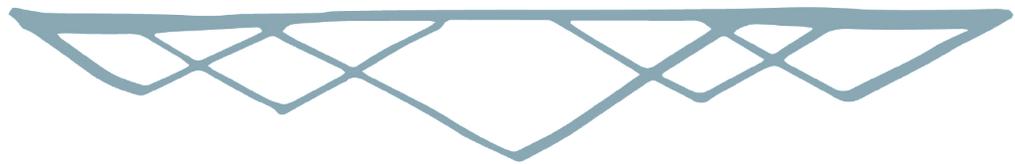
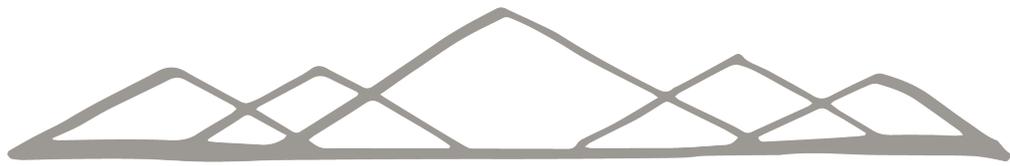


1 & 2 Thessalonians

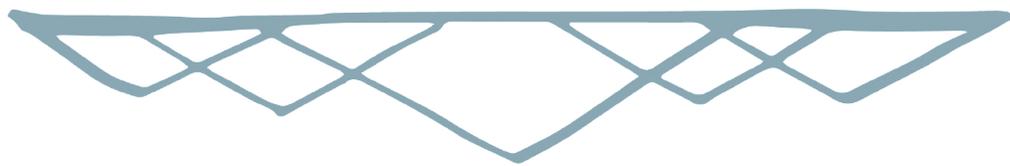




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Introduction to 1 Thessalonians

Paul writes to the church at Thessalonica to encourage believers. He is enthusiastic—both about the Thessalonians’ faith and about the way in which they have shared the good news of Jesus in their region (1 Thess 1:7–8). But Paul also addresses two pressing issues. First, he offers an explanation and a defense of his work among them. Second, he assures them that all fellow believers who have already died will be resurrected to life with Jesus (4:15–18). This letter charges the Thessalonians—and us—to place our confidence in Christ.

BACKGROUND

The opening verse lists Paul as the primary author, along with Silvanus (Silas) and Timothy. Paul wrote the letter from Corinth during his 18-month plus stay there in AD 50–51 (Acts 18:11). This can be dated precisely because of an archaeological inscription found at Delphi that mentions Gallio, the proconsul who heard charges against Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:12–17; compare 1 Thess 3:4).

Before writing this letter, Paul had visited the city of Thessalonica on his second missionary journey (circa AD 49–51). He started his ministry in Thessalonica by preaching in the local synagogue, leading several people to follow Jesus (Acts 17:2–4). However, a riot instigated by other Jews compelled him to leave the city (17:5–10). After Paul went south to Athens, he sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to check on the believers there (1 Thess 3:1–2). Later, Timothy joined Paul in Corinth and gave him an update on the Thessalonians, and Paul decided to write to them (Acts 18:5; 1 Thess 3:6).

Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia (northern Greece), a Roman province. It was one of the major commercial centers in the area and a strategic city for Paul’s ministry. First Thessalonians and Acts suggest that most of the church there consisted of non-Jewish people (1 Thess 1:9; 2:14; Acts 17:4). During Paul’s visit and after his departure, the believers in Thessalonica experienced persecution (1 Thess 1:6; 2:14; 3:3–4). Roman emperor worship—which was popular in the city—made the residents suspicious of Christians, who claimed that Jesus was a king (Acts 17:7). In response to this persecution, Paul encourages the Thessalonians to continue in the faith and to put their hope in the resurrected Christ, who suffered and died for them and who will come again (1 Thess 4:13–18).

STRUCTURE

Like a typical Graeco-Roman letter, 1 Thessalonians has a greeting (1:1), a body (1:2–5:22), and a conclusion (5:23–28). The body of the letter can be divided into two sections: The first section (1:2–3:13) looks backward to Paul’s time with the Thessalonians; the second section (4:1–5:22) addresses issues and concerns in the church. Immediately after the greeting, Paul gives thanks for the Thessalonians’ conversion (1:2–10). Paul then defends his conduct when he was with them





(2:1–12), expresses thanks for their response (2:13–16), states his desire to visit them (2:17–20), and describes Timothy’s visit and return (3:1–13).

In the second section of the letter body, Paul offers guidance on a variety of practical issues. First he addresses sexual conduct (4:1–8), then brotherly love (4:9–12). Then he answers questions about Christians who have died (4:13–18) and Christ’s return (5:1–11). He gives several quick instructions (5:12–22) before concluding the letter.

OUTLINE

- Paul and the Thessalonian church (1:1–3:13)
- Practical instructions and Christ’s return (4:1–5:22)
- Prayer and conclusion (5:23–28)

THEMES

In the midst of great difficulties, Paul encourages the Thessalonians—noting that the message he preached, and the gospel they received, is authentic (2:13–16). The good news of Jesus could have come only from God, and they can trust it to sustain them until the very end (5:1–11). They have proven that they can endure persecution and turn away from idols (1:6, 9), and now they must continue to faithfully follow Jesus (4:1–12; 5:12–22).

Paul’s message in 1 Thessalonians is that we can trust the character of God and the truth of the gospel (1:10; 2:19–20; 5:1–11). Paul reassures believers who have died that they have not missed anything; both the living and the dead will participate in Christ’s return (4:13–18). This would have encouraged the Thessalonians to endure persecution, even to the point of death.

Since Christ will surely come again, we must live faithfully in light of this reality. Like the Thessalonians, we still grieve for those who have died. But we do not grieve like those who have no hope. Because Jesus has been raised, our resurrection is certain—and we can face any hardship with the confidence that God is with us.

Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). Faithlife Study Bible. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.





Chapter One

Paul visited Thessalonica during his second missionary journey (ca. AD 49–51; Acts 17:1–9). Preaching in the local synagogue, Paul converted many Thessalonians—both Jew and Gentile—to Christianity (Acts 17:2–4). Some Jews, however, became jealous and caused a disturbance in the city (Acts 17:5). They accused Paul of claiming there was another king, named Jesus (Acts 17:7)—an act of treason against the Roman emperor. Before they could arrest him, Paul was sent away, leaving behind a community of new believers.

Concerned they might not withstand the threat of persecution, Paul sent Timothy to encourage the Thessalonians (1 Thess 3:2). He likely wrote the letter from Corinth between AD 50–51 (compare Acts 18:1), making it one of the earliest books of the NT.

Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). Faithlife Study Bible (1 Th 1:1–10). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

¹Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,
To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:
Grace to you and peace.

Verse one is typical of Paul's normal opening words for his letters. Paul is the author of this letter. Silvanus (a.k.a. Silas) and Timothy are Paul's companions on Paul's missionary journey, and mentioned here as co-senders of this letter because they both had served the Thessalonians (Acts 17:4, 14).



²We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, ³ remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 13 Paul teaches that faith, hope, and love are the abiding characteristics of all believers. In verse three he mentions faith, hope, and love again, but ties them to Christian behavior: *work of faith, labor of love, and steadfastness of hope*. These virtues aren't abstract, but instead they're real, detectable, tangible qualities that can be seen in our conduct.

Q: Faith, hope, and love are the three core Christian virtues. What are some ways these should be noticeable in our witness? (See also 1 Corinthians 13:13)





4 For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

Paul is clear. The evidence that the Thessalonians were chosen by God for salvation is the tangible presence of Holy Spirit's power in their lives. Sure, the Gospel came to them in word, for how will they believe unless someone preaches? But the evidence that they believed the Gospel that Paul, Silas, and Timothy preached is rooted in the presence of Holy Spirit power at work in their lives.

Q: Why is it important that the Gospel be demonstrated in the power of the Holy Spirit, and not just in word? (See also 1 Corinthians 2:3-4; 4:20)

6 And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. 8 For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything.

A further evidence that their faith was genuine is that they became imitators of Paul, Timothy, and Silas, but most importantly of Jesus. Today it's popular to call people worthy of imitation *influencers*. Why does their imitation serve as evidence that their faith was genuine? Because believing in Jesus brought a lot of trouble into your life. In a culture where there were many gods to worship, and the worship of those gods was intimately tied to every fiber of the social structure, making the claim that there is only one God of gods (Deuteronomy 17:10) and further claiming Jesus Christ is His Son wasn't just revolutionary, it was disrupting. See Acts 16:16-24 and Acts 18:21-41 for examples of local economies being disrupted by the message of the Gospel.

Q: Who are the influencers in your faith journey? Are your influencers leading you to become an example to other believers, even in places hostile to the Gospel? (See also Titus 2:1-4)

9 For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among 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, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.





One of the primary motivators of the Christian faith is that Jesus Christ will return. When Paul heard reports of the Thessalonians, there are three elements of the report that he hears again and again. First, he hears from others about how well the Thessalonians received Paul, Timothy, and Silas. They took them in and extended gracious hospitality while they remained there as ministers. Second, people report back about their endurance of affliction. Turning away from their former idols to serve the *living and true God* brought troubles for them. Third, he heard about their anticipation for Christ's return to deliver us from the wrath to come. The promise of Christ's return is what makes the troubles of this world bearable. One day we will return to deliver us, and that day will be glorious!

Q: How does the return of Jesus increase our faith, hope, and love? (See also *Titus 2:11-14*)



Notes

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Chapter Two

Paul's prolonged absence (2:17-18) from the Thessalonians may have prompted some of them to believe that he no longer cared for their well-being. Timothy's report prompted Paul to remind them of how they ministered to the Thessalonians in the short time they were among them.

Paul described his ministry among the Thessalonians with strong family overtones. He said his affections toward them were like a nursing mother (2:7), a father (2:11), and as a brother (2:9). These family overtones give us a framework for understanding how deeply he loved the believers in Thessalonica. However, Paul's primary motivation for boldly declaring the Gospel to them was rooted in pleasing God first, not people (2:4). It was in his desire to please God that the Gospel was declared and the family bonds he described were formed.

1 For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. 2 But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict. 3 For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, 4 but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.

Paul shifts his thoughts from chapter one. In chapter one he was praising the believers in Thessalonica for their faithfulness in persecution. Here he turns to defending his ministry (which he seems to do in most of his letters). It seems that Timothy's findings (3:6) included a report that some of the believers questioned Paul's sincerity since he had not paid them a follow-up visit. Paul's departure when he planted the church was quick due to the circumstances in the city (Acts 17:5; 1 Thess 2:17). Here he began his response to those concerns.

Q: How does Paul's suffering demonstrate his love and affection for the believers in the Thessalonian church? (See also *John 10:12*)

5 For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness. 6 Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ.

When the LORD is leading and directing your ministry, flattering others, greedy motives, and glory from people aren't necessary. In fact, Paul warned the Colossians to beware of people who are "puffed





up without reason” about themselves and their experiences (Col. 2:18). When the Gospel is clearly taught and takes root, flattery falls flat, all glory goes to God, and greedy motives get put to death.

Q: Why is it important that we do as Paul did and refrain from flattering words, greed, and seeking the approval of others? (See also 1 Corinthians 2:5)

7 But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. 8 So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us. 9 For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. 10 You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. 11 For you know how, like a father with his children, 12 we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

In these six verses, Paul compared his ministry in the Thessalonian church to a nursing mother (2:7), a father (2:11), and in the middle called them his brothers (2:9). Like a nursing mother, Paul has affectionate desires for them. As a brother, he worked night and day so that he wouldn’t become a burden to them. As a father, he exhorted, encouraged, and charged (strongly instructed) them. As we minister to one another, man or woman, we should have the same heart: affection, hard work, exhortation, encouragement, and strong instruction.

Q: How does the Gospel unify all believers as a family? (See also Romans 8:14-17)

13 And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.

The Thessalonians received the things that Paul taught them as *the word of God*, and not just cleverly crafted teachings of men. Paul has already been clear in this letter that he brought the Gospel message, without flattery, without the praise of other men, and in a way that he and his companions presented no burdens to the Thessalonian believers. Paul was also clear in chapter one that his message was accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit (1:5).





Q: How can we spread the Gospel in this manner? (See also *Romans 15:18-19*; *2 Corinthians 6:1-10*; *2 Timothy 1:7-8*)

14 For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, 15 who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind 16 by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved—so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them at last!

Every time Paul calls us brothers, it should remind us of our family bond in Jesus Christ. These Thessalonian brothers followed Paul, Silas, and Timothy in their example of love, faith and practice. However, Paul's comparison is that they suffered the same way as the brothers in Judea. The Judean believers were persecuted for their faith, and so were the Thessalonians, each by their own countrymen. By following Jesus and mimicking other faithful believers in their faith, love, and practice, we will suffer. It's a signpost that we are following the LORD. Paul also minces no words. Our persecutors remain under God's wrath!

Q: Suffering for the Gospel is something we should expect. Why are we taken by surprise when suffering actually comes? (See also *John 15:20*; *James 1:2*)

17 But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, 18 because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us. 19 For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? 20 For you are our glory and joy.

It may come as a surprise to some, but even when we walk in the light as He, Jesus, is in the light (1 John 1:7), Satan can still hinder us. Paul clearly blames the work of Satan for his delay in returning to Thessalonica. While it's not wise to blame Satan for every flat tire, we should be wise and remember that we are always engaged in an active spiritual conflict with active spiritual opponents.

Q: Satan is always trying to steal, kill, and destroy God's family. Knowing this, how should our responses to one another change when conflict happens? (See also *John 10:10*; *2 Corinthians 10:3-5*; *Ephesians 6:12*)





Notes

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Chapter Three

Chapter three is a continuation of Paul's thoughts that began in chapter two. In 2:17 he began explaining his longing to return to Thessalonica, and how their efforts were thwarted by Satan (2:18). Chapter three begins where Paul begins explaining how and why he and Silas sent Timothy to check in on them (3:5).

Paul's love for the Thessalonians should challenge us to examine how we love one another and the people in our communities.

1 Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, 2 and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith, 3 that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. 4 For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know. 5 For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain.

Because of his great affection for the Thessalonian believers, Paul sent Timothy to *establish and exhort* them in their faith. Paul and Silas were willing to be left alone in Athens so that Timothy could return to Thessalonica and check in on their progress in the faith. This was dangerous for Timothy since they left Thessalonica because of a riot against them (Acts 17:10). At work in these verses is a love and concern that makes them willing to risk suffer for the sake of others.

Q: These verses show us a picture of Timothy running toward potential danger so that he could help the Thessalonian believers. Why is it important that we learn how to risk suffering for the sake of others? (See also *Galatians 6:2*)

Paul was fearful, perhaps because Satan had blocked him from returning to Thessalonica (2:18), that the tempter was busy destroying the work that he, Silas, and Timothy had begun. Their abrupt departure left little time to do any discipleship beyond establishing their new-born faith in the Gospel. Because of the affliction they were enduring from their own countrymen (2:14), it seemed probable that they might not have a strong enough faith to continue standing firm.

Q: Judging by Paul's sense of urgency, how important is the role of in-depth discipleship with new believers? (See also *1 Corinthians 3:1-3*)





6 But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you— 7 for this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith. 8 For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord. 9 For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, 10 as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?

The value of a good report cannot be understated. Timothy came back to Athens with a great report for Paul and Silas. It was a report so good, that it encouraged them and strengthened them while they were in their own distress and affliction. We should never discount the value of our faithfulness to Jesus. It reaches well beyond our own personal experiences and feelings. It can impact the journey of others, as the Thessalonian believers did for Paul and Silas.

Q: Do you think a report of your faith would strengthen another believer who is under affliction? (See also *Galatians 6:6*)

6 But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you— 7 for this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith. 8 For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord. 9 For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, 10 as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?

Timothy's encouraging report filled them with such joy that their greater problem became finding adequate words to express their thanksgiving to God in prayer. Paul, Silas, and Timothy prayed for the Thessalonians day and night, but their prayers became preoccupied with finding ways to express gratitude to the LORD for their faithfulness.

Q: When was the last time your prayer life became preoccupied with gratitude? What prompted such thanksgiving before God? (See also *Ephesians 5:4, 18-21*)





However, despite the good reports, Paul knew that they still had much to learn. He was motivated to return because he had a desire supply what is lacking in your faith. His teaching, though enough to clearly give them the Gospel, was cut short. They needed a fuller more robust teaching to help them keep moving from spiritual infancy to spiritual maturity.

Q: The Gospel is both the foundation and the deep well of our spiritual journey. What does it mean for Paul to supply what is lacking if they had already received the Gospel? (See also Hebrews 6:1-3)

11 Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, 12 and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, 13 so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

Paul breaks into a prayer for his readers. He prays that God would clear a path for his eventual return to Thessalonica, but he also prays that until then the LORD would cause them to increase in love for each other and everyone. Growing like this in love would do two things. It would establish them as blameless and holy when Christ returns.

Q: How does loving people make us blameless and holy? (See also Matthew 22:37-40)

Notes

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Chapter Four

1 Thessalonians chapter four represents a shift in Paul's line of thought. In chapter 3, he concluded with a prayer that expressed his heartfelt desire to see them again, face to face, and encouraged them to continue in love for one another. Chapter four begins with some practical instructions for growing in holiness, then followed by instructions for how to grow in love for each other and those outside the church.

Then at verse 13, Paul changes the subject to deal with what seemed to be most pressing problem in Timothy's report. There was some disagreement or confusion among the Thessalonian believers concerning believers who had already died and Christ's second coming. Paul takes that last portion of chapter four, and much of chapter five to address their concerns. Outside of Revelation, 1 and 2 Thessalonians combined have more to say about Christ's second coming than most other apostolic letters (See also 1 Cor 15:50-58). Because of that, much of the remaining time in this study will be devoted to this subject.

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¹ Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. ² For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

When Paul says, "Finally," it signals that he's finishing up the thoughts that he's been writing. So, in light of what he's been saying, Paul says these things. He starts these finishing thoughts by telling the believers to keep on doing what you've been taught, but do it *more and more*. He doesn't want them to get too comfortable with how they're doing things, but instead make it a point to keep increasing, keep improving, and do so constantly.

Q: What is the inherent danger of being too comfortable with how well you do things? (See also Revelation chapters 2-3, the letters to the seven churches)

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³ For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴ that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, ⁵ not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; ⁶ that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. ⁷ For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.





It's interesting that Paul tells us God's will for us - our sanctification - then he zeros in on one aspect of our sanctification: sexual conduct. Sanctification is the ongoing transformation from immaturity to maturity, from self-likeness to Christ-likeness, and every *believer is in this process*. It involves far more than just our sexual conduct, but because this is a consistent theme of instruction in nearly all of Paul's letters, it is an important aspect for our growth. We may think of sexual purity as a conversation for the youth, but adults of all ages are responsible to be sexually pure as a part of their ongoing sanctification. If you're engaged in sexual sin, you are practicing immaturity, and building up chastising judgment for yourself because *God is an avenger in all these things*. It will be brought to light, and it will cost you.

Q: Why does God care so much about our sexual conduct? Why is it tied so closely to our sanctification? (See also *Ephesians 5:31-32*)

9 Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

While at times it may be tempting to weigh the words of Paul against the words of Peter or even the words of Jesus, if we believe that the entire Bible was inspired by God through the human authors, then all of the authors carry the same weight. Verse nine deals with those who will be dismissive of Paul's teachings, particularly on sexual conduct. In 1 Corinthians people were dismissive of Paul's teachings because they preferred Apollos or Peter. But this verse serves to remind us that all of Scripture is inspired by the LORD, so disregard for any of it isn't just against its human author, but against God, who inspired the author.

Paul, then takes it a step farther. You don't get to disregard something because it's too hard. Why? Because the LORD has also given you His Holy Spirit who empowers you to do hard things that you can't do on your own.

Q: When has the LORD asked you to do something too hard for you, but not too hard for Him? (See also *Luke 1:37; 1 John 4:4*)

9 Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another,¹⁰ for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more,¹¹ and





to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you,¹² so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

The love that the Thessalonian believers were displaying wasn't a secret. It was apparent, not only to the people in Thessalonica, but to every believer in all of Macedonia. Though they were young in faith and relatively unlearned in the Scriptures, their love out-shined what they lacked in knowledge. And still, like earlier, Paul tells them to do it *more and more*. But this *more and more* would show them how to love people outside of the church. Acts 17 tells us how the city was put into an uproar by people who hated the Gospel. Paul instructs them not to make matters worse. Live quietly, mind your own affairs, and work with your hands. In doing this, they would demonstrate decency toward outsiders, and remain independent of their generosity.

Q: How does verse 11 shape our response to the actions and beliefs of lost people? (See also *Proverbs 17:14; 1 Peter 4:15; Ephesians 4:28*)



Verse 13 is the start of Paul's discussion about the return of Christ. As we mentioned at the start, there was confusion about this issue among the Thessalonian believers. It's unclear how the confusion started, but what is clear is that it centered around the issue of believers who had already died. Before we begin this phase of the discussion, it should be noted that the subject of Christ's return is not without controversy. The controversy isn't over whether He'll return, but how events will unfold leading up to the moment he returns. The major positions that people take are each defensible with Scripture, so it's important to remember no matter which position you might believe, you might be wrong. For reference, here is a list of the major points of view that have been a part of Church teaching for centuries. Each point of view centers around how we should interpret the 1,000 year reign of Christ that is mentioned in Revelation 20:1-10.

Premillennialism

Premillennialists believe that the prophetic events of the book of Revelation happen before the 1,000 year reign of Christ. This view is thought by many to be the most literal and oldest understanding of Christ's return and the point of view embraced by the Apostles and believers through the first three centuries of the Church. Premillennialism is subdivided into three thoughts about the "catching away" (or rapture) of the church. Premillennialism typically views the events of Revelation 6-19 as a seven year period called the Great Tribulation. The subdivisions of Premillennialism are pre-tribulation, mid-tribulation, and post-tribulation. Pre-tribulation believes the rapture of the church will happen just before the Great Tribulation begins. Mid-tribulation believes the rapture will happen at the mid-point of the Great Tribulation. Post-tribulation (also called Classic Premillennialism be-





believes that the rapture will happen at the end of the Great Tribulation in the moments before the Jesus finally returns to establish His kingdom.

Postmillennialism

Postmillennialists embrace the belief that the Gospel, through the Church, will gradually overtake the world and usher in a golden age - millennium - of spiritual blessing for the Church. Then at the end of this golden age, there will be a brief apostasy, led by Satan, followed by the return of Christ to bring judgment and usher in the new heaven and new earth. This belief depends heavily upon a more figurative interpretation of prophetic texts. This view was very popular prior to the 20th century, but declined in popularity with the advent of World Wars I and II, and the increasing visibility of wickedness.

Amillennialism

Amillennialists believe that there is no literal 1,000 year reign of Christ. They believe His reign began with His first coming and we are living in a *figurative millennium* right now where He rules both on earth through believers (the Church) and from Heaven where He is seated at the right hand of the Father. Like Postmillennialism, Amillennialism relies heavily upon a figurative interpretation of the prophetic texts. This view became popular through Augustine in the fourth century and has been the majority view of the Church through its history. It remains the dominant view of Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches, and some Protestant denominations.

It is important to note that each of these positions agree that Jesus will, at some point, physically return to earth to conduct final judgment and usher in the new heaven and new earth. This portion of our study through Paul's teachings will not debate which point of view is more correct. However, the verses that follow will unavoidably lead you to embrace a position. You will need to decide whether you believe this should be interpreted literally or figuratively, which will then point you toward one camp or the other.

¹³ But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.

It may seem like a strange description, but in Paul's day it was common to refer to those who have died as "asleep." The Thessalonian believers wondered if those who died had somehow missed the Lord's return. But Paul assured them that the LORD would bring those who had died with him when he returns.

Q: Why does this truth change the way we grieve over our loved ones who die in Christ? (See also 1 Corinthians 15:51-52; Jude 1:14)





¹⁵ For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

It's important that Paul starts this teaching with, "we declare to you by a word from the Lord." That means this isn't just Paul's understanding of how things will go down, but the LORD Himself had told Paul that this is how it will be. The believers who are alive on the earth when Jesus Christ comes again will have to wait their turn. They will not meet the LORD first. First comes the dead in Christ. They will resurrect from their graves and meet the Lord before those who are still alive. This is the hope of every believer who has died before us: resurrection to a new glorified body.

Q: Does the promise of our resurrection give you hope? (See also 1 Corinthians 15:35-49; Revelation 20:4)

¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Part two of Christ's coming is what happens to the believers who are still alive on the earth after the resurrection of the dead in Christ. Those who are left will be "caught up" to the clouds where we will meet Jesus and the dead who just resurrected. The Latin word for caught up is where we get the word "rapture." So the *rapture* of the living believers will happen only after the dead in Christ have been raised. When the alive believers are raptured, their bodies will be transformed in an instant to eternal, incorruptible bodies. From that moment, we will always be with the LORD. Paul says we should encourage one another with these words.

Q: Does the prospect of being caught up to the clouds with Jesus in a split second give you hope? (See also Matthew 24:40-41, 1 Corinthians 15:53-55)





Notes

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Chapter Five

1 Thessalonians chapter five is the final portion of this letter and can be divided into three sections. The first section, 5:1-11, is a continued discussion about the return of Christ. His thoughts turn to questions about the timing of Christ's return and parallel nicely with Jesus' own teaching in Matthew 24:36-44. The second section, 5:12-22, begins a set of sort of rapid-fire of short instructions for God's family. These don't appear to be enormous problems within the Thessalonian church since they lack any explanation, but instead are good reminders for every believer. And the third section, 5:23-28, is Paul's benediction, which contains a few incredible thoughts that we'll examine.

¹ Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. ² For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³ While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

Since Paul opens this line of thought, it seems likely that some of the believers in Thessalonica were curious about the times and seasons of Christ's return. But rather than give them something new, he gave them something old. He refused to speculate farther than Jesus Himself taught His disciples. In Matthew 24:36 Jesus taught that even He did not know the day and hour of His return, but that only the Father knows. Paul said in 5:2 that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night, which parallels with Matthew 24:43-44. He said in 5:3 that people will be saying, "*There is peace and security.*" Jesus taught a similar thing, in Matthew 24:38, comparing to the days of Noah, and put it like this: "*they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage.*" In other words, the Day of the LORD will come in a time of relative peace and security where people are living their lives freely and without fear. Therefore, be aware.

Q: Should we expect the Day of the LORD to come during times of natural disaster, social unrest, violence, and political turmoil? Why or why not? (See also *Daniel 9:27; Matthew 24:44; Luke 12:40*)

⁴ But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. ⁵ For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness.





Believers are children of the light, children of the day. This is a core identity issue for all believers. We should not be caught off guard by the return of Christ *because* we are in the light, not darkness. This doesn't mean we can nail down the day and hour of His return, but it does mean that we will be aware of its nearness. As children of the light we will be able to see the signs, discern the seasons, and know the nearness of His coming. This doesn't mean we always read the signs and seasons accurately. If this generation misreads things, it certainly won't be the first. But the children of light see every eclipse, every blood moon, every war, every famine, every earthquake as a reminder that these things will increase like labor pains the closer we get to Christ's return. Those in the dark will fail to see this because their eyes have been blinded by the god of this world.

Q: Have you ever considered the signs and seasons that you are witnessing? What do they lead you to believe about Christ's return, and why? (See also *Matthew 24:3-14*)

6 So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.
7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. 8 But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.

Awake, sober, and armed: these descriptors inform us about the readiness of believers. We are to be ready, always. Paul told the Thessalonian believers to *keep awake*. We can understand that perhaps by saying, *no cruise control*. Remain alert and in command of your faculties, ready to move, ready to share, and ready to defend. Then he said *be sober*. Don't dull your senses. Be circumspect, bringing light of the Gospel to all sides of the issues we face. Then we are to arm ourselves with God's armor: the breastplate of faith and love, and the helmet of the hope of salvation. This is our divine activity, our holy work as ambassadors of Christ. If we fall asleep, if we get drunk, who will there be to warn the world of His coming?

Q: In what areas do you need transformation so that you will be more consistently awake, sober, and armed? (See also *Ephesians 6:10-18; 1 Peter 3:15*)

9 For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. 11 Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.





Paul offers these final thoughts as a comforting promise. The Day of the LORD is coming, believers should be aware of its nearness, but we should not fret or fear because God did not appoint us for wrath, but for salvation. Echoing back to chapter four, our salvation will be consummated, or made complete, when Jesus calls the dead in Christ - those sleeping - and the living believers - those awake when He comes - up to Himself. After that, we're forever living with Him. This is our comfort, and hope, and we are supposed to encourage each other with this promise.

Q: Does this promise bring you peace or anxiety? (See also *Revelation 1:3*)

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¹² We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, ¹³ and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.

Verse 12 shifts us into the final leg of this letter. Paul begins a rapid-fire series of instructions to the believers in Thessalonica. It isn't clear whether any of these instructions represented a response to particular problems. Since Paul normally takes time to break down big problems in the other letters he wrote, the fact that little explanation occurs here might mean these aren't corrections, but instead are godly reminders. It may seem a little self-serving for him to begin with an instruction to respect those who labor for the church, but his heart is for God's family to exist in peace and unity.

Q: What are some ways that you can honor and love those who labor among you? (See also *Romans 12:10; Galatians 6:6*)

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¹⁴ And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. ¹⁵ See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.

The Christian life is a community life. Not only do these verses imply a vibrant community, but they also imply that we are deeply invested in one another's lives. We don't tolerate laziness, we encourage, we exercise patience, we ensure that evil isn't repaid for evil (which is a way of *doing justice*), and we do good not just to one another, but to everyone! You can't do these things as a lone ranger Christian. Lone ranger Christians are in rebellion against the very fabric of family that God intends for His people.

Q: Why is vibrant community within the church so difficult to maintain? (See also *Hebrews 10:25*)





16 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

While the verse numbering for these three verses may be ridiculous, what they say is critically important. Paul encouraged them to have an exciting prayer life. This isn't the only place where we are instructed to rejoice always. Philippians 4:4 says, "*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.*" Why does Paul command rejoicing? Is that something that can be commanded? He's not the first one to do it. The Psalms command gladness and rejoicing. "*Serve the LORD with gladness,*" (Ps. 100:2). These aren't suggestions. They're instructions. That should tell us something. God isn't interested in memorized, rote prayers, dispassionate praise, and hum-drum obedience. God wants your emotions! "*Love the LORD your God with all your heart...*" (Deut. 6:5). The LORD is serious about this. He even told the Israelites, "*All these curses shall come upon you and pursue you and overtake you... because you did not serve the LORD your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart... therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the LORD will send against you,*" (Deut. 28:45-48). People who downplay emotions in their faith journey, don't seem to understand how much God desires to have them. Therefore, Paul simply told the Thessalonians that their prayers should be unceasing, full of rejoicing and thanksgiving, and that this was (and is) *the will of God*.

Q: Why do we struggle to have an exciting prayer life? Why do so many find prayer boring? (See also James 4:3)

19 Do not quench the Spirit. 20 Do not despise prophecies, 21 but test everything; hold fast what is good. 22 Abstain from every form of evil.

Quenching the Spirit has the imagery of putting out a fire. It may be said to be opposite of Paul's instruction to Timothy to, "*fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands,*" (2 Tim. 1:6). If Paul told Timothy to fan into flame the gift of God which is in you, then quenching the Spirit is related to stifling or *putting out the flame* of the gifts of God that in us individually and as the gathered church.

Q: What are ways that we quench the Spirit in our daily life? In the church gathering? (See also Ephesians 4:30; 5:15-21)





23 Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it. 25 Brothers, pray for us. 26 Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. 27 I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers. 28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

There can be a tendency to skim over the benediction in the New Testament letters, but we shouldn't. All of them are part of God's Word, and are therefore inspired. If you skip this particular benediction, you miss out on one of the sweetest promises to which we can hold tightly. Verse 24 tells us that *He will surely do it*. Do what? Look in verse 23: *sanctify completely, and keep our spirit, soul, and body blameless at His coming*. This is a promise that is a deep well of comfort in difficult times. If you skip the benediction, you would miss something precious.

Q: Why should this comfort us? (See also *Philippians 1:6*)

Notes

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Introduction to 2 Thessalonians

Paul's second letter to the Christians at Thessalonica urges them to faithfully continue the work of the gospel. Paul revisits some of the same issues that he addressed in his first letter to this church. He commends the believers for standing firm in the face of persecution; he also explains more about the Day of the Lord and tells idlers in the community to get back to work. A true understanding of the gospel will inspire hope for the future, as well as diligence for the here and now.

BACKGROUND

Like 1 Thessalonians, Paul, Silvanus (Silas), and Timothy are identified as the authors of 2 Thessalonians (2 Thess 1:1; 3:17; 1 Thess 1:1), but there is some modern debate about its authorship. This debate centers around the style and vocabulary differences with Paul's other letters, the suggestion that its theology is more developed than this period of early Christianity, and the close parallels with 1 Thessalonians. This leads to the theory that an author other than Paul drew upon the material of 1 Thessalonians to compose 2 Thessalonians. However, it could be that Paul felt like he needed to emphasize the same matters twice, had a large vocabulary, used a different scribe, and that early Christian theology was more developed than is often theorized. In addition, 2 Thessalonians was unanimously accepted by the early church fathers as by Paul.

The recipients of 2 Thessalonians were Christians in Thessalonica, a city in Macedonia (northern Greece) where Paul and his companions had planted a church (Acts 17:1–9; see the "Introduction to 1 Thessalonians"). This letter does not provide as many clues about the date and place of its writing as 1 Thessalonians (which was sent from Corinth around AD 50–51). Since the two letters cover many of the same issues, 2 Thessalonians was likely written soon after 1 Thessalonians (2 Thess 2:15) near the end of Paul's second missionary journey (circa AD 49–51).

In the time since Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians, it seems that several factors he addressed in that letter had intensified: persecution, uncertainty about Christ's return, and idleness in the church. The persecution and suffering mentioned in the first letter were still continuing (2 Thess 1:5–6; 1 Thess 1:6; 2:14; 3:3–4). Despite Paul's teaching, some people in the community were apparently saying that the Day of the Lord had already come (2 Thess 2:1–2; compare 1 Thess 5:1–11). In addition, some of the Thessalonian Christians apparently had decided that they did not need to work for a living (2 Thess 3:10–12; compare 1 Thess 4:11–12; 5:14).

STRUCTURE

Like many of Paul's other letters, 2 Thessalonians has a greeting (2 Thess 1:1–2) which flows immediately into a thanksgiving section (1:3–12) that introduces the letter's main concerns. In this case, Paul's primary intention is to comfort and exhort the Thessalonian believers as they are facing persecution. In the next major section (2:1–17), Paul reassures the Thessalonians that the return of





Christ has not taken place already, because the events before that day had not taken place. Paul had already taught them about these matters when he was with them (2:5).

Next, Paul addresses the issue of people in the community who had stopped working (3:1–15). This behavior might be connected to assumptions about Christ’s return: If it had already come or is coming soon, people have thought there was no point in working. In rebuke, Paul tells the Thessalonians to follow his example: When with them, he did everything he could to avoid being a burden (3:7–9). The letter closes with a benediction emphasizing the peace of God, which is especially important given the persecution and uncertainty that was troubling the Thessalonian church (3:16–18).

OUTLINE

- Thanksgiving and prayer (1:1–12)
- Misunderstanding regarding the Day of the Lord (2:1–17)
- Exhortations to avoid idleness, benediction, and closing (3:1–18)

THEMES

Second Thessalonians’ central point is that God is just and faithful—which means that our present and future are safe in His hands. Because God is just, the Thessalonians can trust Him in the midst of their current troubles (1:5–6), knowing that He will preserve them and judge those who persecute them (1:7–10). Because God is faithful, they can entrust their future to Him (3:3).

Paul encourages the Thessalonians, and us, to stay faithful in all we do; we are to work hard—ultimately for His purposes (2:13–17; 3:6–9). We also have to exhort others to do the same; this will, at times, result in us making difficult decisions in regards to our relationships (3:10–15). But since we know that God is just and faithful, we can put our whole lives, present and future, in His hands.

Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). Faithlife Study Bible. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.





Chapter One

Paul previously wrote a letter to comfort the persecuted church in Thessalonica. Sometime later he learned that matters had become worse: The persecution of the Thessalonian believers had intensified; a forged letter in Paul's name claiming that the second coming of Christ already happened may have been circulated (2 Thess 2:2); and certain believers were using Christ's return as an excuse to quit working. Paul addresses each of these issues in this letter, which he probably wrote shortly after 1 Thessalonians, near the end of his second missionary journey (ca. AD 49–51).

Throughout this letter, Paul encourages believers to persevere by vividly describing the return of Christ and the judgment He will issue upon those who persecute His people (vv. 3–10). Paul also clarifies the circumstances surrounding the Day of the Lord, refuting claims that it had already come (2:1–12). Finally, He provides instruction for correcting those who quit working (3:6–15).

Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). Faithlife Study Bible (2 Th 1:1–2). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

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¹ Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,
To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the
Lord Jesus Christ:
² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³ We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. ⁴ Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring.

Paul and company, would brag about the Thessalonians to other churches as they went from city to city. Their faith and love grew abundantly despite the fact that their persecutions and afflictions showed no signs of ending. Often, when we are faced with trials and afflictions, we lose heart, we get weary, we say we're burned out, and we retreat from the community. That wasn't the case with the Thessalonian believers. They increased in faith and love, which means they did not retreat but instead leaned harder into the Gospel community that the LORD was building among them.

Q: What makes the difference between someone retreating from affliction and someone growing through affliction? (See also 2 Corinthians 4:8-9; 1 Peter 5:10)





⁵ This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering—
⁶ since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, ⁷ and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels ⁸ in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

The ESV's rendering of verse five can be hard to understand. The New Living Translation provides a rendering that's easier. *"And God will use this persecution to show his justice and to make you worthy of his Kingdom, for which you are suffering."* The evidence that God is a righteous judge will be fully revealed when Christ returns and judges those who afflicted His people. Furthermore, as the church is persecuted and afflicted it will increase despite the opposition. Persecution is a weapon of the enemy to destroy the church, but God reverses its effect and grows His church.

Q: Since God will use our afflictions to demonstrate His justice and make us worthy of His kingdom, how does that affect the way you process the trials and tribulations we endure? (See also *Philippians 1:27-29*)

One of the foundational promises of our faith is that God will repay those who wrong us. Though Jesus told us that we would be persecuted for His name's sake (Matt. 10:22), He will also bring justice and deliver vengeance against our persecutors. Paul wrote, *"God considers it just to repay with affliction, those who afflict you."* When we are persecuted, we are set free from pursuing justice that may or may not be tainted by our own desire for vengeance. Instead, God promises to deliver perfect, righteous justice against our enemies.

Q: When you are wronged is your first thought to let God have vengeance and deliver justice? (See also *Deuteronomy 32:35; Romans 12:19-20*)

The companion promise to God's vengeance is God's relief. Not only will He deliver justice and exact vengeance against our enemies, but when Christ returns He will grant long-awaited relief to His people. The book of Hebrews speaks of this relief as God's rest (Heb. 4:9-11). God considers rest that awaits us the just reward for our affliction.

Q: How can we rest now as we await our final rest to come when Christ returns? (See also *Matthew 11:28; 1 Peter 5:7*)





⁹ They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, ¹⁰ when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.

What does the vengeance of God look like? God's vengeance is the punishment of eternal destruction, away from His presence. It isn't popular to teach about eternal punishment. Even among believers there are those who don't believe the lost will be eternally punished for rejecting the Gospel. But, here it is in plain writing. This is at the same time a sobering reality, an issue of vindication, and a comfort for eternity. It's sobering because everyone who dies in disobedience to the Gospel will suffer eternal destruction. It's vindicating because that's the just punishment for rejecting Christ's work on the cross and for being enemies of the church. It's an eternal comfort for the family of God in that they will be punished away from His presence; kept away from the new creation that God will make for our eternal dwelling.

Q: Why should we be sure to include God's vengeance as share the Gospel? (See also *Micah 5:15; Romans 1:18, 2:5, 5:9; Revelation 19:11-21, 20:11-15*)

¹¹ To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, ¹² so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul was well acquainted with persecution and affliction, and knowing that the Thessalonian believers were enduring the same things opened his heart to them. This prayer for them is insightful. It's tempting to believe that our worthiness - especially in dark times - is measured in how we perform, how we hold up, and how we respond to what's happening. The Gospel destroys that kind of belief. Paul recalled the beautiful truth that God is the one who makes us worthy, not us. Christ's work qualifies us for the kingdom, period. He is everything that's good in us and gives us faith for every good work that He calls us to do. When we understand and embrace this reality, the burden becomes light. Jesus will then be glorified in us, and we will be glorified in Him when He returns.

Q: What are the dangers of believing that your worthiness depends on how well you perform? How does the Gospel free us from those dangers? (See also *Ephesians 2:8-10*)





Notes

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Chapter Two

This is the second time in two letters where Paul dived deeper into issues surrounding the second coming of Jesus Christ. It would appear, in verse two, that there were more false teachings being circulated among the believers in Thessalonica, possibly even by letters that were faked to appear as though they were from Paul. The false teaching was that the Day of the LORD had already occurred, which stirred up concerns and fears in their church.

The recurrence of this false teaching in the Thessalonian church is cause for a healthy discussion about how to detect false teaching. Paul begins his thoughts in this chapter listing three ways that false teaching can work its way into a church. Paul corrected them once in his first letter (1 Thess. 4:13-18; 5:1-11) yet they opened the door to the same false teaching again some time after.

Paul corrects this false teaching by highlighting two future events that had to take place before the LORD's return: *the rebellion* and the coming of the *man of lawlessness*. These events are contentious subjects and have been discussed and debated for centuries. Rather than contribute to the confusion that exists in the many points of view that are held by believers, this study will focus on what we can know with certainty from Paul's teaching.

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¹ Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, ² not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.

It's interesting to note that Paul lists three different ways that false teaching can be delivered: a spirit, a spoken word, and written word. Let's work backward through these. First, apparently Paul was aware that fake letters were being circulated in the churches, which alleged to be from him. These letters were teaching things that were contrary to what he had taught them in person (see 2:5). Second, there were people who were preaching, teaching, or prophesying things that weren't aligned with Paul's teachings. Paul also warns them not to be alarmed by a spirit, which is a reference to any spirit being who influences and teaches contrary to his teachings. Bottom line: be people of the Word so that we can know when something false is being presented.

Q: Based on your current understanding of God's Word, do you think you can recognize and correct false teachings? (See also 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 2:15)

Q: If you recognize a teaching as false, how should you go about correcting it? (See also 2 Timothy 2:24-26)





³ Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, ⁴ who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. ⁵ Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?

First of all, look at verse five. Paul has already told them these things. He touched on all of these issues when he was with them for those few weeks in Acts 17. How quickly they forgot! But we're no different. We forget just as quickly. We need constant reminders of what we've already learned because the enemy is patiently waiting to pervert them the moment they begin to fade from memory.

Q: What are some good habits we can form that will help us remember the things we've been taught? (See also *Ecclesiastes 12:1*)

Let no one deceive you. This is how Paul began his corrective teaching about the Day of the LORD. That should tell us something. There will be deceiving spirits and false teachers who will try to lead the church astray concerning this issue. There will be two events that must *precede* the second coming of Jesus Christ. First, there will be a rebellion. The Greek word that is translated as *rebellion* is the same word where we get the English word *apostasy*. That's an old word, but it means *to fall away or to forsake*. This rebellion will be a falling away from, or a forsaking of the LORD.

Then, second, the man of lawlessness will be revealed. The rebellion, in one way or another, sets the stage for the appearance of the man of lawlessness. Lawlessness appears many times in the New Testament, but 1 John 3:4 offers a clear definition: *sin is lawlessness*. This man of lawlessness, or the son of destruction, or the antichrist (1 Jn 2:22) will elevate himself higher than any god that is worshiped, even higher than Yahweh, the God of gods. He will be so full of himself that he'll even make his throne in the temple of God. While the Apostle John makes it clear that there are already many antichrists present in the world (1 Jn 2:18), Paul puts a finer point on the issue in that this man of lawlessness will be the ultimate and final manifestation of the Antichrist.

Q: As children of the light, we aren't supposed to be caught unaware by Christ's coming. Do you believe we are seeing the rebellion unfold before us? Do you see the LORD being forsaken by humanity at large? (See also *Matthew 24:10*)

Q: How might a rebellion set the stage for the man of lawlessness to arrive? (See also *Daniel 7:25*)





⁶ And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. ⁷ For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way.

While there's much discussion about the identity of the one who restrains, many scholars believe Paul is referring to the Holy Spirit. It isn't a stretch to say that the Holy Spirit is the one restraining the arrival of the man of lawlessness. Jesus called His followers, *the salt of the earth* (Matt 5:13). Salt is a preservative. God's people are indwelt with the Holy Spirit. It would seem that the Holy Spirit is restraining the mystery of lawlessness through the ministry of the church. But as the rebellion approaches (or intensifies), lawlessness will increase, and people's love will grow cold (Matt 24:12). When the LORD decides the restraining ministry of the Holy Spirit is complete, He will release what was being restrained, and the man of lawlessness will arrive on the world scene.

Q: In one sense, the Spirit-filled ministry of every local church functions as a restrainer of evil. How can we actively engage in pushing back the darkness around us with the light of the Gospel? (See also *Matthew 5:14-16; James 1:22*)

⁸ And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. ⁹ The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, ¹⁰ and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.

Before we make too much of the man of lawlessness, it should be said that when Jesus comes, He will destroy this man immediately with nothing more than the breath of His mouth. It's good to remember that Satan is simply no match for Jesus. Satan's best work will be blown away like a dandelion when Jesus returns. However, we should be cautious. The arrival of the Antichrist happens directly through Satan's activities, with powerful false signs and wonders, designed to deceive everyone who doesn't belong to Jesus. Paul notes that the wicked deception is *for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved*.

Q: How should this knowledge affect the way we process and think through current events, political and cultural movements, and social anxieties? (See also *Matthew 10:16; 25:1-13*)





11 Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, 12 in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

In the preceding verses, Satan works through the man of lawlessness with a wicked deception designed to deceive those who have rejected the Gospel. Here, God doubles down on that deception and sends a strong delusion so that these men and women will keep believing what is false. He uses Satan's deception as a punishment against those who reject His Son, Jesus Christ. To make it simple, this means once the man of lawlessness is revealed and his deception is in full swing, at some point God will draw the battle lines. The sides will be fixed. It appears that when this moment in history passes, salvation for those who have rejected the Gospel won't be possible.

Q: Does this create a new sense of urgency to share the Gospel? (See also *Isaiah 55:6*)

13 But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. 14 To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 15 So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.

When we consider all of the horrible things that will transpire before the Day of the LORD, the hope for believers is this: God chose you. If you belong to Him, you have nothing to fear from the coming of the man of lawlessness. His calling upon us is the promise that we will obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus. No matter what we may face, Jesus is worth it. If you can't say that, perhaps you should spend time getting to know Him better. Or, perhaps you don't know Him at all. Paul admonished the Thessalonians to stand firm in light of His calling. We too can stand firm because our salvation doesn't rest upon us choosing Him. He chose us and that is what empowers us to endure.

Q: Standing firm against the big things that are coming is rehearsed in the small things we face each day. In what way does each day challenge us to stand firm? Are there small daily things that shake your faith? (See also *2 Corinthians 2:11*)





16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, 17 comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.

As we've studied both 1 and 2 Thessalonians, there is a consistent theme connected to teachings about Christ's return. These teachings should comfort us. The end of 2 Thessalonians 2 concludes Paul's teachings about the second coming, and he finishes it with a prayer for comfort. Jesus Christ's bodily return to the earth is what this whole Christian thing has been pointing toward. If you're just in it for a ticket to heaven, you might be surprised that earth is where we ultimately end up living and reigning with Him. This topic is sorely understated in popular Christianity. Even Christian funerals seldom mention our very earthly future that will begin when we return with Jesus to reign. And yet, this is the hope and comfort of the early church. It's what Paul taught the Thessalonians. It is our hope and comfort as well. We should get to know it.

Q: Why do you think we undersell the comfort and hope in the return of Christ? (See also Revelation 19:11-16)

Notes

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Chapter Three

Second Thessalonians 3 is the last chapter of this letter and it is essentially a prayer request and a final admonishment. If you've been paying attention, you might have noticed that every topic addressed in this letter was also addressed in 1 Thessalonians. There are no new issues at work within the Thessalonian church. Every problem Paul addressed in this letter are unresolved issues from his first letter. Chapter one deals with afflictions which Paul mentioned first in 1 Thess. 1:6, 2:2,14. Chapter two deals with the Day of the LORD which Paul discussed at length in 1 Thess. 4:13-5:11. Chapter three deals with idleness which Paul briefly highlights in 1 Thess. 5:14.

As we move through this chapter, notice two words: *command* and *idle*. These two words rise to the top in Paul's line of thought. Command appears in 3:4 and 3:6, and this word created a very particular tone to the admonishment that Paul gave. It left no room to think that Paul was only making a suggestion. This was an order. It was to become their standard operating procedure as a church.

The next word, *idle*, has a broader meaning in Greek than it holds in English. In English we consider *idle* to mean *doing nothing* or *being lazy*. The Greek certainly means that, but it can mean more. It also includes *being disorderly* or *living irresponsibly*. Bringing those meanings together in Paul's admonishment means not only were there believers who weren't working, but their laziness was symptomatic of whole lives marked by disorder.

1 Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, 2 and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith.

The Gospel was the centerpiece of Paul's life. Paul's prayer request wasn't for himself, but for the advance of the Gospel. Everything he did was connected to spreading the good news of Jesus Christ. He then asked for prayers that he would be delivered from wicked and evil men. To what end? So that the Gospel would spread unhindered.

Paul was always facing opposition to the Gospel from Satan (1 Thess. 2:18) and more generally from lost people, Jew and Gentile. It was a mob of Gentiles, stirred up by jealous Jews, that ran them out of Thessalonica to begin with (Acts 17:5). But there is another opponent that comes from within the church: false teachers. In almost every church that Paul had dealings with, he had to deal with the issue of false teachers. It may be too obvious for Paul to say that people outside the church don't have faith, so perhaps his warning that not all have faith was directed at people within the church; wolves in sheep's clothing (Matt 7:15).

Q: Do our prayer lives reveal our devotion to the spread of the Gospel and the well-being of the church? (See also Matthew 6:6)





³ But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one. ⁴ And we have confidence in the Lord about you, that you are doing and will do the things that we command. ⁵ May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.

We've seen multiple times in these letters how Paul would boast about the Thessalonians to other churches (1:4) and how all of Macedonia was aware their faith and love (1 Thess. 4:9-10). But, here we see the source of his confidence in them. Paul didn't boast about these believers because they were awesome people who were nailing it. He boasted about them because he had confidence in the LORD about them. He knew that the Lord would be faithful to grow them, and he saw the evidence of His faithfulness in their love for one another and others. It would do us well to remember that every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father of lights (James 1:17), so when we see growth in each other, it's Him, not us.

Q: Since God is the one growing you, how would you describe the ways that God brings growth in your life? (See also 1 Corinthians 3:5-9)

⁶ Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. ⁷ For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, ⁸ nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. ⁹ It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. ¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. ¹¹ For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. ¹² Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.

In the ESV Bible, the heading for this section of Scripture is *Warning Against Idleness*. There are several issues at work in this passage which might not be evident from a simple reading of the verses. First, let's look at the word *command*. Paul mentions it first in his prayer in 3:4 - *And we have confidence in the Lord about you, that you are doing and will do the things that we **command***. It's almost as if Paul butters them a little bit, then in verse six lowers the boom - *We **command** you*. Have you ever wondered where Paul gets the authority to command believers to do something?





In our culture, we don't command people to do things. Commands are more or less relegated to authoritarian structures like the military. If your pastor commanded you to do something, you'd probably tell him to take the shortest route to the nearest lake and jump in.

Q: Where does Paul get the authority to command other believers? (See also *Galatians 1:11-24*)

This is an important question because the command he issues to the church is rather harsh. Don't associate with brothers who walk in idleness (3:6). Before we talk about idleness, let's not rush away from the command to cut ties. The New Testament talks about disassociating ourselves from fellow believers in other places as well. Matthew chapter 18 reveals that an unrepentant brother, who refuses to repent after being brought before the whole church, is to be put out of the fellowship - treated as a Gentile and tax collector (Matt 18:15-17). Paul admonished the Corinthians to put a brother out of fellowship who had been sleeping with his stepmother (1 Cor 5:1-2). To what end? Why do we put people out of fellowship? Simply put, it is to make them ashamed (3:14). Paul says it more demonstrably in 1 Corinthians 5:5 - "*you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.*" The most important thing at stake is not the rebellious brother's feelings, but his eternal soul. Unrepentance isn't a fruit of the Spirit, and when someone purposely walks in it, that casts doubt on whether their faith is genuine. Yet, it seems many believers balk at the idea of putting a person out of fellowship.

Q: When local churches are unwilling to put unrepentant believers out of fellowship, what consequences occur? (See also *Romans 2:24*)

Idleness is apparently a serious charge if Paul was willing to command the church to shun away from idle brothers. At the very least, we can tell from Paul's admonishment that these idle brothers were unwilling to work. In 3:7-9 he reminded his readers that while he was there, he worked hard and refused to burden any of them with his needs, even though he could have as an Apostle. Then in verse ten he uttered the famous, oft quoted verse, *if anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.* Of course, Paul instructs these believers to repent and work quietly, earning their own livings.

It's easy to read this and immediately turn to judge a brother whom you believe doesn't work as hard as you. The temptation is to hold everyone to a subjective standard of hard work defined by the sweat of our own brows. However, if the Bible applies to the original readers and to us (and everyone in between) then defining idleness will vary from culture to culture. It even varies from person to person. Idleness for a single person will be different than for a married person because the personal responsibilities aren't the same.

Take this a step farther. English translations of 2 Thessalonians 3:11 vary. Some say, like the ESV, *idleness*, while others say *undisciplined*, *disorderly*, *disruptive*, *lazy*, and *irresponsible*. Given the





variety of English words used across Bible translations, *idleness* may well be a condition where refusing to work is one symptom of many. An undisciplined and disordered life would be marked by many other problems, too lazy to work being just one.

Q: Given what Paul could've had in mind, how might we define idleness in our time, location, and culture? (See also *Proverbs 31:27*)

While English translations may vary on the word idleness, there is far more consistency on the word *busybodies*. And if the word busybodies isn't used, it is typically replaced with *meddling* or *interfering in other people's business*. These believers may not have been working, but they were working hard at being pot-stirrers. They were spending their days receiving and spreading gossip about others. Idleness, as it turns out, doesn't mean you're doing nothing, you're just not doing anything good.

Q: If Paul commanded the Thessalonian church to avoid believers who are idle busybodies, how should we respond to the ones in our churches? (See also *1 Timothy 5:13,15*)

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¹³ As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good. ¹⁴ If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. ¹⁵ Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

The encouragement in verse 13 is important. *Do not grow weary in doing good*. Laboring in the Kingdom includes confronting evil within the church. That often means making your heart vulnerable to being misunderstood by others when you confront them. It's common for weary believers to extend grace when what's really needed is some tough love. In 1 Corinthians 5, the church was tolerating gross immorality and Paul harshly corrected them. If God has commanded us to disassociate then that is the most grace-filled thing we can do. We can't be more grace-filled than Him, but we pretend to be when we tolerate things that we should correct.

However, Paul's final admonition on this matter is a great leveler. We can't forget, these believers are brothers, not enemies. In Christ, the family bond we have with each other should temper our responses with love. We should never gloat or enjoy putting someone out of fellowship. It should always be a heartbreaking matter every time. If your heart isn't broken, you're not doing it right.

Q: How would loving church discipline change the local church? (See also *Proverbs 17:17; Matthew 7:5; Hebrews 12:11-12*)





16 Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all.

17 I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the sign of genuineness in every letter of mine; it is the way I write. 18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

As was mentioned in 1 Thessalonians, the benediction often has little things that you'd miss if you skipped it. Tucked in the middle of this benediction is verse 17 where Paul personally signs this letter. Some speculate that because he might have had poor eyesight, Paul's personal handwriting would've been larger, perhaps less professional looking than that of the scribe who transcribed for him. Why is this a big deal? Remember in chapter two, Paul insinuated that fake letters were being circulated in his name. This affirms that insinuation. He's basically saying, *just look at my handwriting and you'll know it's from me!*

More importantly, most of Paul's benedictions pronounce grace and peace upon his readers. We are all in need of daily peace and fresh grace, no matter what season of life or circumstance or affliction or prosperity we experience. It should be a common refrain for each of us as we love one another; a constant reminder of the LORD's kindness to us in Christ. Grace and peace.

Q: As we've studied 1 and 2 Thessalonians, how has the Lord blown fresh grace and peace into your heart?

Notes

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