during prayer. Pet peeves produce poor parishioners. Let us put them aside and demonstrate the love we have been called to.

Heavenly Father, as Christians who have been bought by the precious blood of Christ, we are actually supposed to be loving to one another. It seems this instruction has been left out of the basic curriculum which is taught to believers. Instead, we find it easier to tear apart one another over the color of chairs used in the church. Give us hearts to overlook pet peeves, and to see one another as You see us. Amen.

...and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more; 1 Thessalonians 4:10

Paul's words now serve as a compliment towards his readers. He had just noted that they were "taught by God to love one another." Now his compliment based on that is, "...and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia."

The love of the Thessalonians for other believers was evident in their missionary enterprises which Paul noted in verse 1:8. There he said that from Thessalonica, the

Lord's message had sounded forth not only throughout Macedonia, but it had even extended as far as Achaia. In carrying the message, they had also carried love for the brethren. This was a point upon which he complimented them. But he then goes further by urging them on to even greater things by saying, "But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more."

The intent of Paul's words is to encourage them to seek perfection in their love of the brethren. This cannot be taken as any sort of rebuke, but rather an exhortation to continue to perfect that which they had already displayed. Peter states the same thing to his audience in 2 Peter 1 –

"But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, ⁶to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, ⁷to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. ⁸For if these things are yours and abound, *you* will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins." 2 Peter 1:5-9

Like Peter, Paul isn't focusing on the lack. Instead, he is exhorting towards perfection. This is what all Christians should strive for, knowing that it is this which is pleasing to the Lord.

Life application: No matter how long we are in this body of flesh, we will never be perfect, nor will any of our Christian qualities be perfected. Only when we are glorified at the coming of Christ will this be so. However, we can and should strive for perfection at all times. Let us do this to the glory of God, and for the mutual benefit of those we encounter in our daily lives.

Most glorious heavenly Father, thank you for putting up with Your children, even in their weaknesses and failings. Your kind hand of mercy and Your marvelous grace is evident in every one of us who have failed You countless times. But because of Your loving kindness, You continue to forgive us through the offering of Your Son. How can such love be? And yet it is! Thank You for the grace found in Christ our Lord. Amen.

...that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, 1 Thessalonians 4:11

Paul's words here form a paradox. He says that the Thessalonians are to "also aspire to lead a quiet life." The sense given is that they are to strive to be quiet. In other words, it would be comparable to saying, "So contained should believers be, that they are actually to be willing to jump out of their skin in order to remain that way." The words thus indicate a superlative nature involved in our striving for a quiet life.

Next he says, "to mind your own business." Christians are not to be busybodies. It is explicitly stated by Paul in his second letter to this same group of people –

"For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. ¹² Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread." 2 Thessalonians 3:11, 12

In this, we are only to express our opinions and actions in regard to others' lives when we are asked to do so. Other than that, we are to mind our own business, leaving others to what pleases them.

Next he says, "and to work with your own hands." Paul had set the example for them. He came and ministered to them, and yet he continued to work in his profession as a tent maker. It may be that as the Thessalonians went out to tell others about the Lord, that they became indolent towards productive work. In this, they would then become a burden on others.

It could also be, as Paul will hint at in his next letter, that the believers were so caught up in the fact that Jesus might be returning soon, that they just sat around talking about the rapture and getting nothing productive done in the meantime. Unfortunately, that same sad type of conduct continues on today. Rapture seekers find all kinds of reasons to do nothing productive for themselves or for the church as they make ridiculous predictions about the coming rapture. Every time a prediction fails, another pops up to replace it.

Finally he says, "as we commanded you." His words are not new. Rather, they have already been noted while he was present with them. Word probably came back to him that these things were being neglected. Because of this, he is once again reminding them of the need to act in these important ways. Should they fail, there would be disunity and disharmony among the believers, and discredit upon the faith in the eyes of non-believers. Obviously, these precepts remain the same, and those who do not follow them fall into exactly these same unhappy results.

Life application: If you are a busybody, an idle person, or a rapture-speculator, Paul's words should speak out to you today. We need to keep our noses out of other folk's business, we need to be diligent in work, and we need to let the Lord decide on when He will return. He will come at exactly the right moment. To not act in the manner Paul instructs only stains the name of Christ in the eyes of others, and it brings unnecessary division to the body.

Lord God, Your word tells us that we are to be diligent in work, not idle. It also tell us that we are to mind our own business and not put our noses into the affairs of others. In general these precepts have really been lost to the modern church, and in this we then bring a stain upon Your name in the eyes of others. Help us to be obedient to Your word and to only bring honor and credit to Your name. Amen.

...that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and *that* you may lack nothing. 1 Thessalonians 4:12

Paul continues with his exhortation to "increase more and more" from verse 10. He now tells them to "walk properly." To walk signifies the conduct of one's life, as it does consistently in Scripture. In this case, the word means "having good form," and it is the opposite of walking in a disorderly fashion, as is noted in 2 Thessalonians 3:6. He then adds on to this the words, "toward those who are outside."

There are a multitude of reasons that can be inferred as to why we should so walk. We want to be right examples for others, we would not want to be seen as inviting sin and unholiness, we would not want to be seen as subversive to the society in which we live, and etc. In walking properly, we would avoid such things, bring honor to the Lord, and have no reason for accusation against the title of "Christian." However, if we are walking properly and we suffer, then Peter tells us the benefit of that –

"But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, *you are* blessed."

-1 Peter 3:14

Finally in this verse, Paul says, "and *that* you may lack nothing." This can be taken in the neuter, as in this translation, or it can be taken in the masculine, and thus read, "may lack of no man." In other words, not sitting around idle waiting for the rapture to happen. In such a case, they would be dependent on others. This is certainly the intent of the passage.

Paul will soon speak of the coming rapture, and he will continue to define events which will occur around that event in his next letter. In both, he indicates that this is what some were doing. They were sitting around, waiting on the coming of the Lord, and were not productive in their regular, or their Christian, lives. This attitude is certainly contrary to “walking properly.”

Unfortunately, there is an entire section of believers out there today who still fit this sad pattern. They are unproductive because they are speculating on what is known but to God. Equally unfortunate, they turn their lack of productivity around and claim that it is they who are doing the Lord’s business by being “watchmen” for the Lord’s coming. Reject this type of behavior and walk properly in this life you have been given.

Life application: We are here to live out our lives to the full, not sit around watching 10 rapture date-setting videos a day. That is a waste of the life the Lord has given us. Let us not fall into that sad routine.

Heavenly Father, it is wonderful to know that You have chosen a day for the Lord’s return for us, but until that day comes, You want us to walk properly, and not be dependent on anyone else for our needs. Help us to fix our eyes on Jesus, but keep our feet planted in proper conduct as we walk in this world. Help us to be honorable, productive members of society. We pray this to Your glory as we are evaluated in the eyes of those around us. Amen.

But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. 1 Thessalonians 4:13

This verse begins the third major section of the chapter. He gave his “Finally then” in verse 1. Then he introduced what is “the will of God” in verse 3. Next he added, “But concerning brotherly love” in verse 9. Now, there is another “But” which is one of great hope for those who have lost loved ones before the coming of the Lord. As the letter was written 2000 years ago, that is a lot of lost loved ones, and it is also a lot of hope in the hearts of God’s people.

“But I do not want you to be ignorant” (some translations say “we” here), speaks of a matter which, if mistaught, or misunderstood, would leave believers with sadness, confusion, and possibly even bitterness towards the faith. It is possible that there were already erroneous ideas being bandied about which were causing heartache and pain over “those who have fallen asleep.”

What can be inferred here is that even at this early time after the establishment of the church in Thessalonica, some of the congregation had passed away. Without Paul being there, it may be that someone went up to the one grieving and said, "I'm so sorry for your loss. It is too bad that this happened before the Lord's coming. Now they will never know what glory they have missed." In this, there is the erroneous assumption that death meant the end of that person's hopes for a return to the Paradise lost so long ago. Paul will now correct this, showing that death is a defeated enemy, and nothing can block a believer's access to the glory which is promised. No, not even death itself.

In this, he again first calls them "brethren." The words here are exclusively for believers. They are first and foremost to living believers, and they are (as will be seen in the next verse) pertaining to believers who have died. These verses cannot be applied to anyone outside of a personal faith in Christ Jesus. In the term, "fallen asleep," there is already a clue as to where Paul is going with this. A person who is asleep is expected to awaken at some point. A person who is dead is not. Paul uses this most friendly and comforting term, and he then applies it to believers who have, in fact, died. It is reminiscent of his words to the Corinthians concerning the defeated foe -

"O Death, where *is* your sting?
O Hades, where *is* your victory?" 1 Corinthians 15:55

As the people he refers to now are merely "asleep," there should not be the sense of grieving that there would be over someone who had died. To bolster this, he then says, "lest you sorrow as others who have no hope." The word "others" is speaking of anyone who is not in Christ. When a person not in Christ dies, there truly is "no hope." And even if a person in Christ dies, an unbelieving friend or family member still senses only loss. Because they don't believe in a resurrection, they have no hope for the one who will actually someday be resurrected. To the one suffering the loss, there is only the anguished thought of eternal separation.

But in Paul's words there is hope. If he is making a contrast of those who have no hope, then that means there must, in fact, be hope! He will continue with his thought about this marvelous hope through to the end of the chapter.

Life application: Death is a sad time, even for Christians, because we will miss the fellowship and happiness that we share together now. But there is also a sense of joy in knowing that our beloved friend or family member is with the Lord. There is great comfort in Jesus Christ. Let us rest in Him in our times of sadness, drawing from the well of comfort He has given us – the pages of Scripture.

Lord God, we all suffer sadness and loss. This is especially so when we lose a loved one. But in Christ, there is a comfort which even death cannot extinguish. For those who have gone to sleep in His arms, there is the sure hope of awaking at His call on that great Day which He has set aside for us. The countless millions who have gone to Him will come to life anew, and we who are alive and awaiting that Day will be changed in a moment. And what a glorious day that will be. Even so, come Lord Jesus. Amen.

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 4:14

The words “For if” are stressed in the Greek, “If indeed...” In other words, this is not a question which asks, “If we can just believe.” Rather it is an emphatic statement containing no doubt as in, “For we certainly believe.” This is what the gospel hinges on. Nobody that Paul is writing to as one of the brethren (noted in the previous verse) would be considered as such unless he believed this particular precept which he now states – “that Jesus died and rose again.” As he says in Romans 10 –

“The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith which we preach): ⁹ that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”
-Romans 10:8, 9

To not believe in the death and resurrection of Christ, is to not be a Christian. Either one believes this and is saved, or he does not believe it, and is not saved. Paul takes the two verbs, died and rose again, and places them side by side as a single action. He did this also in Romans, speaking of the two things as one unified whole –

“It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, ²⁵ who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.” Romans 4:24, 25

The focus here then is on the humanity of Jesus. Though fully God, His humanity died, and it was up to God to raise Him, having been satisfied with His work. In the gospel of John, Jesus stated that He would lay down His own life and take it up again, but it is His divine nature which accomplished this. This is shown true because in Romans 10:9, it says God has raised Him. In His humanity, He literally died, and He literally rose again from the grave. As this is so, and as we are in Christ because of belief in what He has done for us, then Paul next says, “...even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.”

In this there is surety. There is no, “We hope this will happen.” Paul states it as a matter of fact. As Christ arose, so will those who sleep in Him. There is literally nothing to question because it is impossible for it to not occur. In the words of Paul though, he doesn’t actually say, “in Jesus,” but rather *dia*, or “through Jesus.”

The symbolism of what Paul is saying is missed by translating this word as “in.” Jesus is the way. He is the door. He is the One who welcomes us through Himself. When our physical bodies die, we pass through Christ Jesus into a state of rest. As believers, we are in Jesus, and so the actions which occur in this manner are through Him. It is one of the infinite blessings we possess because of simple faith in what He has done for us.

Further, the verb for sleep in this verse is passive. Therefore, instead of “who sleep,” it should read, “who have fallen asleep,” or “who have been laid asleep.” God has directed the moments of their lives, and at some point their lives ended, symbolized by the word “sleep.” Likewise, at some point, God will again direct the movement of what occurs for them, bringing them to a new state. We are participants in what occurs, not the initiators of it.

As an exciting second possibility, Vincent’s Word Studies renders this verse as, “...them also that are fallen asleep will God through Jesus bring with him.” In this, Jesus is “represented as the agent of the resurrection.” In either translation, we are the participants, and God is the One to do the work. We sleep; God raises. Depending on how Paul’s words are formed, they tell us that the sleep is either through Christ, or the resurrection is through Christ. In the end, it is all about what Jesus has done for us, and what God will do through Jesus for us. We have a surety that those who have died before us are safe and secure in the hands of our most capable God.

Life application: If you have believed in the work of Jesus Christ, you are saved. Nothing is going to change that. Someday, unless the Lord comes first, your earthly life will end, just as it has happened to the countless believers in Christ thus far. But that is not the end of the story. It is simply the closing of one act. God has set the plan, and it will not be thwarted. We shall be raised to eternal life because of the work of Christ Jesus.

Lord God, the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus gives us the absolute assurance that we too will be raised to eternal life. If we have believed in this gospel message, nothing can thwart what You have promised. For those we love and who have gone before us, they are safely in Your capable hands. For those of us who remain, our lives contain a surety that we too are, even now, carefully kept by You. No fear here. Because of Jesus,

our future is assured. Praise You, O God, because of what You have done through Jesus! Amen.

For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive *and* remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.

1 Thessalonians 4:15

“For this we say to you” is given to build upon the words of verses 13 and 14. Paul has made statements that pertain to those who have died, and to the future concerning them as well. Those in Thessalonica could say, “What is he talking about? How could he know these things? He is just saying this to give us comfort in our sorrow, but it cannot be true.” This is certainly a possibility, and so the words “For this we say to you” will then be built upon with, “by the word of the Lord.”

Paul claims direct inspiration from the Lord in this. There is nothing else in Scripture that matches what he says here. In other words, it cannot be said that he is simply repeating a previous thing found elsewhere in Scripture. Nor is this something that was passed on to him through a third party. Instead, he is explicitly stating that he was instructed by the Lord. It is the word of the Lord bearing the full authority of the Lord, and it is now being transmitted to the believers at Thessalonica (and thus to us!).

Understanding this, he continues with this “word of the Lord” by saying, “that we who are alive *and* remain until the coming of the Lord.” There is a time when the Lord will return. That is as sure as anything to be found in Scripture. The exact time is left unstated, and the way which He will return has to be fleshed out of several passages in Scripture, including Paul’s words here. He is certainly returning again. But He isn’t just coming back to an empty world, or a world devoid of believers. Rather, there will be believers on earth waiting for Him. This is what it means when He says, “that we who are alive *and* remain.”

Understanding this, Paul’s words which include the word “we” in no way implies that Paul expected this to occur in his own life. It was probably a hope of his, but the words must be taken generally. For all he knew, he could die that day. The timing of one’s life is up to the Lord. And so Paul is speaking as a broad picture of the coming of the Lord for whatever Christians were alive at that time, not specifically for a time he himself would participate in. Further, the words “who are alive and remain,” indicates that the timing is an unknown thing. It was unknown to Paul; it remains unknown to all to this day.

From there, he then goes on to explain, that those who are alive when He comes, “will by no means precede those who are asleep.” The words here have a strong emphasis on the negative. The Greek reads, “remaining unto the coming of the Lord no not shall precede those who have fallen asleep.”

This emphasis shows two things to the anxious Thessalonians. First, those who have died will be quickened first. There is no reason for the confusion someone introduced into their minds that they would not participate in this first resurrection. Secondly, there was to be no fear for those who were facing death that they would be included in the first category and somehow miss the blessed return of Jesus. In fact, just the opposite is true. Those who have died in Christ would receive the honor of being quickened first!

Life application: We may mourn over the loss of a loved one who is in Christ, but we can also rejoice that they will have the honor of being raised to new life before we who are left alive at His coming. Isn't an extra moment of seeing the Lord's face worth more than all the riches we possess? Certainly it is so. We should rejoice for their gain, even in our loss.

Lord God, though we weep at the side of a believer in Christ who has passed on, we should also rejoice for them. They will have an honor that those who are alive at Your coming will not have. They shall be raised unto their eternal life before those still alive. They will hear Your call, and they will be glorified. Only then will those who remain be changed. And one moment of beholding Your glory is worth more than all the earth's riches. In the sadness of our loss, we should also rejoice in the gain they possess. Thank You for tending to Your people so carefully. Amen.

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.

1 Thessalonians 4:16

In this verse, Paul explains the dead in Christ rising first by beginning with “For.” After this word, he will give details about what will occur which are parenthetical in nature. Then the final sentence picks up the main thought once again. To see this laid out, “For (...) the dead in Christ will rise first.” The words between these two thoughts simply give details of the sequence of events which will lead up to this. That sequence of events begins with, “the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout.”

The word translated as “will descend” is only used this one time concerning the second coming of Christ. It was used by John concerning Christ’s first advent when He came as a Man. It is also used when the Spirit descended on Christ at His baptism in Matthew 3.

Here the word “shout” is one found only here in Scripture. It signifies the shout of a command. Further, the word translated as “with” is the Greek word signifying “in.” The clause reads, “Because Himself the Lord in a loud command, in the voice of an archangel...” The context does not make it known if this is actually the voice of the Lord, or the voice of the archangel. John 5:25-29 speaks of the dead rising at the voice of the Son of Man, but with the mentioning of the archangel, it may be that he is the chosen herald, announcing the coming of Christ. Thus it would add a dignity to the event which is often seen among earthly kings and nobles. It is possible, as some interpret this, that there is both a shout of the Lord which is accompanied by the voice of the archangel, thus these are two separate parts to the events being described.

Concerning “the voice of an archangel,” who is being described can only be speculated on. The term “archangel” is only used here and in Jude 1:9 where Michael is named. Michael is then identified in Daniel as “one of the chief princes,” and “your prince” when speaking to Daniel, an Israelite. As he is one of a number of “princes,” it could be him or another unnamed archangel. Jewish writings do identify others, and Gabriel is noted in both Daniel and Luke as an angel, and as he is said in Luke to “stand in the presence of God,” and because he is the herald of the messages given to Daniel and Zechariah, he is a likely choice to again herald the sound of this memorable event in redemptive history. This is certainly possible because the Greek has no article before “archangel.” Instead it simply says, “(an) archangel.” This is important because in Jude, Michael is identified with an article, “the archangel.” This then means that he is not the only archangel, and so it is highly inappropriate to definitively single Michael out for this event, especially when it relates to the church, and not specifically to Israel.

Paul next says, “and with the trumpet of God.” Again, the Greek preposition is “in” the trumpet of God. It is as if His descent occurs during the shout and during the blast, signifying that He is the center of attention, not the voice or the blast itself. They sound forth only to call our attention to Him. It is reminiscent of the amazing events of the descending of the Lord upon Mount Sinai in Exodus 19:16-20. The sound of a trumpet from God is referenced elsewhere in Scripture many times as well.

Finally, Paul says, “And the dead in Christ will rise first.” This is the explanation of the previous verse. Those who are dead in Christ will hear the events, they will respond to the call, and they will come forth... to life! To everlasting life!

Life application: If you want life, you need Christ. Call on Christ and be one of those who will be taken up to be with Him forever. His word is true, the message has been written, and we have the surety of God's word that these things will come about.

Lord God, the idea of eternal life is something we cannot even imagine. It is written on our hearts to live forever, but what that really means is beyond our ability to mentally grasp. No matter what it will be like, there is one truth which we can rejoice in... We will be with our Lord Jesus. Because He has defeated death, we too can do so by calling on Him. It is a guarantee from Your wonderful word that we can be freed from this body of death and be granted eternal life with You. May that day be soon! Amen.

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.

1 Thessalonians 4:17

The substance of what these words mean is highly debated. The word "Then" signifies "afterwards." In essence, what precedes is an essential precursor to what then occurs. Some argue then that there could be a large amount of time between the two events. In other words, the dead will be changed, and then at some future point those alive will be changed. This analysis is incorrect for two reasons.

First, it would mean that remaining alive until the coming of the Lord has a different value assigned to it than dying in the Lord, something the Bible never implies. Secondly, it would then contradict 1 Corinthians 15:51, 52 which clearly states that all shall be changed in in the twinkling of an eye at the sound of the trumpet. The only distinction between the dead and the living are that the dead are first raised in order to receive their glorified bodies, at which time we shall join them in that flash of a moment. The word "Then" simply means that one event precedes the other, but they are otherwise all but simultaneous.

Next, we are told that when the dead are raised, "Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them." In this instantaneous act, we will be "caught up." The word is *harpazó*, and it signifies a sudden snatching away by force. A comparable thought is someone robbing another. They don't just grab and walk. Rather, they grab with decisiveness, and they remove themselves from the scene with all alacrity. This is what will occur with all believers, and it will be with all suddenness. We will be in this body, and then we won't.

In this occurrence, both those who were dead, and those who are still alive at that time, will join together “in the clouds.” There is no definite article with the word “clouds,” and so it says, “in clouds.” This has led some to conclude that the believers will be gathered together to resemble clouds. The lack of the article actually seems to demand this interpretation. In Revelation 1:7, Christ is said to come with the clouds. There the article is used. If one accepts that these are believers returning with Him, then the terminology of believers being gathered as clouds fits well. It would also be a New Testament fulfillment of the Old Testament picture where the Lord descended with a cloud at Sinai.

However, the translation “in the clouds” is also a possibility. Either way, there is a joining together of the people of the church to be with the Lord, either “in clouds” due to the gathering, or “in the clouds” due to the location. It is a moment where the hopes and dreams of the people of God will be fully and completely realized. We will no longer live by faith, but by sight. We will have the reward that our faith was based upon. Paul then further describes the event as, “to meet the Lord in the air.”

Here the word is *aér*, and it indicates the lower air; the air we breathe. Rather than meeting on solid ground, we will meet in a place which otherwise could not support physical beings. This shows that our new bodies will have a completely new nature. We will be like Christ at the time of the resurrection where He could suddenly appear behind closed doors, and who ascended to the Father in front of the disciples. One can speculate all day about what these bodies will be like, but the fact that we will meet the Lord with them in the air shows that they will be completely different than what we now possess. Anyone with acrophobia now will no longer have to worry about that.

Finally, Paul says, “And thus we shall always be with the Lord.” Here, Paul doesn’t tell us whether that means in heaven or on the earth. He simply makes the statement. Depending on how one perceives the events which surround this catching away (the rapture), will dictate where one believes we will be. But without even going into that, being “always” with the Lord does not necessitate that we will physically be there with Him at all times. It can simply signify that we will always have access to Him.

A bride is always with her husband, even if she isn’t in the same room (or even in the same country) as he is at any given moment. This verse is often taken to unhealthy extremes which then turn into demanding analyses of other verses in Scripture. This should not be the case. As the Bride of Christ, and indeed we are His bride (see 2 Corinthians 11:2), we will always be with the Lord – even if not physically at His side at all times; we shall never be parted from Him.

One item of timing which does need to be addressed is that of immediately returning to earth with the Lord after this catching away. This is held to by some, but that is to be rejected outright. Paul elsewhere speaks of believers standing before the judgment seat of Christ. It would make no sense for Christ to return to judge the earth before He has first judged His people, and then dined with them at a bridal ceremony.

As a final note, this catching away is alluded to by John in Revelation 4:1 where he saw a door opened in heaven. From Chapter 1 through Chapter 3 of Revelation, the church is specifically addressed. From verse 4:2, the church is not mentioned even once until Revelation 19:11 when Christ returns. At that time, His saints are with Him. The rapture that Paul speaks of here is then logically an event which occurs prior to the tribulation period. For this, and many other obvious reasons, it is illogical to point to a rapture at any other point, including a mid-tribulation rapture. The timing of the rapture will continue to be explored in the beginning verses of Chapter 5.

Further, the Old Testament gives definite types and shadows of what God would do in this rapture event, as He does with all other major events related to redemptive history. To see the rapture-related pictures, and to understand that He has already shown us what lies ahead, you can watch this video (a sermon by a rather handsome fellow) which clearly shows this as being the case: [The Rapture – Old Testament Types and Shadows](#)

In the end, God has determined that His saints will be with Him forever, beginning with this event known as the rapture. It will then be followed by a seven-year period of wonder in His presence, and seven years of hell on earth. After that, we will return with Him at the end of the tribulation period. This is what the Bible clearly and exactly portrays to His people; the church, which is His bride.

Life application: The word is written. Study to show yourself approved. And have faith that it will turn out exactly as God has revealed.

Lord God, You have shown in Your word that a day is coming when Your saints will be gathered to You. It is a time just prior to the world going through seven years of absolute and terrifying destruction. But You have not appointed us to such. Rather, You have granted that we will be taken to You, there to become Your bride. While the world is destroying itself, we will be in Your marvelous presence. What a great hope and comfort this gives to us as we await that wonderful day! Hallelujah to You, O God, for the surety we possess. Amen.

Therefore comfort one another with these words. 1 Thessalonians 4:18

“Therefore” is given to sum up the words of verses 13-17. They respond directly to the words, “lest you sorrow as the others who have no hope” which are found in verse 13. Where there is no hope apart from Christ, there is total assurance in Christ. When a Christian is properly instructed in what Paul has said, there may be grieving in the pain of separation, but the grounded believer will not grieve with the sorrow of the sense of total loss. There will be no lingering question as to what has become of their lost loved one in Christ. Rather, there will be a sense of surety that death is defeated, and that the time of separation will come to a happy end.

This is why he finishes the thought with, “comfort one another with these words.” Actually, Young’s Literal Translation gives the correct sense by following the Greek which says, “in these words.” It is an admonition to us from Paul that we should repeat the words Paul has written when the need arises. In them comfort is to be found. The grieving soul can immerse himself in them as if in a blanket of assurance.

Life application: The closing paragraph of 1 Thessalonians 4 is one of hope and one of comfort. Even if we do not memorize the verses, we should memorize where they can be found. All people will inevitably face the loss of death, and for the believer in Christ, they will need a reminder that death is not the end of their lost love who was also in Christ. However, we need to never give a false hope. These words are not to be passed on when the dead was not a follower of Christ. We are to stand firm on the truth that only those in Christ will be included in Paul’s words concerning the rapture and our gathering together to be with the Lord.

Lord God, there is comfort in Christ that is found in no other place. Your word teaches that there is but one way to reconciliation with You, and that is through Jesus. All others have the choice to receive or reject this narrow path. But what an incredible thing that You have even given us one path! It is we who turned from You, and yet it is You who have offered us peace. Thank You for what You have done for us. Thank You for the path back home. Amen.

CHAPTER 5

But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. 1 Thessalonians 5:1

Paul now enters into Jesus' equivalent of Matthew 24:36. What Jesus was referring to was specifically dealing with Israel's future prophetic events. The church was not yet formed, and the Gentiles were not yet being addressed. His words of Matthew 24 have nothing to do with the church. However, Paul's words do. He is writing what is considered doctrine for those in the church.

This introductory verse was written to eliminate any false ideas about church events which had already been claimed, and which Paul had to re-correct them on in His second epistle (see 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4). The timing of these event are, and will remain, unknown until they come to pass. They are things which the Bible states belong to God alone. It is pointless to make speculations about when they will occur because Paul clearly informs us that we are not in the know.

And so, to begin this section of his discourse, he says, "But." This is given to contrast what he has just laid out in the previous section – that of the resurrection and rapture of the church when we will be gathered together to meet the Lord in the air. A contrast means that it is the opposite of something. In this case –

- 1) We know that there will be a rapture, and the events which it encompasses are laid out in Scripture.
- 2) But...

This "But" is next detailed with the words, "concerning the times and the seasons." This phrase is a Hebraism. The first word "times" is a word which carries the sense of "time in sequence" as in a succession of moments. It is *chronos* (think of "chronology"). A person has a time to be born, he has a time to be graduate school, he has a time to be married, and he has a time to die. These events are ordained in a sequence, one following logically after another.

The next word, translated as "seasons," is the Greek word *kairos*. This word is more specific. It refers to things which come to their fullness, and thus they are "the right moment." This is comparable to Jesus' words of Matthew 24 when He says, "the day and the hour."

After saying this, he then says, “brethren.” Paul is speaking only to believers. Unbelievers have no part in the words of Paul’s letters, with the exception of leading them to a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Until that happens, the words do not pertain to them. They will not be included in the good things which have been prepared by God for His people.

Next he says to these brethren, “you have no need that I should write to you.” The intent of his words is not that the information was useless or somehow superfluous. It was because he had already told them that the timing of the events was beyond the sphere of his instruction to the church. It is natural for us to long for Jesus’ return, and thus that curiosity would then otherwise turn into idle speculation if he didn’t quell it in his audience now. Too bad we still don’t pay heed. Instead, it is the duty of the church to concern ourselves with affairs of the church, and not attempt to pry open the box of these future events “which the Father has put in His own authority (Acts 1:7).” There Jesus spoke the same words which Paul now puts to paper with the flow of his ink.

The coming verses will explain this in a way which rapture date-setters will claim gives them the right and the knowledge to pry all they want, but exactly the opposite is true. Context matters, and the context is that we are to pay heed to Jesus’ words of Acts 1:7 and connect them with Paul’s words here. After doing this, we are to say, “God is God, and I will not attempt to beat Him to the punch.” When the day comes (which involves a time known to God alone), we will not be surprised that it has come, but we will not have known that it was the day which He had ordained.

Life application: Setting dates for the rapture only causes harm. It is an embarrassment when it does not occur, it is an affront to God, and it diminishes the value of the church in the eyes of non-believers.

Lord God, how good it is that You have made such wonderful promises about our future! But, you have kept from us knowing the times and seasons of these future events. They belong to You, and they will be revealed to us only when they happen. Help us to be about Your work in the church instead of idly speculating about our departure. Help us to be obedient to this, and to be faithful Christians who go about Your business. Amen.

For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. 1 Thessalonians 5:2

To explain what he just said in the previous verse about “time and seasons” being unknown even to believers, Paul now says, “For you yourselves know perfectly.” The

word means “accurately” because it is examined down to the minutest detail. It is as if a probing examination has made the determination completely sure and there is no reason at all to go further.

This shows us that Paul had already discussed this part of the matter with them. They had not been given the incredible details of what the resurrection of the dead at the rapture would be like, and so those details were penned by him in Chapter 4. But they had been told about when the coming of the Lord would be. Someone had probably asked, and Paul then gave them his complete answer so that the matter would be settled. And that answer to them concerned “the day of the Lord.”

This “day of the Lord” is explained in the coming verses, not as the rapture, but as what follows the rapture, meaning the “day of the Lord’s judgment” upon the world. It is a seven year time-frame which is explained by the prophets and apostles in numerous passages. Paul’s words are then explained further in 2 Thessalonians 2 with these words—

“Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, ² not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. ³ Let no one deceive you by any means; for *that Day will not come* unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, ⁴ who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.”

-2 Thessalonians 2:1-4

In this passage from 2 Thessalonians, “the day of Christ” (some manuscripts say, “the day of the Lord), will not come until after the rapture of the church. The words “that Day will not come” are inserted by the translators for clarity, but they are correctly inserted. As “the day of Christ” is the nearest antecedent, it is speaking of that event. The reason for Paul telling them this was because some had obviously told the Thessalonians that it had arrived. This gave them reason to fear that they had missed the rapture which he explained in 1 Thessalonians. Paul wrote to them the second letter to show them this was not the case. Thus, these verses show that the doctrine of a pre-tribulation rapture is correct. First will come the rapture, and only then will come the day of the Lord which comes “as a thief in the night.”

This term is a simile which is used to indicate with all suddenness. There will be a time when the day of the Lord comes, and it will plunge the world into its self-destruct mode. And so what is correctly seen when taken as the Bible reveals these things to us is:

- 1) The church age
- 2) The rapture of the church (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)
- 3) The day of the Lord after the rapture (2 Thessalonians 2:2)
- 4) The revealing of “the lawless one” (meaning the antichrist) after the rapture (2 Thessalonians 2:8)

It is the rapture which initiates the unfolding of the next occurrence in the sequence of events, “the Day of the Lord.” As this event comes as a thief in the night, it is obvious that Paul is tying that phrase in with the “times and seasons” of verse 1. And as the antichrist is the one who is behind the 7-year peace deal with Israel, and as we will not know who he is because his identity is only made known after the rapture, then it is again plainly obvious that the rapture must be pre-tribulation. Each step is methodically recorded so we don’t have to fall into the error of misaligning the timing of the rapture as commonly occurs.

The main point is that actual timing of the rapture is not known, and it will not be known until after it has taken place. It falls under the “times and seasons” which both Jesus and Paul state we are not privy to. Unfortunately, Paul’s words, “For you yourselves know perfectly” apparently don’t pertain to date-setters. Time and again (and again) they set dates, and these predictions are always incorrect. The Lord told us that it is not for us to know these things, and Paul reaffirms the Lord’s word. And yet we presume to know better than those from Whom (and through whom) came the word of God.

Life application: The world is spiraling down the tubes, and we may have great fear that the Lord has forgotten about us, but such is not the case. When the time is right, and at the perfect time of His choosing, the Lord will come to gather us to Himself. Let us not set dates about when it will come about. Instead, let us do as we are instructed, and continue to tell others about what God has done in Christ. If we don’t do this, only terrible things lay ahead for them. It is either judgment at the cross, or judgment on the world who has rejected the cross.

Lord God, it is good to know that You have the “times and seasons” of all events safely guarded, and that You will bring those events to pass when You alone have determined. Help us be obedient to the commission which You have given us, and to proclaim the

cross which frees us from the coming wrath. That is our job now, and it is a marvelous honor for us to share it. Amen.

For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. 1 Thessalonians 5:3

The whole world is focused on a tiny sliver of land in the Middle East, Israel. It is so overly concerned with it, because of the countless enemies which surround that nation. Because of this, there can be no peace. The Islamic nations have oil, vast numbers of people, strategic lands for military purposes, etc.

Further, Muslims have spread out into the non-Islamic nations of the world and have become a threat within those societies. One of the main issues that stirs them up is Israel. Without dealing with Israel, they then cause death and turmoil wherever they go, using the lack of peace between Israel and the Muslim population in the land as a reason to work their evil.

Until the issue is supposedly handled, they vehemently state that there can be no peace. If there is no peace, then there is no safety. It is from this state that Paul’s words of the end times now make sense.

He begins this verse with “For when they say.” “For” is given based on the preceding words concerning Christ’s coming as “a thief in the night.” It is obvious that the two issues are being tied together. It also explains what is meant in 2 Thessalonians 2:6, 7. There is a restraining force in the world.

When that Restrainer is removed (which is speaking of the Holy Spirit), then the end time events will rapidly unfold. Thus, there is the rapture of the church at the removing of the Restrainer. After this happens, the world will then make its peace deal with Israel. The words, “when they say” are vague and form a general meaning, thus it is speaking of the world at large.

When the world sees the peace deal signed, they will say “peace and safety.” The enemies who have signed will say “Peace!” The world that believes that the Muslims are now pacified will say, “Safety!” There will be rejoicing at the state of kumbaya which has seemingly come upon the world.

However, the belief will be a false one indeed. Paul tells what the outcome of this “peace” agreement will be. It will be a time when “sudden destruction comes upon

them.” The Greek indicates literally, “stands over them,” or “takes its stand over them.” Paul writes this in the present tense to give it the most vivid effect on the mind. His words here closely reflect what is said in Luke 21 –

“But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. ³⁵ For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

-Luke 21:34-36

Jesus was speaking not to the church in those words, but to Israel. They would again be gathered back to Israel at some point, and it is at this time that the words would be fulfilled. The church age has ended, the rapture has taken place, and only now will these prophetic words find their fulfillment. There is no such thing as a “mid-tribulation” rapture. It is at the mid-point of the tribulation that the antichrist is working out the full force of his wickedness. Before that, there must be the perceived peace, but this perceived peace only comes after the rapture. Paul’s words form a doctrinal treatise on the sequence of events of the end times.

When the whole world has seen the peace deal signed, they will shout out, “Peace and safety,” but that is when the destruction stands over them, ready to destroy the world. And it will come, “as labor pains upon a pregnant woman.” The pains of a woman in labor increase both in intensity and in frequency, right up until the birth of the child. So it will be with the world. The supposed peace and safety will have been nothing but a precursor to strife and destruction. The people of the world will be hemmed in as if in a prison planet, and “they shall not escape.”

The book of Revelation shows that there will be no exit, no second rapture, for the people of the world. They will either take the mark of the beast and perish, or they will not take it, and they will perish. The difference between the two is that those who take it will perish, facing ever-lasting death at the Great White Throne judgment (Revelation 20:12). Those who refuse it will perish physically but be rewarded at the first resurrection (Revelation 20:5).

Surprisingly, the Old Testament gives prophetic pictures and details of these things so that we won’t make the error of incorrect analyses of eschatology (the study of end times events). The pre-tribulation rapture, the signing of the seven-year peace deal, the tribulation period, the return of Christ – all of it – it is all given in types, shadows, and

prophetic utterances in the Old Testament to give the sound believer in Christ the surety and hope of not being around when these calamitous events take place.

Life application: What kind of hope is there in being stuck on a prison planet for 3 ½ years, waiting for the Lord to come as His bride is being pummeled and torn apart by her enemies? No, God has not appointed us to wrath (1 Thessalonians 5:9), and he has promised to keep us from the hour of testing which is coming upon the whole earth (Revelation 3:10). Ignore those who have failed to take the time to properly evaluate these verses, and who provide us with only an unhappy doctrine of insecurity and uncertainty.

Heavenly Father, as incredible as it seems to the world at large, You have appointed a time when those who have put their faith in You through Jesus Christ will be spared from the hour of testing which is coming upon the whole earth. How marvelous it is that we have a sure and blessed hope of being in Your presence while those who failed to simply believe in what Jesus has done for them will face a world of destruction and death. Help us to continue to speak the word of Christ boldly while there is still time. Amen.

But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.
1 Thessalonians 5:4

The words, “But you,” are given as a contrast to what has just been said in the previous verse. The world will say, “Peace and safety!” when there is actually only sudden destruction coming upon it. For them, there will be no escape. This is because, as he has already said, the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night. This then sets up the contrast. The night implies darkness, but for believers, they are “not in darkness.”

The night and the darkness are words which are not literally speaking of night, but of the spiritual pall of immorality, ungodliness, false religion, etc. Believers have been converted by Christ, and this is no longer their state. Because of this, Paul continues that for believers this Day should not “overtake you as a thief.” The word “Day” is speaking of the Day of the Lord of verse 2. It is the tribulation period. He then returns to the simile of the thief. As noted in a previous verse, Paul specifically states that the antichrist will not be revealed until the Restrainer is taken out of the way.

As the antichrist is the one to bring in the 7-year peace deal with Israel, then it is plainly obvious that the church will experience a pre- (not mid- or post-) tribulation rapture. To state otherwise, sets up several open contradictions in Paul’s eschatological timeline. Further, it then logically contradicts what is known from the book of Revelation.

The greater part of the tribulation saints will certainly, and logically come from the first half of tribulation period. Maybe they will be converted and believe because of the rapture, or maybe because of the 144,000 who are sealed and who testify to what will happen. For whatever reason, they will refuse the mark of the beast.

It would make no sense to have to face the choice of taking the mark when one is already saved, which would be the case if a mid- or post-tribulation rapture were true. It would be like saying, "You now have to work to be saved." That isn't grace at all. The world will already be set up where nobody is able to buy or sell. Only in the second half will the truly greater part of the devastation take place. In the first half of the tribulation, the peace deal has been made; the second half is where things devolve.

If one thinks it through logically, it is not at the second half of the tribulation, but during the first half that the tribulation saints will refuse to join in the world system which has been realized. The words of Revelation state that there is a "great multitude" who will come out of the "great tribulation." Those who endure the events of the second half of the tribulation period will, for the most part, be those who have taken the mark of the beast. Some who have not done so will survive through the entire period and enter the millennium, but logically, they will be in the minority.

Finally, Paul's words of this verse that we are "not of darkness" cannot be used to justify that we are able to pinpoint the day of the rapture. This is not saying that we are going to be enlightened to these things. Rather, it is speaking of our spiritual state, not an ability to divine what the Lord has already told us is something we are not to know.

Life application: Believers have a surety which is wonderful. The world is going to go through seven years of immense suffering, all of which will come about after the signing of a peace deal between Israel and her enemies. But this will not occur until after the rapture of the church. To go through half, or all, of that time of suffering would mean that we would have to earn our salvation. Something which no other generation of believers has had to do. It would negate the grace which we have been bestowed. Hold fast to the surety that we are not destined for wrath, but for salvation from this terrible time which lies ahead.

Lord God, how grateful we are that You have promised to keep those who have believed in Christ from the terrible events which lie ahead for the world which has rejected You. Once the world was destroyed by flood; again it will be destroyed, but this time by fire. But Your people have an Ark of safety in Jesus Christ. Thank You that we possess this wonderful assurance. Amen.

You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness.

1 Thessalonians 5:5

In verse 2, Paul said that the day of the Lord comes as a thief in the night. In verse 4, he said that believers are not in darkness concerning the coming of this predetermined Day. Now to bolster that, he says, “You are all sons of the light and sons of the day.” The words are written to all believers at Thessalonica (and are thus inclusive of all believers in Christ at all times and in all places). There are no divisions, there are no exclusions. Any and all who are in Christ are termed “sons of light and sons of the day.”

The word “light” is used to contrast the “darkness” of verse 4, and the word “day” is used to contrast “the night” of verse 2. The terms are Hebraisms which means “belonging to.” As we belong to the light and to the day, our lives are open and evident to the Lord. We have confessed our need for Christ. The contrast is to those who have not. In order to show this, he then says, “We are not of the night nor of the darkness.”

This is the world in general. All people who have not come to Christ have concealed their need for Him. Their dark deeds are hidden, but they will be exposed. Their walk is one of spiritual death rather than renewed life.

What Paul has done in these first verses of chapter 5 is move from the specific, such as “Day of the Lord,” to the general, such as “sons of the day.” The “Day of the Lord” is that time which will expose all darkness and all wickedness. Paul speaks in this same general form in Romans 13 as well –

“And *do* this, knowing the time, that now *it is* high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation *is* nearer than when we *first* believed. ¹² The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. ¹³ Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. ¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to *fulfill its* lusts.”

-Romans 13:11-14

As you can see, we are positionally already sons of the day and of the light, but we still have the choice (as seen in the Romans passage) to act in a manner contrary to that position. This will be seen as the chapter continues to unfold as well. Because we have gone from darkness to light, we should live as if it is the case, not pursuing deeds of darkness and immorality. Should we not do so, there will be a loss of rewards at the coming of the Lord.

This is confirmed by the use of the preposition “in” in verse 4 (believers are not “in” darkness), and then the use of the genitive form of the noun in verse 5 – (believers are not “of” darkness). Being “in” speaks of the state one is in, whereas being “of” points to the nature and origin of the state. Believers can be “in” darkness while not be “of” darkness. In the case of the day of the Lord, those at Thessalonica are neither in nor of. This is true with all who have been instructed in this particular doctrine. However, when we are not instructed in certain doctrines, we remain “in” darkness even though we have been brought out “of” darkness. This is a call and a challenge to read, know, and apply the word of God to our lives.

Life application: You have been called into Christ’s marvelous light. This came about by a freewill decision to leave the life you once knew. Why would you want to go back to the life you realized you wanted to once get away from? Stand fast in Christ, walk in the light, and be a true son of the day.

Lord God, there was a time when each person who follows You called out to be saved from the pit they were in. Many eventually turn back to the same things that they once called out to get away from. Why would we want to go back to a place that we needed to be rescued out of? Help us to not forget who we were so that we won’t be tempted to return to those dark days which stole our joy. Instead, help us to walk in Your light, and to be pleased to pursue a righteous and holy walk all our days. Amen.

Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober.

1 Thessalonians 5:6

The word “Therefore” is given as a summary of what has been said concerning the words of verses 1 through 5. He has spoken of the “times and the seasons” which includes the Day of the Lord, and which will come as a thief in the night. He has said that those who are of the night will find that sudden destruction will come upon them. He has said that because we are not of the night, but rather are “sons of light and sons of the day” that this Day will not overtake us as a thief. This does not mean, and it cannot be inferred from these words, that we can know specifically when the Day of the Lord is coming. Rather it means that we will not be ensnared by it, having a general understanding of the prophetic timeline as he has laid it out. Because of this, “Therefore.”

To build upon the “Therefore,” he then says, “let us not sleep, as others do.” What this means will be further defined in the coming verses. Now, he simply tells us to not sleep. It is a metaphor which doesn’t so much speak of sin, but rather of being careless in

things pertaining to morality and spirituality. He speaks of sleep in this manner in Ephesians 5 –

For you were once darkness, but now *you are* light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of the Spirit *is* in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), ¹⁰ finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. ¹¹ And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose *them*. ¹² For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. ¹³ But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. ¹⁴

Therefore He says:

“Awake, you who sleep,

Arise from the dead,

And Christ will give you light.” Ephesians 5:8-14

Therefore, Paul’s words here are not speaking of us being aware of the “times and seasons” of verse 1 at all. It is speaking of our spiritual state as we await the Lord’s unfolding of those set and appointed moments which are known but to Him alone. Again, as is seen in the previous verses, there is nothing to suggest that we are going to be aware of the day of the rapture. The Lord has told us this, Paul has confirmed it, and so we are to be spiritually and morally awake as we await Him.

We are not to fall into the same state of indifference which is noted about unbelievers (noted here as “the others” – see verse 4:13) who state, “peace and safety.” In so doing, as is common among the apostatizing liberal churches of today, they are being drawn back into being in the dark rather than remaining in the light. This is something Paul states, time and again, which can happen to believers who do not actively stay awake, immerse themselves in the word, and walk according to the doctrine he lays down for us.

This then is confirmed by the contrasting clause, “but let us watch and be sober.” In the next verse, Paul will use the literal example of sleeping and drinking until being drunk. After that, he will explain what that means in a moral and spiritual sense by telling us how to avoid it. We are to be calm, wakeful, circumspect, and morally grounded because of knowing and adhering to the word. In acting in this manner, we will always be ready for the Lord’s coming. It will not be a moment of sad surprise when it happens, but rather a moment of joyous surprise. This is what Paul’s words convey. They in no wise indicate that we should be predicting the rapture, but rather we are to be in constant anticipation of it.

How sad it is that those who predict the rapture, time and time again, are actually in violation of this very precept. To state in January that the rapture is coming in September, or from one year to the next, or on a date four years away (or whatever!) would then wholly violate the intent of Paul's words. We are to be awake at all times, ever prepared for a moment which the Lord has reserved unto Himself.

Life application: What a sad and dangerous attitude it is to speculate on the day of the rapture and the subsequent unfolding timeline of the time of God's wrath upon the earth. And what an incredible waste of time it is. It is good to know the broad outline of these things, teaching them as doctrine, but it is error to specify when that outline will be executed. Let the Lord be the Lord. When we stand before Him, there will be no boast that we knew what He knew about the timing of these unfolding events.

Lord God, help us to be patient in our wait upon You. You would ask us to remain sober and alert, not spiritually darkened to the events of the world around us. There is no "peace and safety" ahead for the world, but rather there is only going to continue to be a degradation of society until the day You call us out of it. Help us then to not get sucked into it and allow our morals to lapse. You have called us to holiness, and so help us to be holy. This to Your honor and glory, O God. Amen.

For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night.

1 Thessalonians 5:7

Paul now explains what those who are in darkness do with the darkness. First, they "sleep." This is not to be equated with "those who have fallen asleep" in the previous chapter. There, Paul was speaking metaphorically of those who had died in Christ. Here, he is speaking of those who are spiritually dead as if asleep. They live in immorality, they act contrary to the word of God, and they are displeasing to Him because of this.

Such people in this condition "sleep at night." This continues the same thought. The night is the time of darkness. The physical darkness of a real night is to be compared to the spiritual darkness of those who are apart from Christ. They are doing the things which those "who sleep" do at the time when those who sleep do them.

Next he says, "and those who get drunk." Again, Paul uses a physical example to make a spiritual analogy. A person who is drunk is incapable of right thinking. They are often rude, boisterous, etc. It is a real, literal, and physical condition which is to be taken metaphorically for those who are in a comparable spiritual state. They cannot discern

rightly concerning the word of God. They are spiritually corrupt, morally abusive, etc. And as he says, such people who are in this state “are drunk at night.”

Paul again compares the life they live to being in spiritual darkness, and apart from the light which comes forth from Christ. His physical examples are provided for us to make spiritual comparisons to the world around us, and to discern what is right, moral, honorable, and glorifying of God.

Life application: Paul’s words are to be taken both literally and in a spiritual sense in this verse. One points to real conditions, the other as metaphors to those conditions. This is obvious because all people sleep at night, and there is nothing wrong with doing so. Further, not all people who get drunk do so during the night. These are general statements intended to provide spiritual applications. Careful consideration is necessary in verses like this in order to not jump to unfounded conclusions about what is spiritually right and proper, and what is spiritually improper.

Lord God, your word sometimes uses metaphors to teach us spiritual truths. These are really, really helpful to us when trying to understand what You wish for us. But how can we understand the spiritual meanings unless we understand the metaphor first! As always, if we don’t know your word, we are ships tossed about on an unfriendly sea. Help us to desire your word more than our necessary food. And then open our minds to understanding it properly. Amen.

But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. 1 Thessalonians 5:8

Paul, using the metaphor of “those who get drunk are drunk at night,” from the previous verse now contrasts that with the expected life of the believer. He says, “But let us who are of the day be sober.” As noted, getting drunk is equated with a spiritually immoral condition. Paul doesn’t say that we cannot be in such a state. Rather, he exhorts that we should be otherwise. Christians are to have a complete break with the life-attitude and conduct of those who have not come to Christ. In order to accomplish this, he next gives two more metaphors to guide us.

First, he says, “putting on the breastplate of faith and love.” The words “putting on” give the idea of vigilance. The guard “puts on” his gear in anticipation of that which is certain to come. Adorned in these things, he is then to watch. Why? The reason is because he doesn’t know “the times and seasons” mentioned by Paul in verse 5:1. The guard is to stand ready at all times, not be asleep at night nor get drunk at night. “The breastplate

of faith and love” is a protection. In Ephesians 6, Paul exhorted believers there to put on “the breastplate of righteousness.”

In our watchful state, we are to have defensive protection which is based upon who we are in Christ. Faith is our strong defense against the wait. It may be a long time; it may be a time of trial and persecution; it may be a wait which encompasses an entire life of ill health or disability. But we are to defend against the attacks of the world with faith. When we stand in God’s goodness, and upon His word, we will be able to endure whatever blows we may face.

Added to that is love. Paul’s discourse concerning love in 1 Corinthians 13, along with his many other references to it, can teach us how this should be realized in each of us. Suffice it to say that this is love of God and of man, and it is love from God and from man. We are to live in this state of love in order to protect ourselves from whatever attacks we may face.

Finally, Paul says, “and *as* a helmet the hope of salvation.” Paul retains the same metaphor that he used in Ephesians 6. The helmet, both there and here, is one of salvation. A helmet is used to protect one’s head. It is to guard us in our thoughts, in our knowledge, and in our understanding. As it is a helmet of salvation, it is one intended to keep us from falling into idleness, despair, loss of the knowledge we already possess, etc. When we have a hope, we are not to let it become diminished. Instead we are to retain that hope, reflect on it, and be encouraged by it. In so doing, we will not be as one who sleeps at night, or as one who gets drunk at night. Instead, we will be sober and alert at all times.

Life application: Faith, love, and hope are all things that we are exhorted to possess, and we should possess them in abundance, even to overflowing. If we stand in this way, then we will be able to overcome despair, and from getting sucked into the ways of the world once again. Christ is coming; we don’t know when that will occur; and therefore we need to stand ready at all times. If we don’t do these things, our walk will falter, and we will become ineffective soldiers in the church.

Lord God, help us to be sound, reasonable, and effective soldiers who are always on the watch as we wait upon Your return. It is so easy to get caught up into idle speculation, and to then let our guard down. In so doing, it will be easy to fall into despair, and in turn to lose our hope. Help us to not be this way, but to stand moment by moment throughout our lives in eager anticipation of being joined to You forever. Whenever the day comes, even so – let it come. Amen.

For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 1 Thessalonians 5:9

The word “For” is given to explain further what Paul has just said concerning right living as we wait on the Lord. Because of this hope, “God did not appoint us to wrath.” The point of living in a right manner is because we have a true hope of not being caught up in God’s wrath. If such were the case, there would be little point in right living. Every good thing we did would be in vain, and all that we could expect is a reward of pain and misery for our efforts.

But such is not the case at all. Instead of being appointed to wrath, we have been appointed “to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.” The word translated as “obtain” is *peripoiēsis*. It is a word which means “to make one’s own,” or to “completely obtain.” Literally, it signifies “for abundant (all-around) gain.”

Believers have made a choice in Christ Jesus. They have put their trust in Him, and God has used that trust to guarantee our salvation. There is nothing the believer has done to merit this, but rather it is a choice of trusting solely in the merits of Christ for salvation. This is why Paul states, “through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Our faith is directed towards Him, and our salvation is obtained through who He is, what He has done, and the means which He has decided for it to come about. The same word is used in Hebrews 10:39 to show that it is faith which makes this possible –

“But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.”

There the word “saving” is the same as “obtain” here. The faith (those who believe) in Christ is what secures this. Again, it is faith in what Christ has done, and it is sufficient to be saved from God’s wrath.

An argument concerning the timing of the rapture comes up from this verse by some. It says “For God did not appoint us to wrath.” Some will argue that this means believers will be completely exempt from the tribulation period, and these words justify a pre-tribulation rapture. Others state that it justifies a mid-tribulation rapture because Revelation speaks of the “wrath of the Lamb” which is only the second half of the tribulation period.

Paul’s use of the word elsewhere could rightly be used to justify the former, but he also uses the term in the present sense when speaking of of the Jews in 1 Thessalonians

2:16. However, the second option, that of the wrath of the Lamb pointing to a mid-tribulation rapture, is impossible to justify. Nowhere does Paul indicate any such connection as this. But even more, this rather ludicrous analysis makes “the wrath of God” different than “the wrath of the Lamb,” as if Jesus is not God. No such separation is ever noted in Scripture, and it is truly a mishandling of what is being said in order to justify an otherwise unjustifiable presupposition.

Revelation 3:10, speaking of the entire tribulation period says –

“Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.”

This is speaking of the entire tribulation period which comprises everything after the letters to the seven churches, all the way up until the Second Coming of Christ in Revelation 19. The next verse after that then says, “Behold, I am coming quickly.” Those words are tied into the thought of “the hour of trial.” In other words, He will come quickly, and then will come “the hour of trial.” It would make no sense to say that one is coming quickly (meaning unexpectedly) if the timing of His coming was already known, meaning one-half way through the tribulation period.

The only justifiable position from a right understanding of Scripture concerning the coming rapture is that it will occur, and only then will the world enter the seven years of tribulation.

Life application: Though we may suffer greatly in this life, as countless millions of Christians have in the past, this is not an indication that God has poured out His wrath upon His people. Rather, that is a part of the world building up iniquity which will be poured out in wrath upon them. The Lord will reward the world with great wrath and indignation, but His people will be saved through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Heavenly Father, at times it seems as if You are absent from us. We face trials, sicknesses, and death. But we can be sure that these things are not an indication of Your absence. You are carefully watching out for Your people while allowing the world to conduct its affairs. You have promised that those who live for You, as well as those who have died in You, will be saved from the wrath to come. We have obtained salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord. Help us to remember this, and to be confident that we are safely guarded by you. Amen.

...who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.

1 Thessalonians 5:10

Paul now completes the thought of the previous verse, beginning with the words, “who died for us.” He is certainly tying this into the thought of both clauses of the previous verse –

- 1) For God did not appoint us to wrath – because Jesus took our wrath upon Himself in His death.
- 2) but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ – He died for us, giving up His human, earthly life so that we could be saved.

It is Christ’s death which “delivers us from the wrath to come” (1 Thessalonians 1:10), and it is belief in His work, including His atoning death, which God credits to us for righteousness (Romans 4). And this is true “whether we wake or sleep.” Paul is ensuring that the believers in Thessalonica (and thus us!) understand that Christ’s return is for all believers, both those who have died (or, as Paul says, “sleep”), and those who are awake. At His coming all will be gathered together as one and will be transformed in the twinkling of an eye. There will be none lost, but all shall be saved and given new and eternal life at that time.

It is from this moment, that “we should live together with Him.” Christ was raised to eternal life, and so we too will be raised to eternal life. Christ ascended to heaven, and so we too shall ascend to heaven. We will participate in the events that He has laid out for us as is detailed in the final chapters of Revelation, and the saints of God shall rejoice in an existence which will never end. It will be one of marvelous wonder, endless delight, and eternal joy. Stay tuned; Christ is coming again to make all of this come about.

Having said that, the word “together” isn’t to be connected to the words “with Him.” Rather, it refers to those who are awake and those who are asleep. The event which occurs at the rapture will occur for the living and the dead at that time, as is detailed in verse 4:13-18.

Life application: Death has no hold on those in Christ. If you are facing the death of a loved one who believes, or if you are facing your own earthly end, you should not worry. God cherishes your faith at all times. How much more when that faith is demonstrated at the door of the great unknown encounter we call “death.” In Christ, death is defeated;

and in Christ, death has no sting. Let us stand firm on this truth and receive additional rewards for continued faith at such a time.

Heavenly Father, as mortal beings, we are all sure to face death unless you come first for us at the rapture. Help us to maintain our faith, even in the face of this great unknown door which we have never passed through before. As it approaches, let us be confident in the promises which are found in Christ, and which tell us that death is a defeated enemy. Thank You, O God, for Jesus Christ who delivers us even from death itself. Amen.

Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.

1 Thessalonians 5:11

Once again, Paul introduces the thought of verse 4:18 where he said, “Therefore comfort one another with these words.” In that verse, he was telling them to comfort one another in the assurance that none in Christ will be lost, and that all will be joined to Him in glory. Now, he is basing his words on the fact that this being joined in glory means that we are not to be included in God’s wrath. Instead, we will obtain salvation through Christ Jesus. As he then noted in verse 5:10, “...whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.”

This is the basis for his exhortation. Because of this wonderful assurance, we are to “comfort each other and edify one another.” The idea of the word translated as “comfort” is that we are to personally make a call on one another in their times of sadness such as when a fellow believer has died in Christ. At such a time, we are to remind them of the promises of God which Paul has penned to us. The word “edify” means to build up. When another’s faith is wavering, we are to take them to the word and build them up once again, assuring them that all will be fine. The Lord has it all under control, and we are to convey this to them.

Paul then finishes the thought with, “just as you are doing.” Those at Thessalonica were following through with this. Paul knew that, but somehow it appears that a thought of doubt concerning those who had died had been introduced into their minds. Because of this, he was doing exactly what he was admonishing them to continue doing – comfort and edify. They would now be able to do this with the tangible proofs of an apostolic letter available to them. Should someone come in and attempt to reintroduce doubt or make conflicting statements, they would only need to go to the word to prove the truth of the matter.

Life application: How can we know if Mormonism is right or wrong? What about the doctrine of the Jehovah's Witnesses? What about any other false sect? The answer is, "Whatever conflicts with, or contradicts, what is already written in God's word is to be rejected." The word is written. It is fixed, firm, and forever. Let us not be tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine which is given through the trickery of men. Instead, let us stand fast and firm on the truth of the Word of God.

Heavenly Father, You have given us a choice in life. We can accept or reject Your word. Help each of us – from any and every background and culture – to be willing to search out the truths You have laid down, and to accept them as they have been given. Truth is what corresponds to reality, and surely Your word is truth. Help us to accept this, O Lord. Amen.

And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, 1 Thessalonians 5:12

Paul has now completed the main thoughts of the epistle. The last main thought was the information about the coming of the Lord at the rapture and what will occur after that has come to pass. With that behind him, he now gives various exhortations which are intended to keep the church strong and properly aligned with what is expected of them. To begin that thought, he starts with honoring the leadership. Without respect for those who carry the load within the church, nothing else will run efficiently.

To begin, then, he says, "And we urge you, brethren." He is addressing the church which is comprised of believers. Though non-believers may have been present, and though many have read his words since then, his words are directed to those who are a part of the fellowship. In this, he prompts them strongly using a word translated here as "urge." It is a word that indicates special consideration should be given because of the intimate relationship which is involved between them.

His urging is then defined with the words, "to recognize those who labor among you." The word indicates having an appreciation for them and their labors based on their nature and position. The various churches at the time of Paul were not set, organized structures. Unlike Israel which had a set standard of worship, set priests, set times for various occurrences, and so on, this was not the case (nor is it the case today). Each church (and each denomination) today has its own structure and hierarchy.

Paul's words are to each and any church. Those within this hierarchy, and who conduct the ministerial tasks of the church, are to be recognized for their efforts. The word

translated as “labor” gives the sense of laboring until worn out. Thus it is “wearisome toil.” If the elder, pastor, preacher (or whatever other designation is given in any particular church) is sincere about his duties, he will expend himself tirelessly in them. This is what Paul actually anticipates in his choice of words.

To further define this, he continues with, “and are over you in the Lord and admonish you.” The words “over you” indicate one who provides the needed example to direct others. This is through positively impacting them by example. They are those who are set before the church, and to whom the church then looks to for their spiritual instruction and guidance. The words “admonish you” indicate the exerting of positive pressure on someone’s logic or reasoning. In other words, such a person is one who urges others to choose God’s best for themselves.

Paul acknowledges that such leaders are to be appreciated for their labors because they have chosen the weighty task of training and instructing others in the most important issues that any person could face. They are issues which deal with family, work, death, marriage, salvation, condemnation, holiness, morality, and on and on. Most of these issues are highly personal, and therefore they are sensitive and truly a source of wearing out the leader.

Live application: One person unloading on a minister might not seem like much, but when there is an entire church full of people, many of whom need to unload at any given time, it becomes a great burden on him. Time is precious, and so each person that the minister attends to should realize this and appreciate the effort that he makes.

Lord God, there aren't enough hours in the day! And so help us to prioritize our labors according to those things which are most important to You, and those things which are right and proper for our daily lives. Help us not to get distracted by the vanity of this world, but instead to train ourselves to seek out and apply to our lives that which is noble, honorable, and pure. We have eternity set before us, and so help us to make what we do now count towards that time. Amen.

...and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. Be at peace among yourselves. 1 Thessalonians 5:13

The Greek of the words, “and to esteem them very highly” is difficult to be dogmatic about. Two main views are 1) that the words “in love” are to be taken with “to esteem,” and then to attach “very highly” to “in love” –

“...and to esteem them in love very highly.”

Or, 2) it could be that “love” qualifies both “esteem” and “very highly” –

“...and to esteem them very highly in love.”

Either way, the idea is geared towards loving “those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord” They are to be given high honor for their efforts in Christ. The church isn’t just to “recognize” that he is the leader as if one would pay honor to a president or a king, but they are to have a holy love for him as one would of a beloved leader. In such a bond, there is to be the letting go of pet peeves and minor disagreements about life, and a joining together in heart and fellowship because of Christ.

The reason for this is then stated as, “for their work’s sake.” It is not so much because of the person doing the work of ministering, but actually for the sake of the work itself. Though a person is filling the position, it is the position which is being focused on. This is actually rather important, because pastors and preachers come and go, but the position remains. The one who fills the position is to be esteemed “highly in love for their work’s sake.” In so doing this, any non-sinful failings of the person are overlooked because of the job he is carrying out for his flock.

Finally, Paul says, “Be at peace among yourselves.” There is no connecting article such as “and” here, and thus it is an entirely different thought intended for the members of the church in general, among one another. Not only are they to show loving esteem for their leaders, but they are to act in peace towards one another as well. This is a sentiment seen elsewhere. Jesus says substantially the same thing in Mark 9:50. Paul says it in Romans 12:18, and again with the same idea, but different words in Romans 14:19.

Life application: A church is only a home to those in it if they treat it as a home. When we are with our family, we will hopefully give respect to the parents, demonstrate love towards one another, and attempt to live at peace. If we carry this same attitude with us to the church, then it will function in the intended manner. The ultimate purpose of going to church is to bring glory to God, not have donuts and coffee. If we fail to follow through with Paul’s words, we will fail at glorifying God.

Gracious, merciful God – forgive us for treating our time at church as a social affair. We hurry to get coffee and see what good things are laid out to eat, we talk about our successes of the past week, we let the music become our enjoyment (or become upset when we don’t like it), and we forget that the entire purpose of church is to glorify You.

We should hunger after Your word which reveals You. We should long for a close walk with Christ whom Your word points us to. And, we should revel in the day when we will be in Your presence forever. Help us to have this attitude as we come into Your presence at church. Amen.

Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. 1 Thessalonians 5:14

Paul continues his exhortations which are intended to maintain the “peace” just mentioned in the previous verse. “Now we exhort” is stated to ensure this is accomplished. The word for “exhort” is a common one which signifies “to call to” or “to encourage.” The exhortation is that they are not shy in carrying out the things necessary to maintain the peace. Instead, they are to act boldly and decisively.

This is, again, directed to the “brethren.” He continuously uses this term to ensure that they understand their position in the body, and that they then act on it from that perspective. First, they are to “warn those who are unruly.” Paul uses the same word translated as “admonish” in verse 12 to show the contrast between those who listen to their elders, and those who do not. He is showing the contrast between what is right and proper, and what is not.

The word translated as “unruly” is found only here. It is the negative of a word which means to “draw up” or “arrange.” Thus, it is those who are out of line, just as a soldier who marches to his own beat is out of line. Such people refuse to observe the guidelines of the Lord by living in faith in what He has instructed, and what is then transmitted to them through their ministers. If the unruly use their unruliness to divide the body, Paul then gives direct instruction to ministers concerning them –

“Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, ¹¹ knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.” Titus 3:10, 11

Next, comes his exhortation to “comfort the fainthearted.” This indicates a demonstration of sympathy and comfort by the personal touch of soothing speech and heartfelt attention. This is needed for those Paul identifies as “the fainthearted.” The Greek is a rare word found only here. It means “little in quantity,” and thus it is someone who is undeveloped, and who lacks individuality. A suitable synonym for such would be someone who is pusillanimous in nature.

Next, he exhorts the brethren to “uphold the weak.” Charles Ellicott defines such people as “those who have not attained robust common-sense and breadth of conscience which discriminates between truths and superstitions, necessities and expediencies, or who are not yet ripe enough Christians to be sure of standing in persecution.” We are to reach out to such as these and provide them with words which will build them up, correct them in their deficiencies, and encourage them to press on in their walk with Christ.

Finally he instructs the church to “be patient with all.” In Christianity, there is a truth that “everyone is a specialist except the minister.” People develop ideas about what is correct, and they can wear others out with their incorrect thinking. Ministers are to be patient in correcting people like this. Further, there are others who have real trouble grasping theological truths. They can be told the same thing numerous times, and yet they still will come back and ask the same question again and again. Believers need to be patient with such people, tending to them with care and courtesy, even if they are worn out by the tedium of the task.

Life application: There is a difference between those who are unruly or belligerent, and those who are simply lacking internal courage or right reason. For those who are “know-it-alls,” and who are disruptive about doctrine, there is always the “block” option of Facebook. But this should be used sparingly. There are many who are simply misinformed, misguided, or misaligned in their Christian instruction. We are to be patient with such people, tending to them in a manner that will lead them to a fuller appreciation of God’s word, and His intent for them.

Lord God, Your word asks us to be longsuffering and patient with others. It’s hard to know when “longsuffering” ends, and when we can walk away from an unruly or divisive person. Your word does give us that option but give us wisdom in this so that we don’t unintentionally harm someone who is truly seeking out the truth. And give us wisdom on the other side of that, so that we can effectively cut off those who do nothing but argue for the sake of arguing. Yes, give us this wisdom Lord. Amen.

See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all. 1 Thessalonians 5:15

The words of this verse are plain, simple to understand, and without any ambiguity or vagueness. He begins with “See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone.” It is human nature to want to seek retribution, especially when someone renders evil towards us. We want judgment on their actions, and we want it immediately. Further, we want to

execute that supposed judgment at least in kind, and possibly in a more stringent manner than it was rendered to us. But the word instructs us otherwise.

When evil is brought against us, we are asked to not turn around and act in a like manner. The word translated as “evil” is correct. It signifies evil in a broad sense. Returning evil for evil only produces more evil. It does nothing which will produce holiness. And Paul doesn’t just expect this toward believers, but “to anyone.” Our withholding of rendering evil includes all. It is a giant exhortation for us to follow, but it is a part of the word.

Next he contrasts the thought with, “but always pursue what is good.” This shows that rendering evil for evil is by nature wrong. In pursuing such an avenue we are, by default, pursuing evil. Paul asks us to instead pursue that which is moral, upright, and honoring of the Lord. Again, this is often a really hard thing to do in this life, but this is what is asked of us. And again, he notes “both for yourselves and for all.”

Certainly, Paul has included this thought to show that our attitude is not to be one way among believers, and then another way among non-believers. This may be the hardest part of all. Unbelievers often persecute those in the church in amazingly perverse ways. However, we are to conduct ourselves in a moral manner even towards them, placing them on the same level as those with whom we stand in agreement about our faith.

Life application: In today’s world, it is incredibly easy to return evil for evil to people via electronic means. We no longer have to look someone in the eyes in order to act this way. We can send out angry words laced with poison, and feel unashamed at doing so. But the modern world doesn’t exclude this ancient precept. It is as binding today as when Paul wrote it. Let us be careful to act morally, and honoring of the Lord, at all times.

Lord God, it is a very easy thing to tear others apart after they have attacked us. This is especially so nowadays. We don’t even have to see their faces. We can do it with our fingertips, rendering evil for evil. Help us to apply Your word to our lives and to not act in such a way. You have instructed us to always pursue what is good. It is often difficult, but we would pray for Your help in this so that we may honor You. And so do help us, O Lord. Amen.

Rejoice always, 1 Thessalonians 5:16

Paul now begins a succession of rapid-fire exhortations meant to stir up the minds and actions of those in Thessalonica. He begins with what is the shortest verse in the Bible based on the original wording, *pantote chairete*, or “Always rejoice.” It is argued that Luke 20:30 is shorter, but this is only so with certain manuscripts. In the Hebrew Old Testament, 1 Chronicles 1:25 is shorter in total letters, but it is three words. In the English translation, “Jesus wept” is the shortest, but that is much longer in the original and does not qualify. For an all-round “shortest verse in the Bible,” this is it. And what a wonderful admonition it is!

Those at Thessalonica were persecuted with afflictions (3:3), they were certainly challenged in their faith concerning the loss of their loved ones, and yet Paul exhorts them to “rejoice always.” There is a hope in Christ which transcends the troubles of this world, and which extends beyond death itself. Because of this, we are admonished to rejoice, and to do so always, at all times, and evermore.

In our faith, we are to believe that God is working out all things to our good, and which then is for His glory. And so, we are to be in a constant state of rejoicing because of this. Paul gives us similar admonitions throughout his writings, such as in Romans 5 –

“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³ And not only *that*, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; ⁴ and perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” Romans 5:1-5

The theme of the book of Philippians is summed up in the word “joy.” Despite writing from a dirty Roman prison, Paul was filled with joy at the thought of the work of the Lord for His people. This is the state we are to be in always.

Life application: Read the words of this verse again; apply to life.

Lord God, in You we can rejoice always. Amen.

...pray without ceasing, 1 Thessalonians 5:17

Prayer is a precept which Paul writes about many times. He says in Colossians to “devote yourselves to prayer.” He says in Romans to be “faithful in prayer.” In Ephesians, he tells

us to “pray in the Spirit,” and to do so with “all kinds of prayers and requests.” There he also specifically says to “keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” Such examples are all tied up in the thought of praying “without ceasing.”

We are to pray constantly, fervently, consciously, and purposefully. In so doing, we will then be able to fulfill the previous words of this sentence which say to “rejoice always.” It is through constant communication with God (through Christ Jesus) that we are able to remember the very things God has done for us, and those things which He has promised to us.

But what does it mean to “pray without ceasing?” Does it mean we are to lock ourselves away in a monastery and mumble chants all day long, swinging censers full of incense and eating bread and water? No! Praying without ceasing is a state of life. We can pray out loud or in our minds. We can pray as we work, and as we walk. We can pray alone, and we can pray with others.

Prayer is communication with God. When we are thinking about something which blesses us, and we say in our souls, “That is so beautiful, Lord. Thank You,” we are praying. When we are distressed over some terrifying occurrence in our life, or because of some issue which has saddened our souls, we can open our hearts and cry out to God in prayer which is audible and painfully woeful to others’ ears. And any communication between these extremes – indeed, any acknowledgment of the Lord’s presence in our lives which is mentally or audibly communicated to Him – is a type of prayer.

Therefore, to “pray without ceasing” is to always have the Lord on our minds. This is the life of faith that is pleasing to God. Let us then be obedient to this precept, living our lives in His presence, acknowledging that presence at all times. May our lives be constantly filled with words transmitted to God, rising to Him as the fragrant smoke of incense; always pleasing to Him.

Life application: If you are reading this commentary and thinking about the Lord, thanking Him for an analysis of His word, then you are in the process of prayer. Now, let this state continue always. Pray without ceasing.

Lord God, help me to be obedient to the exhortation to “pray without ceasing” which is found in Your word. May my mind be connected to You at all times, acknowledging You through thanks, petitions, and praises. And may these prayers also flow out from my heart, through my lips, and rise to Your ears as if the sweetest of incense. I pray this to

Your honor. May our connection stay open at all times as I truly “pray without ceasing.” Amen.

...in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

1 Thessalonians 5:18

It can often be hard to be thankful in this life. Family and friends die, we get ripped off by others, sickness and trials are always just around the corner – or maybe even in the room with us now. For these, and seemingly countless other reasons, giving thanks seems impossible. But when offering thanks in such times, we are truly fulfilling what is right and proper.

When we really and fully trust that we are where we should be, and when we can acknowledge that God knew we would be there, then we are demonstrating that we believe God is fully in control, even in the worst of circumstances. In giving thanks at such times, we acknowledge that He has something better planned for us, and we trust that it is true. Thanks then are a demonstration of faith. And they are not just for times of trouble, but even in the often more ignored times of abundance.

When things are going smoothly, we often forget to stop in our comfortable tracks and say, “Thank You God.” We get so caught up in the fun, that He becomes an afterthought. And so, Paul admonishes us to “in everything give thanks.” Truly this is pleasing to God, because it is an ever-present acknowledgment that He is there with us. It is, as noted, a demonstration of faith. And as the Bible says, “But without faith *it is* impossible to please Him” (Hebrews 11:6). Obviously then, with faith we are found pleasing to Him.

Paul then continues with, “...for this is the will of God.” In verse 4:3, Paul said that the will of God is our sanctification. As much as it is God’s will for us to be holy, so it is God’s will for us to be thankful. In being thankful, we will remember our connection to Him, and we will then desire to be Holy. These logically support one another. This state of thankfulness exists in the person who truly believes that God wants the best for him, and that the best is yet ahead. In our bad times, and even in our very best of times, we are to be thankful for the life we have been given – the spiritual life which has been granted because of the work of Christ. As Paul says, our thankfulness is God’s will “in Christ Jesus for you.”

Nobody on the planet would consider being thankful for bad times, ill-health, death, or other negative instances unless they saw that there was a good end because of them. In Christ, there truly is a good end for them. God’s love is fully and perfectly demonstrated

in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, and therefore, that love continues to be demonstrated now as we anticipate His coming again to bring us unto Himself.

Life application: A couple (of the many, many examples) other times that thankfulness is mentioned for us to consider are found in Ephesians 5:20, Philippians 4:6, and Hebrews 13:15. Take a moment to read those verses and consider them in the context they have been written. After this, be sure to be thankful in all things.

Lord God, today let us just stop and give You thanks. We have needs, but we know they will be met. We have hopes and desires, but we know they will be fulfilled according to Your wisdom. And we may have pains and trials, but these are a part of the life You have ordained for us. Through these things, we offer You both our thanks and our praise for Your immensely kind hand upon us. You have given us Christ Jesus, and so we are filled. We thank You in everything because of Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Do not quench the Spirit. 1 Thessalonians 5:19

These words from Paul give us great insight into the work of the Spirit in our lives. In Ephesians 5:18, Paul said, "...be filled with the Spirit." The verb in the Greek there is present/imperative/passive. In essence, "Right now, certainly, you are to have the Spirit to fill you." In Ephesians 4:30, he then writes, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit." The verb there is present/imperative/active. Thus, it gives the idea of "Right now, certainly, you are to not do this thing." Now Paul writes, "Do not quench the Spirit." What do you suppose is the state of the verb? It is present/imperative/active. Like grieving the Spirit, we are to be active in not quenching the Spirit.

What we are seeing here is a truth concerning the Spirit's working in our lives. Being filled with the Spirit is a passive thing. A person actively drinks wine, but then there is a reaction when the wine makes the person drunk. A person in a hospital who needs an IV does not fill himself with the drip. Instead, it is received passively. The person could pull out the drip, thus he would stop being filled with it.

The believer has all of the Spirit he will ever receive the moment he calls on Christ, but the Spirit can get more of the person. On the day of a person's marriage, they are now married and will never get more married, but the spouse can get more of the other spouse as yielding takes place.

The same is true with the Spirit. In order to be so filled, the Christian is to sing praises, pray, worship, fellowship, read the Bible, talk on the things of the Lord, etc. In doing these things, they are “filled with the Spirit.”

Understanding this, both grieving the Spirit and quenching the Spirit are active, not passive. When we do something inappropriate, we grieve the Spirit we already have. Likewise, when we don’t actively do the things necessary to fan the flames of the Spirit, we quench the Spirit. And this is the idea of the Spirit in our lives. It is as a fire. In Matthew 3:11, John the Baptist said, “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” In Acts 2, the Spirit was said to come down upon the believers at Pentecost as tongues of fire.

The Spirit then is as a fire which 1) can be quenched in our lives, 2) must be fanned in our lives, and which will only then, 3) fill our lives. Our actions result in the Spirit’s filling. But there is a truth which then cannot be missed. We possess the Spirit. Paul never says (nor can it ever be implied anywhere in Scripture) that we can accidentally lose the Spirit, remove the Spirit from our lives, or have the Spirit purposefully leave us. We are sealed with the Spirit the moment we believe, and that will never change. He is our deposit, our guarantee, of our redemption in Christ.

And so to not quench the Spirit (something we can actively do), we are to praise God, pray to God, meditate on God’s word, fellowship with other believers, live in holiness, and so on. Those things which are pleasing to the Spirit will fan the flame of the Spirit. Those things which are displeasing will do the opposite. This is why Paul said to Timothy, “Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands” (2 Timothy 1:16). The word translated as “stir up” means “to kindle afresh” as in fanning the flames. Paul implored Timothy to actively do this in order to be fully filled with the Spirit he possessed because of his faith in Christ. So we likewise are to conduct our lives in order to be filled. The Spirit will only fill those receptacles which are properly yielded to Him.

Life application: If you are saved, you are saved. Deal done; you are a son! (or daughter). However, your standing in relation to the Spirit you now possess is one which requires you to do certain things, and to not do certain things. When failing to appropriately act, it is we who will suffer. Why are so many Christians dead in the pews, probably because they aren’t even in the pews! What a waste of eternal rewards, staying home and watching football. Instead, let us expend our energies in Spirit-directed activities, and thus we will be pleasing to God.

Lord God, in Your word, we are admonished to not quench the Spirit, to not grieve the Spirit, and to be filled with the Spirit. The first two we can do actively; the third only You can do as we yield to You. Help us to be active in right ways, so that You will then fill us – even to overflowing. May our fellowship with the Spirit be so vibrant and active that others will see it and want some of Your good Spirit which we possess. Amen.

Do not despise prophecies. 1 Thessalonians 5:20

Paul now turns to prophecies. He just said, “Do not quench the Spirit.” It is the Spirit who worked through the apostles and prophets to give us the word of God. This is noted by Paul in the book of Ephesians –

“Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone.*” (2:19-20)

A foundation is laid only once. The chief Cornerstone is Christ. Upon Him the foundation is laid. The early church was given prophecies to establish the church. Those which were recorded in the Bible are then the foundation of which Paul speaks of. The words of the New Testament apostles, and the prophetic utterances of the Old Testament prophets are the work of the Spirit. Despite ten jillion claims of prophetic utterances, “a word from the Lord,” visions, dreams, and supposed divine revelations since the completion of the Bible, not one of them has added anything to the foundation which was laid. We have the word of God, and we are to not look for another word in addition to it.

In that now-complete word are the recorded prophecies which Paul speaks of. As they were given by the Spirit, not accepting them would be to “quench the Spirit, and it would further be to “despise prophecies” which are valid utterances of God, recorded for our instruction, reproof, edification, etc.

Paul’s words of this verse are not speaking about supposed claims of prophecy by people today, except in the interpretation of those which have been given. His words are given to us as an exhortation to rely on the word of God “which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3). Let us be wise and discerning, and not be blown around by false claims of supposed “prophets” today. There is one word, it has been received, and we are to hold fast to it alone for our life, doctrine, and edification.

Life application: If you want to hear prophetic utterances from the Lord, open your Bible and read. Let the word speak to you the word which God has spoken.

Heavenly Father, help us to be wise and discerning concerning supposed prophecies that people claim come from You. You have spoken, and Your word is complete. The foundation has been laid, and it is a sure and wonderful word which came from You through the apostles and prophets. What more do we need to be built up and edified in You? Thank You for Your precious word. Amen.

Test all things; hold fast what is good. 1 Thessalonians 5:21

Note: Some manuscripts begin this verse with “but,” thus showing a contrast between what was just said and what is now said. Whether “but” belongs there or not in the text, the words of Paul still imply the use of “but” in the verse. Either way, Paul is showing us a contrast to the previous thoughts.

Paul has been giving a list of positive exhortations intended to keep the believer on a happy and sound course. Verses 19 & 20 concerned the latter – “Do not quench the Spirit” & “Do not despise prophecies.” Now, in order to ensure that we accomplish those things, he exhorts us to be wise and discerning. In order to do this, we are to, “Test all things.”

The word “test” is one that speaks of validation. Its root was used concerning the proving (or testing) of coins in order to confirm whether they were genuine or not. There is the real currency of the land, and then there is that which is counterfeit. Unless one was careful, he could easily be duped into believing he possessed something of value, when instead he possessed only a fake which had no value at all. Paul’s admonition here is that we are to test the fire of the Spirit, and we are to test prophecies. Is this the true Spirit of God, or is it a corrupt counterfeit? Is this a true prophetic utterance, or is it lie from the devil?

Like the currency of the land, what is real is often very hard to distinguish from a forgery. Paul even relayed this truth directly to those in Corinth –

“But what I do, I will also continue to do, that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast. ¹³ For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.” 2 Corinthians 11:12-14

How can one tell if something is true and correct if they are not intimately familiar with it? It takes either a specialist or a special chemical test to tell if a \$100.00 bill is real or not. The specialist is trained in the most subtle nuances of the original bill, and the chemical test is able to quickly identify the false bill as such. It provides a comparison to what will occur with an original bill.

In both cases, the original is the standard, and the false can only be identified as such when compared with it. The lesson for us is obvious. We cannot know what is false in our faith, unless we know what the true basis for our faith is – the Bible. If we are not willing to train ourselves in a detailed understanding of God’s word, it is not possible for us to test all things. No wonder so many cults and false teachers have arisen, and why so many once-sound denominations have completely fallen away from what is true!

But when we are careful, and when we “test all things” according to the one true standard, we are then able to “hold fast what is good.” We can easily reject the bad, and we can quickly discern who the false, or just plain crummy, teachers are.

In today’s world, where everything in the Bible can be quickly accessed, it is easy to have people suddenly come forth sounding as if they are specialists in the word. In fact, it appears many are specialists, because everyone has this amazing access to the word which was never before available. But this is a scary place to be when putting one’s trust in someone because they have supposedly mastered a single specialized portion of the word (such as future prophecy) and nothing more.

There must be a full understanding of the whole counsel of God in order for a teacher to be fully equipped. Likewise, the layman must have a full understanding of the word of God, or they will easily be duped by these seeming specialists. The study of the word is hard, it takes much time, and it takes a great deal of mental energy, but without it, there is no way we can test all things, and there is no way that we can hold fast to what is good.

Life application: Concerning the Bible in today’s world, it seems everyone is a “specialist.” The wise person will read the word day and night to be kept from these “specialists,” and he will be careful to not get duped by them. KNOW YOUR BIBLE.

Lord God, right in Your word, we are told to test all things, and to hold fast to what is good. How on earth can we test something unless we are familiar with that by which we are making the comparison? Do you approve of homosexuality? Is the supposed prophecy I heard about true? Is observing the Sabbath necessary? How can we know the

answer to these things unless we are familiar with Your word? We are like sheep being led to the slaughter because we find our pleasure in TV and not in You. Forgive us of this and help us to get our priorities right. To Your glory we pray. Amen.

Abstain from every form of evil. 1 Thessalonians 5:22

The translation here gives a much better sense of what is being conveyed than that of the older King James Version. It says, “Abstain from every appearance of evil.” That gives the idea of the evil being projected outward from the person, as if we are to abstain from everything that “looks like” evil. Thus, one would be doing works in order to please men, regardless as to whether the person was engaged in evil or not.

If one thinks it through, one cannot abstain from everything that “looks like evil,” and this is not the intent. The words “form of” rightly explain what is meant. Evil comes in many forms – thoughts, actions, words, etc. These are things which are morally wrong, and with which the Lord would be displeased. Whatever “type” or “form” of evil is there, we are to abstain from it.

To demonstrate how “appearance” is incorrect, an example might be that of a person walking down a street where prostitutes congregated. Another person might see this and say, “Ooooh, that supposed ‘Christian’ is hanging out with prostitutes.” In fact, however, he was going down the street handing out tracts about Jesus. Thus “appearance” is a faulty idea here, and it actually matches what the leaders of Israel accused Jesus of. They were judging by appearance, and not by what actually occurred.

Forms of evil, or maybe better, “types of evil,” however, explains the thought. We are to keep ourselves from engaging in prostitution. We are to keep ourselves from being drunk. We are to keep ourselves from murder, adultery, backbiting, and etc. This is what Paul is admonishing us, and thus it is set in contrast to the words of the previous verse which said to “hold fast what is good.” In holding fast to good, then we will naturally abstain from every kind of evil.

Life application: There are times when it may appear we are engaged in evil when we are not. We stand or fall based on the Lord’s evaluation of our conduct, not in that of others. It is right that we should present ourselves before others in the best manner possible. In the end, however, people are fallible, and the Lord is not. When faced with doing what is right, even when it may be perceived as wrong by others, we are to choose the right.

Lord God, thank You for your wonderful word which shows us that we stand or fall based on Your judgment alone. Regardless of whether the world approves of our conduct or not, what matters is that You do. Others are fallible; You cannot err. And so when faced with the decision to do right in Your eyes, or to be perceived as doing wrong in the eyes of others, we should always choose the former. Help us to conduct our lives in a manner in which You approve. To Your honor and glory alone we pray. Amen.

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Thessalonians 5:23

The previous admonitions have been given by Paul, one after another, in a rapid-fire succession. Each has looked to man's efforts before God. Now as an emphatic contrast to that, we read these words (as laid out in the Greek) – "Himself moreover the God of peace may sanctify you." There are man's instructions concerning his efforts in a relationship with God through Christ, and then there is the special blessing of God, apart from man's efforts.

In the English translations of this verse some add in the word "And" at the beginning: "And the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly..." Others use "Now" to begin: "Now may the God of peace Himself..." The "And" makes it sound like God's sanctification is dependent on our efforts. In other words, "If you do these things, God will sanctify you completely." However, the type of verb used is optative. It is a mood that indicates a wish or a hope for those being addressed.

Therefore, it seems more likely that Paul's words are simply a petition for this to come about. He has asked them to do their part, but he is giving a sense of hope that this will occur despite the efforts of his readers. And yet, it does not in any way negate that our efforts are unnecessary as we live out our lives. Otherwise, Paul would never have given those exhortations.

We have our part for happy living and blameless conduct in this life, but we have a hope that God will follow through in order to sanctify us completely despite any lack or failure on our part. This is seen in Paul's words elsewhere. In 1 Thessalonians 4:3, he tells us that the will of God is our sanctification, and so he gives exhortations which will make that come about. However, in 1 Corinthians 1:2 (and elsewhere), he notes that God has sanctified us already. This was based on our faith in Christ, apart from works.

With that understood, Paul then completes the verse with, “and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” However, the NKJV incorrectly places the word “whole.” Instead of being tied to “spirit, and body” it should be tied to “preserved,” such as is done by the Berean Study Bible –

“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely, and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved, entirely blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Paul is not hoping that God will preserve our whole spirit and body, as if they could be partially preserved! Rather, he is anticipating that God will preserve us so that we will be entirely blameless at the Lord’s coming. In other words, it is the efforts of God of the previous clause, not man’s efforts of the preceding verse, which Paul is putting his hopes on. Man’s efforts could never be so relied upon, but God’s power can be trusted.

Understanding this, Paul petitions that we shall be preserved, that it will be in a state which is entirely blameless, and it will be “at the coming of the Lord Jesus.” As this will occur at an entirely unknown time, it is a demonstration that we are (past tense) sanctified for this purpose already, despite our human efforts. Paul has exhorted us to conduct our lives in a right and proper manner, but it is not that effort which will ensure our preservation. And thank God for that!

Life application: We have a responsibility and a duty to act in a right and proper manner before the Lord. There are things we are to do, and there are things we are not to do. But through faith in Christ, and in that faith alone, we are sanctified and preserved for the time when the Lord comes for us. Let us be prepared because we have been so prepared.

Lord God, it so ever so comforting to know that the race is ultimately not up to us to complete. We are instructed to live in a right and proper manner during this life, and in accord with the salvation You have given us, but our failures will not negate that blessing which You have granted us through the work of Christ. Your word asks us to be prepared for His coming because we have been prepared for His coming. Thank You for saving us, even when we fail You. Amen.

He who calls you *is* faithful, who also will do *it*. 1 Thessalonians 5:24

The verse now is given as a fixed and sure follow up to what was just said concerning being preserved blameless at the coming of the Lord. In this verse, the emphasis is on

the person who calls instead of the act of calling. The Greek reads, “Faithful the (one) calling you.” God offers reconciliation through Christ Jesus. When a person accepts that call through faith, nothing can change or nullify what has then been granted. Should those who have been called not be carried all the way to glorification, the very character of God would be forfeit. It is an impossibility.

God is truth. His word says that man is saved by faith through grace. It doesn’t say this is conditional or that God could change His mind. Instead, it says that when a person believes, he is “sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance” (Ephesians 1:13, 14). God has given a guarantee; He will not violate this guarantee. Instead, He “also will do *it*.” In this, the word “it” is inserted. The object is left unexpressed in the original, thus forming an emphatic expression. “God has said, and He will do.” There is active performance in the work of God, and there is surety in its fulfillment.

Paul’s confidence of such things is seen elsewhere as well. In his second letter to Timothy, we see the same display of surety that he provides to us here –

For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day. 2 Timothy 1:12

This is actually a huge encouragement for believers to possess and to meditate on, especially when they fall short and mess up. They can question, “Why would you love me as you do?”, but there is no reason to question, “Do you still love me after what I have done?” We can confidently avow that because of our faith in Christ Jesus, we are saved, we are sealed, and we are on the sure and guaranteed road to glorification.

Life application: Confidence in the promises of God is a source of rewards all by itself. Demonstrating faith in God’s promises, even when we have failed, shows that we have our trust in Him and not in our own accomplishments or failings. Stand fast on the word, and trust that God is faithful.

Lord God, when we fall short of what You expect of us, You are still faithful to Your word. If we have called on Jesus, the deal is done. Your grace covers our failings, and our faith in that must surely be pleasing to You, especially when we are wondering why You ever saved us in the first place. The fact that You did is what we are continue to trust. And so give us this confidence; a confidence which Your word already proclaims. Amen.

Brethren, pray for us. 1 Thessalonians 5:25

In this epistle, Paul has noted several times his prayers or petitions for those at Thessalonica, such as in verse 1:2 –

“We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers.”

Particular statements of thanks to God, or prayers to God, on their behalf are seen again in Chapter 2, Chapter 3, and Chapter 5. Now Paul specifically requests prayers be made on behalf of him and those with him. This request is all the more appropriately placed here because in just two more verses he will charge them to have the letter read to all the congregants.

His first word here, “Brethren,” has been used time and again in the letter. It would be no good to ask unbelievers to pray. God does not hear the prayers of people, except those who are redeemed through Christ. Once that happens, He can then mediate those prayers in His priestly role. And so the “brethren” alone are given the request. The word in Greek translated as “for” is *peri*, or “about.” He is asking for prayers which cover all of their needs – personal, ministerial, etc. Just as Paul has carefully noted various prayers on behalf of those at the church, so he is asking for prayers concerning himself and those with him.

As ministers of the gospel, they faced many dangers, they faced many persecutors, and they faced the same temptations as any other people. Paul considered the prayers for them as necessary in order to empower them to overcome these various things which would come their way.

Life application: If Paul, who had personally seen the risen Christ and who had been led by Him throughout his ministry, felt that prayers were needed for him to continue, should we feel any less so today? Rather, we should be more than grateful to receive the prayers of others so that we too can be strengthened in our continued walk in the presence of the Lord. Let us be willing to both pray for others, and be accepting of prayers from others.

Lord God Almighty, we have a wonderful avenue of access to You which is found in prayer. It is a clear and unobstructed highway which has been opened to us because of the work of Christ Jesus. Help us to remember to accept this precious path, and to use it often – in prayer for others, in petition for our own needs, and in notes of thanks and

praise to You for Your kind hand upon our lives. Great are You, O God, and greatly are You to be praised. Amen.

Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss. 1 Thessalonians 5:26

Paul just said, “Brethren, pray for us.” Still speaking to the brethren, and in an admonishment that they should all be in one mind and in one accord, he gives them words to instill this in them. He exhorts them to “Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss.” This doesn’t just mean those in the congregation, but any and all who are the redeemed of the Lord, in whatever church they attend.

The “holy kiss” is an expansion of the kiss of greeting which is seen in many nations to this day. It is the same idea as when western nations today shake hands or possibly hug, depending on familiarity. In the Far East, a deep and respectful bow is given in substitute of this.

Although Paul’s letters are prescriptive, intent must always be considered. Is Paul mandating that all people in all churches meet one another “with a holy kiss?” The answer is “No.” The reason why this is important is because there are small pockets of churches that mandate this even today and even in western societies, such as the US. However, the intent of the kiss of greeting is cultural, not merely biblical. Proof of this follows from the first kiss noted in the Bible in Genesis 27:26 when Isaac blessed his son Jacob before he departed to Padan Aram.

From that point, the kiss is seen among the covenant people and among those who aren't yet in the covenant, thus demonstrating the cultural nature of the greeting. It is used in the same way we use a handshake. When Jacob met Rachel, without knowing her in any familiar way yet, he kissed her. In 2 Samuel 20, the following exchange begins with a kiss of greeting and ends in death -

“Then Joab said to Amasa, ‘Are you in health, my brother?’ And Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him. But Amasa did not notice the sword that *was* in Joab’s hand. And he struck him with it in the stomach, and his entrails poured out on the ground; and he did not *strike* him again. Thus he died.”

-2 Samuel 20:9, 10

In 1 Samuel 20:41, David and Jonathan, close male friends, gave a fraternal kiss in accord with the culture before departing. And, Proverbs 27:6 notes the following -

“Faithful *are* the wounds of a friend,
But the kisses of an enemy *are* deceitful.” Proverbs 27:6

This demonstrates clearly that the kiss is cultural because even enemies will kiss rather than shake hands. This is seen in these parts of the world today when leaders who are at war with each other still greet with a kiss. Exchanging “kisses” with “shaking of hands” in this Proverb would hold exactly the same meaning and intent.

And as a premier example of this, read this exchange between Jesus and Simon the Pharisee -

“And He said to him, ‘You have rightly judged.’ Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, ‘Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped *them* with the hair of her head. You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. Therefore I say to you, her sins, which *are* many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, *the same* loves little.’” Luke 7:43-47

And of course, the most famous kiss in history is recorded concerning Judas' betrayal of Jesus and reflects the sentiments of Proverbs 27:6 (above) perfectly.

It is important then to understand the cultural nature of this admonition by Paul lest we get swept up into legalism over something which is actually not intended for all cultures and in all situations. If a person with an immune deficiency were to use this verse in a prescriptive manner, he could soon be dead from receiving the germs of others.

Finally, the kisses in these and other verses throughout the Bible which are between men and men (such as David and Jonathan noted above) are not in any way intended to convey the perverse sin of homosexuality as modern liberals often imply. They are merely cultural and welcoming displays just as handshakes are today. To imply this in their writings shows a disregard for God's order in the natural world.

Life application: If you are in Rome, do as the Romans do. If you are in Japan, do as they do. It wouldn't be appropriate to go to church in the Far East and attempt to hug, kiss, or even shake the hands of another unless they first offered. If you are in a mid-eastern area, a fraternal kiss may accompany a greeting. In America, a hearty handshake and

maybe a friendly hug is the custom. The intent of Paul's words is promoting warmth and harmony between believers, not causing offense.

Lord God, how good it is to travel the world and to see so many different cultures that worship You in their own way while still exalting the wondrous work of Jesus. It shows that You truly are the God of the nations and He is Lord over people of every race, creed, and culture who have set their hopes in You through His finished work. The songs differ, the layout of the meeting places may vary, and the way prayers are conducted are unique, but when the Son is exalted, You O God are glorified! Amen.

I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren.

1 Thessalonians 5:27

The word “charge” in this verse doesn’t really catch the depth of meaning of the original. It is a word, *horkizó*, which is used only three times. The first is in Mark 5:7 where a demon in a man implores Christ Jesus by God not to be tormented. The second is found in Acts 19:13 where the casting out of evil spirits was attempted in the name of Jesus. This word comes from *horkos*, meaning “an oath.” Therefore, Paul’s words here should say something like, “I bind you by oath before the Lord...”

The question as to why Paul would adjure them in such a weighty way is debated. It is possible that he is making certain that no uninspired doctrine would be accepted by the congregation. Only a letter from Paul or another apostle was to be held as inspired. In 1 Thessalonians 2:2, he seems to hint at this very notion. People were making prophetic claims that the Day of the Lord had already come. He could be adjuring them now to stick to Scripture alone. As people continuously claim idiotic prophetic revelations to this day, it is a warning which has gone totally unheeded by those who listen to such things. Paul’s words are ignored, and nonsense is believed as if it were based on Scripture.

Along with this, it demonstrates that what he has written is thus to be followed by all. If the letter was received by the elders, it was still to be read to everyone in order to ensure that they were equipped with the same doctrine, filled with the same exhortations, and motivated by the same admonitions.

As the main thought of the letter is that of the coming of the Lord for His people, those things which surround that notion were especially important to be absorbed into the minds of the people. Believers are to mind their own business and work with their own hands (verse 4:11), and thus not be a burden on anyone else. The timing of the Lord’s coming is known only by the Lord, and so we are to be about life’s business. Paul’s

weighty word, which adjured that the letter be read to all, would hopefully help motivate the people in the right direction.

It is most probably for this reason that Paul says, "I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren." They were all holy, or set apart by God. They were all brethren as well. Because of this, none were to be neglected in being given these words of knowledge, and all were to act in accord with the words as Paul has laid them out.

Life application: Scripture is given to us for right conduct in this life, and for the assurance of God's promises after this life. However, it is not given for us to know when we will transition between the two. If we did, we would not be paying attention to this life, here and now, as we should. And yet,,,, countless people waste incredible amounts of time doing just this, in direct disobedience to the words of Scripture.

Heavenly Father, guide us in this life so that we do those things which Your word instructs us to do. This should be all the more important to us because Your word also tells us about what lies ahead for those redeemed by Christ Jesus. Because we have such a sure hope, we should be content living out our lives now in the most honorable manner possible, not speculating on when we will enter Your presence, but knowing that it will come in due time. May we be responsible souls in this life that we have been given. Amen.

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

As with all of his epistles, Paul adds into his closing salutation a blessing which is a petition for divine favor to be upon his audience. In the Greek, there is a definite article in front of "grace." Quite often English translations will insert "the" for clarity at certain points, but it may not be in the Greek. However, it is here.

"The grace" is different than saying something like, "May grace from the Lord Jesus be with you." Paul is asking for a divine impartation of this attribute of the Lord to rest upon those in Thessalonica (and thus us!) and to sustain them in their walk. It must be then considered that those who are not obedient to the epistle are to be excluded from this petition.

For example, in a similar petition for grace to be bestowed upon the congregation at Corinth, he wrote concerning a disobedient congregant, saying to "deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord

Jesus." It should be obvious that until this person is willing to adhere to the sound instruction of the epistle, this petition for divine grace is not intended for him.

And yet, at the same time, we all fall short of one precept or another. Therefore, it must be considered that it is for those who earnestly strive for adherence to it, even if they do fall short. Such is the nature of grace; undeserved merit. Paul, in one form or another, closes out every one of his epistles with such a note of request for this divine favor. Even the last words of the Bible are very closely aligned with his words here. There John writes -

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you all. Amen." Revelation 22:21

Finally, Paul closes the letter with "Amen." In essence, "So let it be." Paul has petitioned for grace upon his audience, and he then confirms that petition with assured hopes that it will be so.

Life application: The Bible, time and again, asks for an undeserved blessing to be bestowed upon those who pursue it, even if they fall short of what it states. Such is the nature of grace, and such is the nature of our gracious Lord. As you walk along life's highway, take time to contemplate the wondrous grace which has been lavished upon you. And then thank the Lord and praise the Lord for that same grace.

Lord God, too often we take the many blessings of this life for granted and we even look at Your grace as something deserved. Blessings surround us that might otherwise not even be there, such as the beautiful flower on our path. There might be a precious sent of jasmine to fill our senses and bring back a long lost memory. The rising of the moon over the waters may stir our hearts in a unique way as well. Ten thousand daily examples come our way showing us that we are blessed beyond measure. Thank You for Your care of us. Hallelujah to You, our God! Amen.