

Copyright © 2022 Anthony Rea

All rights reserved.

ISBN: 9798834759102

Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. The ESV text may not be quoted in any publication made available to the public by a Creative Commons license. The ESV may not be translated into any other language. The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®, is adapted from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

# CONTENTS

<i>Part I: 1 Thessalonians</i>	<i>6</i>
2     1:1–4	7
3     1:5–10	17
4     2:1–7	27
5     2:8–12	37
6     2:13–19	47
7     4:1–8	57
8     4:9–12	67
9     4:13–18	75
10    5:1–11	87
11    5:12–13	98
12    5:14–28	108
 <i>Part II: 2 Thessalonians</i>	 <i>118</i>
13    1:1–8	119
14    1:9–12	130
15    2:1–5	140
16    2:6–12	151
17    2:13–17	161
18    3:1–9	171
19    3:10–18	181

# 1 THESSALONIANS 1 PT. 1 V. 1–4

1 THESSALONIANS IS ONE OF THE FIRST LETTERS THAT PAUL WROTE to any church. So, what we find in 1 Thessalonians reflects the earlier years of Paul's decades-long ministry.

Paul first traveled through Thessalonica in Acts 17:1–9 after having been imprisoned and beaten in Philippi (and where he and his company planted a church).

Thessalonica was an important commercial and political city, the capital of a Roman province in Macedonia during this time.<sup>1</sup> And Thessalonica continues to be an important city in Greece today.

During Paul's month-long stay in Thessalonica, an envious party of Jews in the city incited a mob to attack the believers under the accusation of sedition, saying there is another king – Jesus (Acts 17:7) and earning the moniker, “These who have turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6). They were unable to find Paul but did manage to harass several other newly converted Christians in the city.

The church in Thessalonica was so concerned for Paul's safety that they sent him away by night to Berea. The Berean Jews were described as more noble-minded than those at Thessalonica because they searched the Scriptures daily.

The primary form of religious worship in Thessalonica was much like

---

1. D. Michael Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians*, The New American Commentary 33 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 23.

its neighbors – mainly pagan. They worshipped many gods and goddesses as well as the emperor of Rome himself.<sup>2</sup>

This is the context of the church in Thessalonica and indicates to us some of the things that the early church would have had to deal with. Bear in mind that Paul established this group of believers and, while he was at Corinth, wrote two letters to them all during his second missionary journey. So, not much time had passed from meeting them and writing this epistle. While the Thessalonian believers were new, baby Christians, Paul had been a believer for about fifteen years by this time and had already gone on one of his famous missionary journeys (c. early 50s AD).<sup>3</sup>

There are two major themes in this book:

First, Paul demonstrates his love and care for the church and encourages them to continue growing and developing in Christ. This is the bulk of Paul's writing to the Thessalonians. This is quite a short book with only five chapters, totaling 89 verses. And all but 17 verses deal with this issue – continuing in faithfulness to follow Jesus and having all facets of their lives directed by Him.

The second major theme, those 17 verses not dealing explicitly with Christian living, presents instruction on the question of death, resurrection, and Christ's second coming.

While many people like to use Paul's teaching in 1 Thessalonians to develop various eschatological timelines (and many have), that is not really Paul's point in dealing with the return of Christ, as briefly as he does.

His point is that the return of Christ ought to be a comfort to believers rather than causing sensationalism, fanaticism, and abandonment of Christian living.

---

2. Michael S. Guyer, "Thessalonians," *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al., (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

3. "It is ... fairly certain that 1 Thessalonians was written about fifteen years after Paul's conversion, that is, early in the year 51 or late in the previous year. Paul was writing to young Christians, but he himself was already an experienced evangelist." Paul Ellingworth and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on Paul's Letters to the Thessalonians*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1976), x.

Think about it. Most of what Paul wrote here (about 80%) concerns the impact the gospel has on our lives and how we ought to live in the light of the gospel. It is not an endorsement of tunnel vision on the unknowns of the end but rather a call to persevere, having hope that Christ is Lord over all – even the end.

In particular, Paul pushes back against a wrong understanding of Christ's second coming, correcting those who had quit working because of their bad eschatology. They were so sure that Christ's return was hyper-imminent and they had given up living a life that reflected the reality of Christ and His soon return because they thought they would be out of there in no time!

With all of this confusion that affected the Thessalonians regarding the return of Christ we should note that the bulk of the Scriptures, NT and OT, are not predictive in nature.

1 and 2 Thessalonians, the Olivet Discourse (found in Mark 13 and Matt 24), and the Book of Revelation make up the major portions of prophetic Scripture in the NT that relate to the last things (eschatology).<sup>4</sup>

The danger that Paul deals with in 1 and 2 Thessalonians is that some Christians had failed to strike a proper balance in their theology and practical living. Instead, they were hyper-focused on plausibilities and what-if scenarios and had neglected the weightier matters of the faith, a common ailment of Christians in our era, too. The remedy for such an imbalance is the consistent, systematic exposition of Scripture.

We ought to be believers who spend most of our time, energy, and concern on those things that God, through the Holy Spirit, spent most of His time, energy, and concern on as He inspired the Scriptures.

That is not to say that a proper understanding of eschatology is not important. It certainly is. But a good understanding of the last things (which remain widely debated) should never take priority over the centrality of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

---

4. Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*, Fifth Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 396–397.

Additionally, our understanding of Christ's second coming, that it could be at any moment, should propel us to be plain and clear about the gospel with others because time is running out! Our salvation is nearer than when we first believed (Rom 13:10–4).

So then, let us press into God's Word to the Thessalonians through the Apostle Paul.

---

***V. 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.***

This is a common introduction to Paul's letters. He immediately declares who the authors are and to whom they are writing. These names are probably familiar to many Christians.

Of note here is that Silvanus is also called Silas in other portions of Scripture. This is the same Silas whom Paul chose to accompany him on his second missionary journey after having a sharp contention with Barnabas regarding John Mark (Acts 15:36–40).

Timothy was Paul's young protege/disciple. Paul was raising him up to labor in the ministry, and Timothy proved to be capable and diligent in his efforts (Acts 16:1–2).

While the greater corpus of Paul's writings in the NT is often referred to as the Pauline Epistles, Paul, in fact, did have some help writing them. This is important for us to know – not just because it's a fun fact, but also because it informs our understanding of shared ministry. Paul wasn't a "lone ranger."

Note that this letter is addressed to a church rather than a person (Paul wrote personal letters to Philemon, Titus, and Timothy).

Inasmuch as Paul wasn't a lone ranger, the Christian community isn't called to solitude or single-minded interests either. Unfortunately, in our

present age, we take the idea of a church or **the** church for granted.

But the church was a new, emerging concept in the first century, a unique gathering of people sharing a common faith in Jesus Christ. While the early church practices were certainly influenced by synagogal tradition (and sadly even pagan influences), they were something new altogether, with a new lexicon, new traditions and symbols, a new hope, and a new purpose. This has given rise to a particular branch of theology called ecclesiology which seeks to examine some of those characteristics.

The word for church, ἐκκλησία, did not initially have a spiritual meaning and was in use for “several hundred years before the Christian era.”<sup>5</sup>

**But** remarkably, this term became nearly universally accepted as decidedly Christian as believers used it to refer to their gatherings.

We bring this up to point out that we are part of something bigger than ourselves and that Paul’s letters are addressed to a congregation, a gathering of the members of the body of Christ, or, as Paul puts it, those who are positioned in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. This is wonderful language indicating the unity of the church with the Father and the Son.

Paul opens this letter as his other letters by commending to the Thesalonians the grace and peace that come from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

These are gifts given to the saints by our God. We must remember that these gifts that we are given are more than just turns of phrase but genuine, substantial, and meaningful.

And they are worth more than all the money in the world!

Grace is that unmerited favor that God pours out upon us in spite of our unworthiness.

---

5. “In the rendering of ἐκκλησία a translator must beware of using a term which refers primarily to a building rather than to a congregation of believers. In many contexts ἐκκλησία may be readily rendered as ‘gathering of believers’ or ‘group of those who trust in Christ.’” Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 125.

Peace is the result of our responding to God's grace, a settling of the spirit as we are found in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

People go their entire lives searching for these things. They even seek to buy them or contrive them. But in truth, both of these things come from God. And if those who seek to attain them hope to have any lasting relationship with grace and peace, they must begin by drawing close to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

---

***V. 2 We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers,***

Verses 2–4 are one long sentence, but we shall look at each verse in turn so that we may truly see all of the myriad points that Paul is making here in his opening remarks.

Paul begins by noting that he and his ministry companions actively pray for the saints at Thessalonica. He cared deeply for them. Their relationship was more than just incidental.

William Mounce includes this bit of commentary in his grammar to demonstrate the active nature of their prayers:

*Far from being victimized by a group of itinerant moral preachers who sought their money and food, the Thessalonians were evangelized by a trio of men who proclaimed to them the living and true God. These were men whose lives had been touched deeply by the risen Christ, and they poured themselves out to the Thessalonians in a loving and caring way. Their abrupt departure did not indicate a lack of concern; on the contrary, they were forced to leave, and now they prayed together constantly to the living God for these fledgling and vulnerable believers! (Clinton E. Arnold)<sup>6</sup>*

---

6. William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar*, ed. Verlyn D. Verbrugge and Christopher A. Beetham, Fourth Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019), 171.



This is how we ought to pray for one another as well: continuously, earnestly, and with thanks – thanking God that He has graciously put us into His church and gifted us not only with His grace and peace but also with other believers to walk alongside us! That is amazing! Be thankful for other believers!

---

*V. 3 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,*

Along with continually giving thanks to God for the Thessalonian saints, as young as they were, Paul and his companions also constantly recalled specific commendable attributes that they had witnessed among them.

The first memorable attribute of these believers was their work of faith.

That is an interesting turn of phrase. There is, of course, a long-standing debate among Christians regarding faith and works.

Here Paul combines the two in a beautiful simple phrase that hopefully encourages us to understand the complementary nature of faith and works, works of faith.

For the Christian, faith and works are bound up in one another. The works of the saints are “works of faith,” as opposed to “works of the law” (Gal 2:16) or “works of the flesh” (Gal 5:19). Rather, the works of the saints are born out of faith. Therefore, it is our great pleasure and privilege to work in Christ’s kingdom and do any work that He has called us to do by faith.

The second memorable attribute of the Thessalonians is their “labor of love.” Notice again the word that Paul chooses, “labor,” an interesting word choice indeed and a different choice altogether from his previous usage of the word for “work” of faith (τοῦ ἔργου τῆς πίστεως).

Here Paul employs the phrase “the labor of love” τοῦ κόπου τῆς ἀγάπης. The word for labor (κόπου) holds within its range of meaning the sense of

“discomfort, difficulty, burdensome work, toil.”<sup>7</sup>

Think about that for just a second. The virtuous marks of the Thessalonians that Paul praises were characterized by working hard for love’s sake even when it was difficult and uncomfortable.<sup>8</sup>

The third trait remembered by Paul and company was their patience of hope in Jesus.

This will be important to them as Paul continues later in the letter to address their concerns with the second coming.

Some of the Thessalonians believed that they missed it! So here Paul calls to mind their hope – Jesus – and their patience as they, along with all creation, wait for Him. Notice too that Paul reminds them that God sees their patience.

He is not blind to their condition. He has not left them as orphans (John 14:18). God sees and knows, and He is the rewarder of those who remain steadfast until the end (Heb 3:14).

Notice also the “common triad” that also appears in Paul’s other writings and other early Christian writing: faith, hope, and love.<sup>9</sup>

As Christians, we consider these as part of our core values.

Many companies (and even churches) seek to get clever with their communications and renovate their websites with slick language that indicates who they are and what they believe. Core values are supposed to be those things that organizations don’t compromise.

And this is a good place for believers to begin without getting overly complicated – faith, hope, and love. Or a more expanded version would

---

7. κόπος, ού, ὁ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 558.

8. Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1990), 75–76.

9. “cf. 1 Thes. 5:8; Rom. 5:1–5; 1 Cor. 13:12; Gal. 5:5f.; Col. 1:4f.; Eph. 4:2–5; Heb. 6:10–12; 10:22–24; 1 Pet. 1:3–8, 21f.; Barn. 1:4; 9:8; Pol. 3:2f.”

Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 75.

read – works of faith, labor of love, patience of hope.

These marks are part of a spiritual heritage. This is who the Thessalonians were. This is what we are to be, and, by God's grace, this is what we shall be.

---

### *V. 4 knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God.*

Paul was convinced that God chose the Thessalonians, and his language indicates his understanding of what we sometimes call the doctrine of election – that is, that God does elect, or choose, some to be His saints.

The Greek terminology makes this clear. The underlying term gives the sense: “ἐκλογήα, ἥς ... to make a special choice based upon significant preference, often implying a strongly favorable attitude toward what is chosen—‘to choose, choice.’”<sup>10</sup>

**But** before we rebel against the Scriptures by claiming it doesn't really say that and free will is the only way people come to God, let us consider how it actually lines up with our theology.

We believe that we are saved by grace, God's favor towards us irrespective of our merit, and that He made the first move in any of our faith relationships by the cross (though He has moved toward humanity since the beginning of time).

Gene Greene writes,

*God's election is not based on human merits or virtue (2 Tim. 1:9), but instead his decision and initiative are rooted solely in his love. In the Greek world the election or recruitment of political and military leaders had to do with the merits and the character of the persons chosen. But in God's community, nothing less than the love of God is the cause of election, regardless of the positive or negative character or achievements of a person (Rom. 5:7–8). This much is assumed and not debated, as is often the case*

---

10. Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 360.

*today. The purpose of the declaration is to provide assurance and comfort and not to fuel theological controversy, however important such discussions might be.*<sup>11</sup>

The controversy that Greene is referring to is the vitriolic debate between Calvinists and Arminiasts, an argument that won't be settled here.

But we must allow for a Scriptural foundation and pattern for the doctrine of election. God elected His original covenant people, Israel, through no merit of their own (Deut 9:4–6).

Christ chose the disciples through no merit of their own (John 15:16). So there is at least a pattern of God choosing for His own those whom He wills.

The ugly part of the debate comes from derailing the conversation and ignoring God's love as foundational to His personality and supposing that God desires to choose people for eternal damnation rather than for life – contrary to Scripture (2 Peter 3:9).

The reality is that the Lord God had His eye upon us, each of us, that He loved us first before we loved Him (1 John 4:19), and that in itself is, in fact, an act of sovereign election.

This is cause for great comfort that God, in whose sight we live, has chosen us to be His New Covenant people, marked by grace, peace, faith, hope, and love. So then, walk in those things.

---

11. Green, *Thessalonians*, 92.

## 1 THESS 1 PT 2 VV. 5–10

THE TONE OF THIS PORTION OF SCRIPTURE IS DECIDEDLY JOYFUL and congratulatory even as it acknowledges the difficulties that the Thessalonians faced.

One of the remarkable things about our faith is that in the face of turmoil, we are not forsaken nor given to despair (2 Cor 4:8-10).

---

***V. 5 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.***

In vv. 2–5, the Greek text presents one long Pauline sentence. The NKJV has chosen to end that sentence at v. 4, **but** vv. 4 and 5 are connected to one another by the Greek conjunction ὅτι, which can mean “that, since, or because.”

In verse 4, Paul presents the thought to the Thessalonians that they can be assured of their election by God – that God, in His grace, chose them to be part of His kingdom. Verse 5 demonstrates the proof of their election.

Some translations, such as the NIV and ESV, render the conjunction in v. 5 as “because” rather than “for,” but the thought is the same. However,

those translations better present the seamlessness between verses 4 and 5 by presenting the singular long sentence that the NKJV breaks apart.

Translation decisions aside, Paul begins to present the evidence of their election. He affirms to them that God worked mightily among them and God's work is proof of their election.<sup>12</sup>

The point Paul is making is that the Thessalonians encountered more than talk. It is on this point that we have much to reflect upon in our modern era.

How many pulpits are occupied mainly with talking but lack the power and assurance of the Holy Spirit? This is when we begin to consider the term "dead orthodoxy," which resembles the ancient pharisaical heart.

You see, it's possible to preach something that sounds like the gospel but is devoid of the life-giving power of the gospel.

It is possible to declare theological facts and Scriptural platitudes without the power of the Holy Spirit.

It is even possible to do so from a position of genuine sincerity and concern for right doctrine and still come off as hollow and lifeless.

Consider the very orthodox, Scripturally informed Pharisees of Jesus' day. They had a strong affection for the Scriptures. They believed in piety and good works. By all accounts, we would consider their faith orthodox, even straight-laced. They believed in God the Father. They were people of Yahweh's covenant. They believed in a Messiah to come. They believed in the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings! **But** they were reckoned as lifeless by Christ:

*But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe. You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life (John 5:38–40 NKJV).*

Consider also a mighty teacher in the Scriptures, a man named Apollos.

---

12. Green, *Thessalonians*, 94.

*Meanwhile, a Jew named Apollos, an eloquent speaker who knew the Scriptures well, had arrived in Ephesus from Alexandria in Egypt. He had been taught the way of the Lord, and he taught others about Jesus with an enthusiastic spirit and with accuracy. However, he knew only about John's baptism (Acts 18:24–25 NLT).*

As gifted and enthusiastic as he was, Apollos only possessed a partial understanding of the power of the gospel because he had never encountered, been immersed in, the power of the Holy Spirit.

Apollos' own lack of experience with the power of the Holy Spirit naturally impacted the way he taught and what he taught.

As we see in this account of Apollos' ministry, he was a great teacher! He knew the Scriptures. But let's look at what happened in Ephesus after Apollos left.

*While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul traveled through the interior regions until he reached Ephesus, on the coast, where he found several believers. "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" he asked them. "No," they replied, "we haven't even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." "Then what baptism did you experience?" he asked. And they replied, "The baptism of John" (Acts 19:1–3 NLT).*

So, the Christians that Paul finds in Ephesus resemble who? Apollos, their teacher! They had also received water baptism, the baptism of John, but had not been immersed in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now this is important – remember what John the Baptist himself taught about baptism: "I baptize with water those who repent of their sins and turn to God. But someone is coming soon who is greater than I am--so much greater that I'm not worthy even to be his slave and carry his sandals. **He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire**" (Mat 3:11 NLT, emphasis mine).

So, in the wake of Apollos' ministry, Paul had to correct some doctrine

at Ephesus because it takes more than a gifted, enthusiastic, well-intentioned Bible teacher to bring about a conversion moment. It takes God Himself acting through the Holy Spirit to bring dead hearts to life.

*Paul said, "John's baptism called for repentance from sin. But John himself told the people to believe in the one who would come later, meaning Jesus." As soon as they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then when Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in other tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve men in all (Acts 19:4–7 NLT).*

You see, the result of participating in Christ's baptism is to receive the Holy Spirit, to encounter the living God, to be moved by Him! These men in Ephesus did miraculous things, not the least of which was continuing to preach the gospel with Paul for over two years. That is powerful stuff!

In our text, Paul writes that something similar happened at Thessalonica, though we don't know all of the details. The saints at Thessalonica encountered not only the Word of God but the Spirit of God as well.

In our modern era, fractured by denominations, there is a tendency to lean heavily one way or the other concerning understanding the power and work of the Holy Spirit.

Either we have a strong affinity for right doctrine, belief, and practice and shun anything that smacks of charismania (a hyper-focus on the gifts of the Holy Spirit); or we lean so heavily into an experiential faith, seeking an encounter with the Holy Spirit on our own terms, rather than His, that our practices actually contradict Scripture. There is an apparent lack of balance across the board.

Paul here demonstrates that as the gospel is declared, it is the Holy Spirit who makes the message powerful, effective, and meaningful.

Scripture tells us that as the Apostles preached the gospel, their words were confirmed by works of the Holy Spirit among the people.

The gospel is more than just an opinion, one more world religion, or a



clever tale. In the first century, the proof of the truthfulness of the gospel was given by the Holy Spirit through various signs to confirm the reality of what was spoken.

*And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with [them] and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen (Mark 16:20 NKJV).*

*And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch (Acts 5:12 NKJV).*

*And God confirmed the message by giving signs and wonders and various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit whenever he chose (Heb 2:4 NLT. Also see Acts 14:3 and 2 Cor 2:12).*

Now, leaving the argument of the miraculous aside, the Holy Spirit still demonstrates His power to affect drastic change through the gospel. Most often, that is born out in the fruit of the lives of those who have been impacted by the gospel of Jesus Christ, as Paul writes to the Galatians:

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those [who are] Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:22–25 NKJV).*

This is how people know the gospel is real today – because we live it out!

Of course, this does not deny the Holy Spirit His own personal prerogative to reach down into humanity and operate how He pleases through whatever signs He may choose.

After all, the Holy Spirit **is** God! He may choose to make Himself known however He wills in unity with His inspired Word. And we, in obedience to the Scriptures, will live lives that prove the reality of the gospel. We are new creations because of it (2 Cor 5:17)!

Furthermore, Paul reminds the Thessalonians of how he and his companions lived among them, how they were an example to them, and how their own lives had borne witness to the reality of the gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit.

This is what we are looking for today as we survey our modern Christian landscape. Are the people with the loudest voices those whose lives are a reflection of the gospel? Are they living for the sake of others and the gospel or something else altogether?

---

***Vv. 6–7 And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.***

Four ingredients were present to cause a meaningful response to the gospel.

First, their election. God chose them for His kingdom, and they responded positively to their being chosen.

One could argue that their positive response was based not only on some esoteric understanding of election and free will but because of the following criteria: the declaration of the gospel, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the example of the men who brought them the good message.

In the Christian community, the idea of discipleship is connected with following in the footsteps of those who have walked before us, being teachable, and learning from others who are more mature than ourselves.

Sadly, this is one of the greatest obstacles for Christians to overcome. We either lack the commitment to see our discipleship through, or we are

so self-assured of our own completeness and wisdom that we balk at the thought that we can learn from somebody else who has walked the way before us.

Keep in mind that this is not a shameless plug by Paul to build up his own brand. Paul wasn't really concerned about himself, but he was concerned about the well-being of new believers who didn't have any examples around them of Christian faithfulness.

As a matter of fact, at this point in history, the loudest voices in their lives would have been from unbelievers – pagans and idol worshippers.

Is it any wonder then that Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “Imitate me, just as I also [imitate] Christ” (1 Cor 11:1 NKJV)?

Paul's main concern was that these new believers would learn to follow Jesus.

Remarkably, these new believers in Thessalonica underwent their conversion experience in the midst of great hardship.

Their community had been in tremendous turmoil, partly because of resistance to the gospel.

Men of their own small and very new church were being extorted, shaken down by political players.

So great was the uproar that Paul and the gang had to flee under cover of darkness to avoid being assaulted (Acts 17:5–9).

Nevertheless, the attitude of these believers was of joy rather than fear, or anger, or depression, or some morose “woe is me because I follow Christ” mindset.

The Holy Spirit brings joy!

We are lacking in love, joy, peace, and the rest of the fruit of the Holy Spirit not because we are too close to the Holy Spirit but probably because we are actually wallowing in our own flesh.

The result of their experience was a great witness of the gospel to the surrounding region that extended far beyond their local city!

The Thessalonian saints were exemplary in their reception of the gospel, their personal conduct, and their joy of the Holy Spirit.

---

***V. 8 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.***

The Lord was working through the Thessalonians as a further proof of their election and deep conviction.

Again, this wasn't dead orthodoxy or a simple head knowledge. This was the real, life-changing result of receiving the gospel and being changed by it.

Gene Green writes,

*The term translated rang out ... appears only here in the NT, but in other literature of the era it could be used to describe a clap of thunder (Sir. 40:13), the loud cry of a multitude (Philo, In Flaccum 39), a rumor that runs everywhere (3 Macc. 3:2), or, as Chrysostom suggests, "every place near is filled with the sound of a loud trumpet" (Chrysostom, Homily on 1 Thessalonians 2). The proclamation from Thessalonica was set at high volume and went out with great force over a large area.<sup>13</sup>*

The bold sounding forth of the gospel occurs where the Holy Spirit operates. This is a fact that still holds true today.

Where the Holy Spirit lives among His people, the gospel will be declared. Where the people have given over to dead orthodoxy and words alone, forsaking the power of the Holy Spirit, spiritual death will surely follow.

That fact is observable in an untold number of churches across the land that once ran well but got tired, gave up, settled in, snubbed the Holy Spirit, became addicted to hollow homilies, and slowly but surely died on the vine. May the Lord keep us from such a fate.

---

13. Green, *Thessalonians*, 101.

---

*Vv. 9–10 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, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, [even] Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.*

What happened at Thessalonica became a widely known news story.

Remember that at the time of authorship, Paul was already separated from Thessalonica, probably in Corinth (about 190 miles in straight-line distance). But the story of the Thessalonian conversion was spreading like wildfire in every place.

The story being told was of how the Apostles were received in Thessalonica, how the Thessalonians received the gospel of Jesus Christ unto salvation, and how their conversion was so extreme that their lives changed completely; they turned away from their prior religions and idolatry to serve the true and living God.

This would have been a tremendous change for the Thessalonians, Greek pagans who worshipped at the pantheon of gods and goddesses from their childhood.

To be sure, some of the Jews in Thessalonica believed the gospel as well (Acts 17:4). But for those uninitiated Greeks to leave behind their entire worldview and understanding of creation was nothing short of a miracle caused by the power of the Holy Spirit.

In Christ, they found true life, true hope, even in the midst of “severe suffering.”<sup>14</sup>

Not only did the Thessalonians turn to a sincere belief in the living

---

14. “The severe suffering they endured is not a reference to their emotional state or anguish of heart, but rather speaks of the opposition they faced from their contemporaries in the city (2:14; 3:3, 7; 2 Thess. 1:4, 6; cf. Rom. 8:35). The intensity of the persecution is underlined (*severe*). The miracle of the Thessalonians’ conversion is that they received the gospel message (2:13; cf. Acts 8:14; 11:1; 17:11; Luke 8:13; and 2 Thess. 2:10) in the midst of the persecutions described in Acts 17:5–9.” Green, *Thessalonians*, 98. See also Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 81.

God, but they turned to serve him.<sup>15</sup> This speaks of action – more than mere words – and reminds us of our opening verse: the gospel is more than words. And where the gospel is, there the power of God is active among His people.

But let us ask, What was their saving faith anchored in? What was it that prompted such a severe break from their past worldview to a renewed spirit and assurance of salvation? What was it that caused these saints to persevere in the face of violence, upheaval, and scorn by their own community? What was it that enabled them to have an enduring patience as they waited for the return of Christ?

We need to know this, too!

Paul provides the answer – the resurrected Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

There is a coming wrath, as Paul writes to the Ephesians:

*For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them (Eph 5:5-7 NKJV).*

But just as there is a righteous wrath coming upon the sons and daughters of disobedience, there is also a resurrection, an eternal living hope, that we hold in our hearts.

The patience of the saints is born out in expectantly waiting for the return of Christ and faithfully conducting His business in the meantime, sounding forth the gospel of Jesus Christ just like the Thessalonians.

My message to you is: Take heart, loved ones. You are chosen. Stand firm. Sound forth the gospel. Allow the Spirit to work through you. Endure to the end.

---

15. John Calvin and John Pringle, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 245.

## 1 THESS 2 PT. 1 VV. 1–7

AS WE CONTINUE IN I THESSALONIANS, WE SEE THAT PAUL DOESN'T have a problem wearing his affection on his sleeve. This is remarkable given the suffering Paul had endured.

The typical response by people who have gone through much suffering and hardship in their lives is usually to button up, close off, and put up their defenses in an attempt to keep from getting further harmed. This is quite natural. Nobody would blame Paul for being guarded, but that's not the sense we get from his writing to the Thessalonians.

Paul's letter to them here is very personal in nature and recounts their shared experience. It calls to mind the unique set of circumstances that they had shared. They had shared a new life in the midst of much turmoil, and that builds strong relationships. There is an important reminder here for the church of our age.

We are often prone to turn away from hardship with others. We put our own self-interests above the interests of others, even other Christians within Christ's body whom we profess to love dearly.

In a church context, people are quite willing to abandon ship altogether when the waves get big and the storm is wailing on! It's in those moments that some believers take on an "every man for himself" attitude.

**But** the church was never meant to be a group of casual acquaintances simply drinking coffee together. The church was meant to be a special sanctified priesthood of believers living, serving, and battling together

come hell or high water (Matt 16:18; 1 Peter 2:5, 9).

We get a little bit of that sense here as Paul writes to the Thessalonians.

The previous verses dealt primarily with how the Thessalonians responded to the gospel, how they received the words of the Apostles in much affliction, and how the word of the Lord rang out from them.

The following portion of Scripture that we are examining deals primarily with how the Apostle Paul and his fellow laborers behaved among the Thessalonians.

---

***V. 1 For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain.***

\*Grammatical note: the term “brothers” (ἀδελφοί) is the nominative, plural, masculine form of the noun ἀδελφός. When declined in the nominative, plural, masculine, it can also mean “brothers and sisters.” Greek is a gendered language and adopts the masculine gender for mixed-gender groups, similar to other gendered languages, such as Spanish.

Some people get bent out of shape, claiming that some very good Bible translations are attempting to overthrow western culture by changing words like ἀδελφοί to represent both genders. That demonstrates a lack of understanding of the original language.

Ultimately we must let context be our guide. Certainly, the Thessalonian church was composed of men and women, so it makes good sense to presume that Paul was addressing the church as a whole.

Paul counts his time among the Thessalonians as fruitful. Even though his time with them was brief (Acts 17:2), it wasn’t a wasted trip. God had worked mightily in them. The soil at Thessalonica wasn’t too hard to bear fruit unto the Lord Jesus.

Many people get discouraged in ministry today, especially in the early stages, because they wonder if maybe the ground is too hard, maybe the calling that they were once so certain of was just their own pride or



hubris, maybe there are already enough churches and Christians, maybe they just aren't good at it.

And many give up after only a short time behind the plow, counting their work as vain.

Kent Hughes opens his book *Liberating Ministry from the Success Syndrome* with a sad but common story:

*Some onlookers thought it was unusual, but few noticed when the pastor wheeled into the church parking lot in a borrowed pickup truck. But everyone's eyes were upon him when he backed the truck across the lawn to this study door. Refusing comment or assistance, he began to empty his office onto the truck bed. He was impassive and systematic: first the desk drawers, then the files, and last his library of books, which he tossed carelessly into a heap, many of them flipping askew like slain birds. His task done, the pastor left the church and, as was later learned, drove some miles to the city dump where he committed everything to the waiting garbage. It was his way of putting behind him the overwhelming sense of failure and loss that he had experienced in the ministry. The young, gifted pastor was determined never to return to the ministry. Indeed, he never did.<sup>16</sup>*

Sources differ in their exact estimates of how long an average pastor stays at one church. The usual figure is that pastors stay an average of four years at any given congregation.<sup>17</sup>

Pastors leave for diverse reasons, and not all are bad. But we can only surmise that many of those pastors considered their ministry to have been in vain, fraught with discord, a temperamental congregation, and hard ground.

Not so with the Thessalonians. They were not a perfect church, but they were fertile, ready to receive the gospel and bear fruit. After all, God

---

16. Kent and Barbara Hughes, *Liberating Ministry from the Success Syndrome* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1987), 9.

17. <https://churchanswers.com/blog/dangerous-third-year-pastoral-tenure/> and <https://gbjournal.org/8-82/>.

had proved by His Spirit that they were elect (1 Thess 1:4-5)!

---

***V. 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.***

Paul wasn't afraid of hardship or suffering. Encountering harassment and even violence didn't move him from his core purpose – to win others to Christ's kingdom.

Later in Paul's ministry, while meeting with a group of elders from the Ephesian churches, Paul said to them:

*And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God (Act 20:22-24).*

It's high time for Christians to adopt Paul's outlook and attitude when it comes to ministry. So often, we are convinced that even the smallest amount of resistance is a "closed door." Have we not considered that perhaps resistance and upheaval are natural parts of advancing the kingdom in a world that is resistant to it?

Paul, having been stripped publicly, beaten with rods, and imprisoned in Philippi for ministering there, didn't give up. He didn't quit. He labored on and saw God work mightily in that city, too (Acts 16:22-40).

So, experiencing rejection and harassment at Thessalonica was no big deal; those things were normal in Paul's ministry, but they did not dissuade him because he knew the truth. He had seen a dead man, Jesus

Christ, raised to life. He had been filled with the Holy Spirit and had seen that same Spirit of God do miraculous things in the lives of others. He could never stop reporting on what he saw and knew to be true. The same holds for us as well.

---

***V. 3–4 For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, 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.***

As we read these verses, one glaring question stands out: Why did Paul have to write this at all?

Can't the Thessalonians presume his sincerity and goodness?

The implication is that many had sought to lead the gullible, unsuspecting, but well-meaning to destruction through deception.

This fact is attested to throughout the NT. Charlatans and posers, cloaked in deception, had begun to lead unsuspecting believers astray with clever fables of genealogies and tales that Christ's second coming had already happened, along with perverse babble meant to lead God's people into impurity, immorality, and vice (1 Tim 1:4; 2 Tim 2:16–18; 1 Pet 2:16).

In 2 Corinthians 4:2, Paul writes: "We reject all shameful deeds and underhanded methods. We don't try to trick anyone or distort the word of God. We tell the truth before God, and all who are honest know this" (NLT).

So Paul is being very upfront, acknowledging that yes-people use God's Word and twist it to their own destruction and to the destruction of the hearer for their own worldly benefit (2 Pet 3:16). But Paul is claiming, "That's not who we are, and we proved it while we were with you."

One might argue, Wouldn't a deceiver claim as much, too? Certainly. So then we come back to Jesus' teaching, "You tell a tree by the fruit that

it bears.”

*Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits (Mat 7:15–20).*

Paul cuts to the heart of his ministry and tells the Thessalonians that they are not to be concerned with pleasing people, but God. That is not to say that we are unconcerned with people. Caring for others is part and parcel of following Jesus. But being preoccupied with how people judge our ministries isn't something we should be concerned about.

That is a healthy place to conduct ministry from. It is God who calls people to labor in His kingdom (1 Cor 3:9). And when we keep that in mind, we can serve people with a good conscience and let God be responsible for how they respond.

We must also note here that Paul views his ministry as something that he has been entrusted with. It's not his. He didn't invent it. It's God's, and God has entrusted Paul and the team with the good message that God has made a way for the crooked souls of humans to be made straight and be made alive in Jesus Christ.

One thing we can be sure of – seeking to please people is a one-way trip to failure in ministry.

People are fickle, running hot and cold. Committed one minute, absent the next. Instead, in faithfulness towards God, we must fulfill the ministry that each of us has been called to. God never changes, and it is He, the unchanging one, who will test the hearts of all those who seek to serve in His kingdom.

We can try as best we can to be fruit inspectors here on earth and

discern whether or not somebody's motives are pure and error-free, but we can never know for sure – only God knows. And, terrifyingly, He is the one who will judge. That is why Paul claimed a clean conscience - he lived in the reality of who was building the church - Jesus Christ (1 Cor 3:6–15).

---

*Vv. 5–7 For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness. Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.*

Paul uses his personal conduct as his proof of authenticity.

Paul is doing more than just claiming something that can't be verified; he is asking the Thessalonians to remember how he lived among them.

The first thing he calls to mind is his speech. He didn't use language that was intended to butter them up.

Bear in mind that flattery is different from encouragement. Flattery is when we use words to hype someone up so that we might gain their favor or trust because we want to exploit them.

Encouragement is one of those biblical imperatives that we are supposed to do – building one another up in the love of the Lord Jesus without ulterior motives.

Flattery is a common device employed by false teachers, wolves in sheep's clothing, people who would seek out believers and hype them up to establish some contrived rapport or superficial relationship, all with the intent to get something from them because of greed and a desire for fame or glory!

In Romans, Paul writes: "I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine

that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naïve” (Rom 16:17–18).

We also find in v. 6 an interesting little clause regarding apostolic authority. Paul tells them that they *could have* made demands of the church. What is this about? What is going on here?

The *Message* adds some clarity to this thought: “Even though we had some standing as Christ’s apostles, we never threw our weight around or tried to come across as important, with you or anyone else.”

So, some people may have gotten a little “too big for their britches.” They get stuffy, pig-headed, and arrogant exactly because people deferred to their wisdom.

These types of people were not uncommon in the early church. Paul had to deal with them too. “And from those who seemed to be influential (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me” (Gal 2:6).

This happens today, too! There are men (and women) serving in Christ’s kingdom who think very highly of themselves. They have all the gear that says clergy, carry themselves in a bullish manner, and are too smart for their own good, lacking any of the humility that Christ displayed (Phil 2:1–18).

That is not the way of Jesus. Paradoxically, Paul acknowledges the high dignity of the apostolic office but does not embrace that dignity for himself. He actually treats his high calling the opposite of how many treat their own pastoral authority today.

He says that rather than seeking glory or making demands based on church hierarchy, “We were gentle among you like a nursing mother caring for her own children.”

That is the upside-down kingdom of Jesus Christ! It’s not about titles or honors. The apostles, great in the economy of Christ for preaching the gospel to the first churches, were the “scum of the earth” in the eyes of

the world (1 Cor 4:13).<sup>18</sup>

This didn't bother Paul. He put his apostolic authority to better use by caring for others rather than caring for himself.

Remarkably, Paul's care was gentle in nature (1 Cor 4:21), not the "pick yourself up by your bootstraps" but as a mother caring for children – which the Thessalonians certainly were, for they were brand new baby Christians at this time.

Gentleness is an attribute that is so necessary for God's people. Many of us rebel against the thought, preferring to reject the notion and claim, "that's not how God made me."

Well, consider for a moment our guy Paul, a one-time Pharisee, a persecutor of Christians who imprisoned and killed them. **But** Paul is a new creation in Christ.

There is no indication that Paul was overly soft. He did not shy away from confrontation, especially when it came to protecting the church and correct doctrine.

He knew how to be gentle, a skill likely learned from the Holy Spirit upon his rebirth.

The idea that God only makes us one time at our birth and never touches us again is quite a sad thought!

If all we ever had were the attributes we were born with, we would be a sad lot. **But** God does change us. He shapes us, molds us, reforms us, and brings newness out of our misshapen forms. He smooths us out over time as we walk with Him. Part of that is the blessed attribute of gentleness.

Famously, David writes a Psalm with a notable twist that at times deals with strength and war but ends on a note of gentleness:

*For who is God, but the LORD? And who is a rock, except our God?— the*

---

18. "περὶ κάθαρμα, ατος, τό ... **that which is removed as a result of a thorough cleansing, dirt, refuse, off-scouring**, also as a designation of the 'off-scouring' of humanity." Arndt, Greek-English Lexicon, 801.

*God who equipped me with strength and made my way blameless. He made my feet like the feet of a deer and set me secure on the heights. He trains my hands for war, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze. You have given me the shield of your salvation, and your right hand supported me, **and your gentleness made me great** (Psa 18:31–35, emphasis mine).*

Paul describes his conduct, along with that of his companions (therefore a common attribute of faithful servants), as gentle to the point of maternal, an interesting way to describe a bunch of men!

This was a characteristic of Jesus too! Matthew 23:37 (NKJV) says, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under [her] wings, but you were not willing!”

Paul’s maternal gentleness is a beautiful picture of successful ministry. This is the type of ministry that we would all like to be a part of – one that is warm, sincere, close-knit, gentle, loving, and nurturing.

If Paul had to hold the bottle and change diapers for these Thessalonians, young in the faith as they were, he was happy to do that rather than lording over them with a big head demanding that everybody defer to his authority.

May we all bear this in mind as we seek to serve others; gentleness is so needed. People get scuffed up enough in the world without being bossed around when we come together.

Now, certainly, there is a time for correction; that’s part of parenting, too! But, as the old saying goes, people don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.

By serving gently, faithfully unto the Lord irrespective of human recognition, we hope to demonstrate that enduring care towards God’s people – because that’s His heart towards us.



## 1 THESSALONIANS 2 PT. 2 VV. 8–12

REMEMBER THAT IN THE PREVIOUS VERSES, PAUL BEGAN TO RECALL his interaction with the Thessalonians.

He reminded them of the sincerity of their faith, the obvious work of God that had occurred at Thessalonica (their ministry was not in vain!), how they had been shamefully treated at Philippi, and how even in Thessalonica their ministry was beset by conflict.

Paul reminded them of his purity and heart to please God, not people, as he preached the gospel. **And** he briefly outlined the concept of Apostolic authority, in the best sense, as something that benefited the church and not something wielded to make the Apostles rich or famous.

Perhaps most notably, Paul describes the maternal care that he and the men he ministered with extended to the Thessalonians; they were gentle, like a nursing mother. With good reason, the Thessalonians were new believers in the truest sense! They had only been Jesus-followers for perhaps a few weeks or months at the date of authorship.

Paul continues in the following verses to describe his time among the Thessalonians, doubling down on his parental language and pointedly referring to the Thessalonians as believers – a key mark of the Christian faith and belief.

---

*V. 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.*

One of the grand results of our faith in Christ, our being changed by the gospel, our membership within the body of Christ (the church) is that it sparks to life more than incidental, superficial relationships.

Unfortunately, that isn't the case for every believer. Many Christians are content to accept the gospel, form a few tenuous "faith-based" friendships or acquaintances, and call it good.

**But** that is not the picture that the NT presents to us at all.

Being a Christian in the first century held a fair amount of risk. It still does today in many parts of the world. That's why the act of baptism, the sign of one's entrance into the community of Christ, was so important to the first Christians. It took guts! They had to be convinced down to their bones that what they heard was true! In response to the gospel, they publicly renounced the pagan (or Jewish) world around them and embraced a new life likely marked out for genuine suffering and conflict (ref. 1 Thess 2:2).

Remarkably, very few things bond people together in affection and love like shared suffering and hardship.

To be a part of the first-century church meant to belong to a spiritual family that shared in more than just head knowledge, more than just a sequence of historical facts, more than just a creed and a meeting space. It meant sharing lives, a scary prospect for many modern Christians because we fear for others to see our mess.

The term that the ESV translates as "selves" has a broad range of meaning and can also mean "life" or "soul."

Think about what Paul is saying. He didn't stop with speaking the gospel. Yes, he did that in great conflict. Yes, they received it faithfully. But along with the sharing of the gospel and the reception of the gospel came life-sharing, soul-sharing.

A very real intimacy comes along with the gospel because as we are drawn into Christ's kingdom, we are knit together in one body (1 Cor 10:17; Col 2:2; Eph 4:16).

As Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

*For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit (1Co 12:12–13).*

All of this grand doctrine of connectedness and unity as a single body is born out of love.

Paul viewed the churches as His beloved. But have you ever taken a moment to ask, “How could one man have a heart for all of those people!?” That is a great mystery! It is only by the power of the Holy Spirit and Paul's conformity to Christ that it is possible.

There is encouragement here, a scary one. But one this is not altogether unfamiliar to us: “love one another” (John 13:34).

Most people get worn out during those times when we do life-sharing as a church. It's uncomfortable sometimes. People will open up to us with things that perhaps we feel entirely unprepared to speak about or handle. In those moments, we have a choice. We can be “affectionately desirous of one another” and share our lives. Or, as some people prefer, sadly, we can elect to skip that biblical portion of church life altogether.

One thing is clear, there is a way modeled for us throughout the Scriptures that involves sharing our lives with other believers.

Is it risky? You bet! Is it always clean? No. But the lessons we learn in those difficult, uncomfortable moments are lessons about grace, compassion, mercy, care, endurance, faithfulness, and love (to name just a few). All these things are inextricably bound up in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

---

***V. 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.***

Here Paul presents balance to his ministry. He was about more than the touchy-feely emotional side of the gospel. He understood better than anybody that the gospel takes work, not in a works-based salvation sense but in what the gospel propels us to do as we are changed by it. Then we grasp its value and just how necessary it is to be faithfully proclaimed.

In this sense, Paul gave everything he had, working doubly hard, to proclaim the gospel.

Paul had two jobs. He worked a trade (Acts 18:3) and did full-time ministry. He received support and wages from both of these efforts.

Incidentally, there is no “part-time” ministry for those called to pastoral work.

In Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, his admonition to them comes very close to shaming them because of their hardness of heart when it came to supporting those in ministry:

*Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached God’s gospel to you free of charge? I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you. And when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need. So I refrained and will refrain from burdening you in any way (2 Cor 11:7–9).*

But to the Philippians who lovingly supported him financially while he had to deal with those obstinate Corinthians (incidentally, Paul describes the Macedonians [Philippians] as an impoverished church – 2 Cor 8:1–3), Paul wrote a very kind thank you note:

*Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no*

*church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God (Phil 4:14–18).*

So, Paul was supported by the churches, and he worked a job. As he worked his trade in Thessalonica, he also received support from the Philippians. **And** what we must understand is that he labored twice as hard as most people without getting rich from either!

It was shameful for churches (like the one in Corinth) to refuse to support their minister. Paul told them he would rather die than take one red cent from those tight-fisted, stingy believers:

*Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk? Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the Law say the same? For it is written in the Law of Moses, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.” Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does he not certainly speak for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop.... But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing these things to secure any such provision. For I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground for boasting (1 Cor 9:6–10, 15).*

But, as we saw with the Philippians, Paul was quite happy to receive their assistance, and he was blessed by it, not only because it helped him out but also because of what it said about their spiritual maturity as a church.

Paul, having experienced both sides of this in his ministry – working a trade and pulling double duty to preach and teach and plant churches – is very explicit in his instructions to Timothy, whom he sent to Ephesus to appoint pastors over the churches there:

*Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer deserves his wages” (1 Tim 5:17–18).*

We agree with Proverbs 30:

*Two things I ask of you; deny them not to me before I die: Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, “Who is the LORD?” or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God (Pro 30:7–9).*

---

***V. 10 You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers.***

Along with laboring night and day, providing for his own needs and pouring himself into the saints (certainly part of laboring night and day was discipleship and teaching), Paul notes that the Thessalonians themselves had witnessed and could attest to their faithfulness. They knew Paul’s heart.

They knew because they had shared life together. They knew that Paul worked two jobs and, on top of all of that, maintained his own spiritual devotion.

He wasn’t two different people, one making tents and the other preaching the Scriptures. He was Jesus’ ambassador, marked by devotion,

righteousness, and innocence. The way he ministered proved to be unaccusable; that was part of the reason Paul could talk about financial support and working a job so freely because he lived his life transparently and honestly. Nobody could accuse Paul of trying to get rich off the church! But Paul and the gang did not rest on their own righteousness. Rather, these attributes were born from following Jesus and serving others.

Paul was an open book to them. He didn't deal in underhanded methods, emotional manipulation, trickery, or any such thing.

He followed Jesus, taught the gospel, worked a job, and gave everything he had, even his own life to these people.

---

*Vv. 11–12 For you know how, like a father with his children, 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.*

Notably, Paul repeatedly uses language in these verses to provoke the Thessalonians to think back on their time with the Apostle and his company.

In v. 9 he writes, “You remember....”

In v. 10 he writes, “You are witnesses....”

Here in v. 11 he writes, “You know....”

Paul's experience with them was real and observable, even though his time with them was so short. This is going to be very important as we proceed through Thessalonians because Paul is going to exhort them to live life a certain way.

**But** how seriously can you take somebody's instruction if you've only known them for a month?

Well, that's why Paul tells them to remember what they actually saw, what they actually experienced, to take a look at the fruit in Paul's own life, and to know that his heart is for them. Paul isn't just some traveling

salesman, trying to make a dollar, but he cares for them deeply and desires strongly that their faithfulness would stand the test of time.

Paul is declaring in these verses, You know me, you've experienced God's power through His Holy Spirit (1 Thess 1:5), and you saw just how hard we labored for your sake, not taking of your goods but giving **to** you something more valuable than any amount of money – the Word of God.

Paul now encourages them to think back on how he behaved toward them, doubling down on his parental care that he has already referred to.

In 1 Thess 2:7 Paul tells them: “But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.”

Here he reminds them of his fatherly care!

This is a key theme in Paul's writings.

Paul had some difficult things to say to that raggedy band of Christians at Corinth. Much correction was required, so Paul wrote to them: “For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet [you do] not [have] many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel” (1 Cor 4:15 NKJV).

Paul also refers to Timothy and Titus as his true sons in the faith (1 Tim 1:2; Tit 1:4).

Again, these relationships we are building are supposed to be more than incidental. Now, Jesus taught: “And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven” (Mat 23:9).

That was in direct response to over formalizing religious offices and stroking the ego of religious leaders who loved to be honored in public and recognized and celebrated. In reality, they were taking God's glory for themselves and abusing it for their own designs.

What Paul talks about concerning parental care is altogether different. He never demanded to be called Father, or Rabbi, or Teacher. He never demanded public recognition. He didn't even demand to get paid for his work!

He loved them like a Dad and labored for them just as hard!



Paul's teaching is equally applicable today. You might have ten thousand "teachers" who love to be called teacher, or pastor, or whatever! But how many people in your life love you like a Dad and point you toward the kingdom?

How many people do you love like a Dad?

Paul describes what this looks like, and I love the parallel. He encouraged and exhorted them to walk!

Part of a dad's job (and the mother's, of course) is to raise his children, to teach them how to do things. Why does Paul use both exhort and encourage?

Exhort holds within its meaning the idea of coming alongside somebody to assist or aid as we strongly urge them on. To encourage means calling out to keep going! You can do it!

A natural part of raising kids is teaching them to walk. One parent sits on one side of the room while another sits on the other side, and we encourage them to go for it, to take a step.

Or, to draw the illustration out: perhaps you remember learning how to ride a bike.

Part of a dad's job in teaching a child how to ride a bike without training wheels for the first time is to hold the seat and handlebars steady as that beloved child, who's not ready for a crash, can get some momentum.

That kid doesn't quite know how to do it or what will happen if you snatch a handlebar one way or the other (you're going down!) They don't know to keep their eyes up and look out in front. They don't even know to use the brakes if things get out of control!

That's what Dad is for! To be there to hold the seat as they get going, to remind them about the brakes and the handlebars, and where they're looking.

**And** when they crash, to call out to them, Get up, you're okay, you can do it, I'm right beside you.

That's Paul's heart for the Thessalonians! And wherever we can find this in our own lives, we will certainly be blessed!

Now, what is Paul encouraging them to do?

It turns out, in a sweet bit of parallelism, that Paul is encouraging the Thessalonians onward, and their heavenly Father, the living God, is calling them into his kingdom and glory! He's on the other side of the room, calling out to his kids, Come on, take a step.

Listen for the voices, loved ones!

God is calling out to you. Follow the sound of His voice, by His Word. And I will be calling out beside you and behind you, Keep going! Press on! Keep your eyes up! Amen.

## 1 THESS 2 PT. 3 VV. 13–19

MOVING ON FROM PAUL’S PATERNAL CARE, WHICH IS PRESENTED IN the previous verses, we continue to see the affection and joy that Paul has for the Thessalonians.

Chapter 2 concludes with Paul addressing three major areas – how the Thessalonians received and understood the “word of God” (v. 13), their suffering similar to the churches in Judea (with Paul’s aside regarding Jews who opposed preaching the gospel to Gentiles) (vv. 14–16), and the bonds of affection that Paul had for this church, referring to them as his “glory and joy” (vv. 17–19).

---

*V. 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.*

This is an interesting assessment of the believers at Thessalonica. Here’s why; the ministry at Thessalonica was surrounded by turmoil. Acts 17:1–11 gives us the sense:

*Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul went*

*in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days **he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead**, and saying, "This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ." And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd. And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus." And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things. And when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go. The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.*

So, Paul's very brief ministry in Thessalonica had mixed results. It appears that a small group of believers accepted Paul's teaching from the Scriptures as authoritative, but a number of the Jews in Thessalonica were unconvinced and combative.

The same things happen today, but in this instance, that group of people who understood the Scriptures for what they really were, God's Word, became the church in Thessalonica.

What did they realize about the Scriptures that Paul taught from? That they were special. Unique. Divine. Real.

The veracity of the Scriptures has been assaulted over and over again from time immemorial, and still, the Scriptures stand the test of time and every measure of attack.

Yes, the Scriptures were written by people, but those people were uniquely inspired by God. As Paul writes in 2 Tim 3:16, the Scriptures, though written by men, are “God-breathed.” So yes, the Bible is a human book, but it is also a supernatural book.

There are many resources to examine the evidence for and against the Bible, and that is certainly a fruitful study. But suffice it to say that the Thessalonians grasped the gravity of this holy Book! And they allowed themselves to be grasped by it.

This is so necessary for us. If we view this book as simply man’s wisdom or a collection of polluted fairy tales, then we are lost.

If we make ourselves the arbiters of what is inspired and what is not inspired or what is binding upon us and what is not, then we might as well toss the whole thing out.

And since what’s good for the goose is good for the gander, then we ought to be prepared to apply the same measure of skepticism to everything else in our lives. We need to be prepared for the world to apply the same measure of skepticism to us.

In that world, there is no right or wrong. There is no salvation. There is no God. There is only the pursuit of individual gratification based on one person’s tastes and preferences over and above everybody else’s. The God of that world is the individual, and those who live in that world spend their lives building shrines of consumerism and perversity unto themselves. May God help us!

Now, some have indeed adopted that worldview that we call postmodernism, which includes the poisons of moral relativism, utilitarianism, and nihilism.

But if we recognize it for what it truly is, the Word of God passed down to us through the generations through much blood, sweat, and tears and guarded for us by the author of all creation, then we can begin to understand the mysteries that He has bound up for us in these pages.

In this view, we die to our own arrogance and self-assuredness and humbly place ourselves under God’s Word, rather than over it. We

endeavor to allow ourselves to be moved by it and learn the grand truths about humanity, our creator, love, redemption, sin, heaven, hell, and eternity (to name a few).

We also see here in verse 13 that as the Thessalonians came to realize the power of God's Word, it began to work in them.

Do you desire faith, loved one? Press into the Word of God (Rom 10:17). Do you desire sanctification and holiness? Press into the Word of God. Do you desire peace? Press into the Word of God and find God's truth that has the power to bring all of these things to be.

*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work (2 Tim 3:16–17).*

The surface-level meaning of the “Word of God” is simple enough – the Scriptures. **But** at this time, that would have consisted of the Old Testament Scriptures either in Hebrew or Greek (the Septuagint).

**But** may I propose a layered meaning relative to Paul's ministry? Aside from the surface-level reading of the text, we know that Paul's teaching was regarded as authoritative and on the same level as OT Scripture.

*And consider [that] the longsuffering of our Lord [is] salvation--as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, 16 as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable [people] twist to their own destruction, as [they do] also the rest of the Scriptures (2 Pet 3:15–16 NKJV).*

Paul's letters began to circulate very early on (some believe his writings to be some of the earliest in the NT<sup>19</sup>), encapsulating his teaching about the risen Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah of the OT, and God's reconcilia-

---

19. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*, 571.

tion of mankind to Himself through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Now, Paul's letters account for 13 out of 27 books in the NT. They are regarded as God's Word, equally inspired by God, and kept both naturally and supernaturally through time for the edification of the saints.

Finally, and most importantly, the Apostles of the first century received God's incarnate Word in the person of Jesus Christ: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14 NKJV).

Christians today are asked to embrace the Word of God in fullness, just like our ancient forebears, in all of its richly layered beauty and not just the Book, but the person as well.

---

*Vv. 14–16 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, 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, 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.*

In verses 14–16, we see the result of receiving the Word of God. As it worked in them, it caused change.

No longer were they more similar to the pagan society of Thessalonica, but they looked like something else – they resembled the church, Christ's bride. And when they began to change, they began to experience blow-back from their own society, something Paul characterizes as normal, referencing the experience of the Judean churches.

The churches in Judea would have been in the area where Jesus person-

ally ministered. Judea is the region that encompasses Jerusalem and the surrounding cities. This was home to the first churches.

So, it is interesting that Paul sees in this Thessalonian church the same marks of the first churches. But this shouldn't be surprising; they received the same Word of God, and God worked in them to make them part of the Body and Bride of Christ.

The application for our day is that the churches of Christ do share a heritage, a family tree, and we also share (to some degree) some of the same experiences that the Body of Christ has experienced from the very beginning.

When there is no similarity between the first church and us, then that should be cause for concern. How could a church be part of this eternal family and have none of the marks that distinguish Christ's bride?

There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (Eph 4:4–6).

A couple of those common marks of the faithful church that Paul mentions are suffering and persecution at the hands of the community at large.

Remember that in Acts 17, the whole city was thrown into chaos because an unbelieving group of Jews provoked a rabble.

The same things happened in Jerusalem to the first church. Their leaders, Peter and John, were arrested, made to stand before the Jewish courts, and threatened for proclaiming the gospel; yet the church persevered and grew (Acts 4:1–31), reveling in their persecution!

Paul spends some time offering commentary on this continued persecution by the Jews, noting that because of the violence done by their hands and their opposition to the gospel, they are bringing God's wrath upon their own heads – to the uttermost!

This is certainly upsetting for Paul. He is himself Jewish, but what he sees among his countrymen is heartbreaking.



They were God's chosen people! They were the people to whom God revealed Himself through His word and His covenants! They were the people who were promised **the** messiah. But, for all that, their hearts were hard. They opposed Jesus, having Him killed; they killed the prophets; they drove out those who believed in Jesus; they displeased God; and they opposed all mankind by interfering with Paul's declaration of the gospel.

Paul was attempting to get the good news of redemption and salvation broadcast out **to** all mankind so that they might be saved. But Paul's own countrymen actively interfered to stop that from happening.

This hurt Paul deeply.

*I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom [pertain] the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service [of God], and the promises; of whom [are] the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ [came], who is over all, [the] eternally blessed God. Amen (Rom 9:1-5 NKJV).*

Because of this same behavior at Thessalonica – a resistance to the gospel and violence toward those whom God was grafting into His kingdom – Paul and his companions were forced to flee to Berea, and that also broke their hearts!

Consider for a moment the paradox of heartbreak and joy that accompanied Paul's ministry. He loved the Lord Jesus and saw amazing things – people changed, lives saved, holiness invading the world of men. But he still experienced deep heartache.

---

*Vv. 17–18 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, because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us.*

Even though they hadn't known the saints in Thessalonica very long, they knew them deeply because of their shared faith in Jesus.

Our shared faith has the power to grow the most meaningful relationships we will ever have. And it breaks our hearts when we have to part ways with dearly loved believers. That was Paul's experience when he was forced to flee from Thessalonica.

Now, based on what we know about Paul's ministry experience, we would say that Paul and company were successful in Thessalonica even though their time in that city was brief and chaotic.

**But** they were met with much resistance. They were opposed by Satan! That's a big assessment!

Bear in mind that many of us believe that ministry fraught with hardship is not successful; in fact, Paul's experience teaches us the opposite! Viewing Paul's experience of a ministry that is opposed and attacked, we can only come to the conclusion that opposition is normal and to be expected. The gospel of Jesus Christ is antithetical to the power structures of the world, the flesh, and the devil. We should expect it to be opposed at every turn! That is certainly born out in the corpus of NT literature.

Now, not every instance of opposition is Satanic or demonic. Some of it is good old-fashioned "getting in our own way;" some ministry and life setbacks are also the work of the Holy Spirit:

*And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them (Act 16:6–7).*

**But** as far as Paul could discern, this was different; it was Satan.

Green writes:

*So great was their effort that only Satanic opposition could explain why they did not return! Stopped [Hindered] is a term that comes from the military. In order to stop the advance of enemy armies, soldiers would tear up and destroy the road to hinder their passage. Warfare imagery is embedded in the metaphor, Satan himself being their adversary. The battle was over the souls of the Thessalonian believers whom Satan tempted to commit the sin of apostasy.... One of his tactics was to bar the way so the apostles could not return to the church.... In this spiritual warfare, Satan is hardly an omnipotent adversary. But he is a real adversary.<sup>20</sup>*

**But**, remarkably and encouragingly for us, that wasn't enough to cause the Apostles to give up! They were not in any way terrified by their adversary (Phil 1:28–30), knowing that Jesus Christ is greater than any satanic force or scheme. God will have his way!

So press on! Don't be afraid. Remember this, if ever you think that demonic powers can oppress or oppose God's saints: "You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 Jo 4:4 NKJV).

Satan's workers have no power over us! They may oppose our work and use various devices to slow us down, but they cannot conquer us because we have the Spirit of the Living God.

---

***Vv. 19–20 For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy.***

---

20. Green, *Thessalonians*, 152.

Even as Paul and the team acknowledged severe opposition, they maintained a sense of joy and affection for these believers, referring to them as their “hope, joy, crown, and glory.” This fits in beautifully with Paul’s earlier affirmation of parental love (as a mother [v. 7] and as a father [v. 11]).

The churches were a great treasure to Paul and all those who served Jesus faithfully in the first century. The churches are still that today.

There is a profound sense of awe that we are able to experience when we take a moment to consider the work that Jesus has done and is doing through His church (the people!) through love – His love for us, our love for Him, and our love for one another.

He takes a rag-tag bunch of theologically unsure people from all walks of life and washes us by His Word, polishes us like fine silver (a crown even), and treasures His church so much.

**And** so do Jesus’ servants! Paul certainly did. He is just gushing with affection!

Do we view Jesus’ church this way? Not often. We are prone to criticism and cynicism. But look at the work that Jesus has done! Sure, there are some rough spots, but those remind us of just how far we each have to go. They remind us that we are beggars for Jesus’ grace, and yet Jesus, in His faithfulness, has maintained His church throughout the ages and will keep it until He comes again.

The application here is to see others as Jesus’ treasure, **and**, perhaps more challengingly, to see ourselves as part of Jesus’ treasure, His joy, His crown, and His glory, especially since we know how messed up we are. But the invitation is ever before us to receive Christ as the Word of God and allow that Word to work in us and change us for His glory.

## 1 THESS 4 PT. 1 VV. 1–8

---

*V. 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.*

We come to a new section in Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, signaled by the word "Finally." While we might naturally take this to indicate the end of Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, we still have a full two chapters remaining.

Rather this term serves as a "rhetorical marker to transition to a new theme."<sup>21</sup> The theme that Paul is going to advance in this section is the practical nature of being in the family of God, being brothers and sisters with one another and sons and daughters of God.

Our adoption into God's family brings with it certain commitments to live a life worthy of our adoption.

This is a common theme in Paul's letters. He does not only deal with the theoretical. He deals in the transformative nature of the truth – that the gospel of Jesus Christ changes us in real, practical ways.

The gospel directs the way we live, the way we relate to one another, and the way we worship.

---

21. Green, *Thessalonians*, 182.

As we see in Paul's instruction here to the Thessalonians, they were strongly urged, encouraged, and exhorted<sup>22</sup> to grow in their faith in such a way that was demonstrable. The Thessalonians were called to grow in spiritual maturity.

Paul's language makes it clear that their growth was supposed to increase. He tells them that they should continue to live in a way that pleases God **more and more**.

How many of us need this same encouragement!?

A common feeling among Christians is a sense of stagnation. We experience periods in our lives when we feel like we have settled into some sort of spiritual rut.

We still believe, we still desire to follow Jesus, but for one reason or another, we just feel as if we are failing to progress.

Perhaps we reflect on a particularly rich season in our discipleship and wonder why we don't feel the same way. Perhaps we have fallen into the trap of believing that we have "arrived." Perhaps we are right in the middle of a particularly fruitful season of discipleship. It makes no difference.

The call is there for all of us to walk in a manner that is pleasing to God **more and more**, to continue advancing by the grace of Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

We are called to keep on going and not be satisfied with half measures and stagnation but to diligently press on as long as we have breath in our bodies.

You see, many Christians, wondering what God's purpose for them in His kingdom is, continue to stew on that question decade upon decade simply because they refuse to get out of their pew and walk!

As saints, we are not called to mature to a state of **only** regular church attendance, to be sanctified pew sitters. We are called to advance **more and more** and live lives of holiness in all arenas of our lives, with hearts undivided, because that **is pleasing to God!**

---

22. παρακαλέω Arndt, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 765.

One poem nicely illustrates the benefit of perseverance and continuing to press on:

Two frogs fell into a can of cream,  
Or so I've heard it told;  
The sides of the can were shiny and steep,  
The cream was deep and cold.

"O, what's the use?" croaked No. 1.  
'Tis fate; no help's around.  
Goodbye, my friends! Goodbye, sad world!"  
And weeping still, he drowned.

But Number 2, of sterner stuff,  
Dog-paddled in surprise,  
The while he wiped his creamy face  
And dried his creamy eyes.

"I'll swim awhile, at least," he said—  
Or so I've heard he said;  
"It really wouldn't help the world  
If one more frog were dead."

An hour or two he kicked and swam,  
Not once he stopped to mutter,  
But kicked and kicked and swam and kicked,  
Then hopped out, via butter!<sup>23</sup>

Paul wrote to the Philippians:

---

23. Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc., 1996), 996.

*Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you (Phil 3:12–15).*

Loved one, take time regularly for self-reflection. Ask yourself, “What are those things in my life that are not pleasing to God?” Shed those things and walk in faithfulness. Follow the Lord as far as He will lead, and you will find purpose. What’s more, you will find holiness.

---

***4:2–7 For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; 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. For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.***

Paul refers back to earlier instructions that he had probably delivered to the church while he was with them on how they ought to live, and then he reminds them of what God’s will is for them.

Many Christians toil over the question, “What is God’s will for my life?” Believing it to be some esoteric, mystical, earth-shattering thing that is completely individualized for each person.

God does use His people in different ways. As He builds His church, He places each member within it as He pleases for the benefit of all (1



Cor 12). God calls some to be missionaries, some pastors, some teachers, some evangelists, etc.

**But** there are common Christian experiences that apply to all of us who are anchored in God's will for His New Covenant people.

Paul delivers some instruction on the question of God's will that is equally applicable for all Christians. The will of God is your sanctification. That means being made more and more holy, being transformed (conformed) into the image of Christ, who is perfectly holy (Rom 8:29, 12:12).

Or, as Peter writes: "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy'" (1 Pet 1:14–16).

If we ever aspire to do weighty kingdom work such as missions, outreach, evangelism, service, teaching, preaching, etc., we must first submit ourselves to the common, or universal, will of God, which is our sanctification.

Consider how many seemingly devoted believers with huge ministries, people whom we consider to be in the midst of fulfilling great work for the kingdom, have been shaken or pruned by failing to walk in holiness.

Paul adds more detail to this call and its meaning, specifically addressing the sin of sexual immorality. And as we consider the pile of "fallen" Christian leaders and workers, we can be sure that this is a very real, dangerous trap for all of us.

Sexual sin is so difficult to resist that Paul writes in the strongest terms to the Corinthian church: "***Flee from sexual immorality.*** Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (1 Cor 6:18–20, emphasis mine).

People like to use the concept of "my body is a temple" for all sorts

of out-of-context prohibitive reasons: tattoos, consumption of food or drink, smoking, etc. But, Paul's context is clear; this particular usage in 1 Corinthians is specifically about sexual sin.

When we engage in sexual sin, we do so with the Holy Spirit in the midst and so defile His temple, our own bodies. So then Paul calls for us to use our bodies in a way that gives glory to Him, specifically in the realm of sex.

It should serve as a great encouragement to us that the early church struggled with the same temptations we do.

Sometimes we convince ourselves that the world is worse off than it's ever been. In some ways, that is true. Access to pornography, exploitation of others, the use of sexual imagery to sell goods and services, and the idea that **any** sexual relationship equates to love and is a valid form of expression dominate our culture.

However, the idea that what feels right is right has been around from the beginning (Gen 3:6).

Sexual sin, in all of its lurid shades, has existed as part of our fallen creation in ages past (Gen 9:20–23) and, inasmuch as we can infer from Paul's writing to the Thessalonians, was a pressing issue in Thessalonica in the first century.

We struggle under the same sins that have haunted humanity throughout the ages, and we are still instructed to abstain from sexual sin, to **flee** from it, as we exercise our full heavenly citizenship and shun the practices common to the kingdom of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

C.H. Spurgeon illustrates the point of dabbling in sin rather than fleeing from it:

*You read, sometimes, a dreadful story of a man being entangled in machinery. Perhaps it was only one cog of a wheel that caught a corner of his coat, but it gradually drew him in between the works, and rent him limb from limb till he was utterly destroyed. If only that piece of cloth could but have given way, so that the man's life might have been spared!*

*But it did not, and though he was only held by the tiniest part of his garment, that was sufficient to drag him in where the death-dealing wheels revolved. And it is just so with sin. You cannot get in between the wheels of iniquity and say, “I shall go just so far, but no further.” No; if you once get in there, you will be ground to pieces as certainly as you are now alive! There is no way of escape but to turn yourself right away from the evil thing that God hates.<sup>24</sup>*

You see, we are called to live as citizens in Christ’s new kingdom and live by holiness, shunning the ways of the fallen creation. As loudly and seductively as they may call to us, we are to flee, to keep ourselves from it (Prov 9:13–18).

Paul called the Thessalonians to live lives different from the rest of the society and separated unto God as the Holy Spirit dwelled in them and to learn what it meant to control themselves in the arena of sex.

Ultimately, this comes down to obedience to the Scriptures that conflicts with societal norms. That obedience acknowledges the core of the issue – the wickedness of the human heart.

The most common lie used to defraud people in this matter (believers and unbelievers alike) is to follow your heart no matter where it takes us. But, we know from God’s Word, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick” (Jer 17:9). And should we give into the lie of our hearts, we are marching down a path of pain and destruction.

Proverbs teaches us this truth by way of questioning:

*Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned? Or can one walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched? So is he who goes in to his neighbor’s wife; none who touches her will go unpunished.... He who commits adultery lacks sense; he who does it destroys himself (Pro 6:27–29, 32).*

---

24. Charles Spurgeon, *300 Sermon Illustrations from Charles Spurgeon*, ed. Elliot Ritzema and Lynnea Smoyer (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017).

Paul clearly illustrates the significance of sexual sin in our text, noting that “the Lord is an avenger in all these things.”

This seems to indicate that when we participate in such behavior, we are participating in an act that not only wounds ourselves but also wounds somebody else and that God sees and will not let injustice and exploitation go unpunished.

The author of Hebrews offers this view: “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled [meaning sex\*], for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous” (Heb 13:4, \*note added for clarity).

Now, sexual failure is common. Many Christians have a past and a present fraught with sexual sin and temptation, but there is hope. We are not destined to repeat our failures in the future or acquiesce to this temptation.

As with all of our churches, the Corinthian church was composed of people with sexual baggage, hurts, and ongoing temptation, so Paul spent a great deal of time addressing this issue with them.

But one thing he wrote to them should always be on our minds when we are tempted to despair.

*Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality ... will inherit the kingdom of God.... And such were some of you. **But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God** (1 Cor 6:9–11, emphasis mine).*

There is hope! Remember, it is God’s will that we grow in holiness more and more, and the Holy Spirit that dwells within us will give us the strength we need to flee sexual sin and endure as we embrace our sanctification. God has not called us to impurity, but to holiness, just as He is holy.

---

*V. 8 Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.*

Paul gives a warning to the person in the congregation who may hear his words and says, “Isn’t Paul’s thinking a little old-fashioned?” Or, “Well, that’s just Paul’s opinion.”

He tells them that this isn’t just some man-made rule to keep people from having fun and living life to the fullest but that these are instructions from God Himself, who gives us His Holy Spirit.

We shouldn’t expect the fallen world to embrace these instructions. The world we live in is full of darkness. Why would we ever expect unbelievers to live like believers? That doesn’t make any sense at all.

But, that’s precisely how some Christians approach the issue. They believe that if they can change the unbelieving world’s behavior by legislation, shame, or force, then they will cure their own temptation.

They believe that if they can remove sexual imagery and language from the media, prohibit same-sex relationships, and force people to bend to the Scripture, that will make everything wholesome and good and eliminate all temptation.

That’s not how it works.

Ultimately, the problem of sexual sin is a heart problem found even among believers (even among some heroes of the faith, like Rahab, or David, or Solomon), and we are all guilty.

Jesus taught, “You have heard the commandment that says, ‘You must not commit adultery.’ But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Mat 5:27–28 NLT).

Who then is guiltless? Who then has followed through on Job’s vow: “I made a covenant with my eyes not to look with lust at a young woman” (Job 31:1 NLT).

Nobody! We are all wretched sinners in need of grace, and grace is what we receive.

The gospel of John captures a poignant moment of Jesus' reaction to adultery:

*As he was speaking, the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They put her in front of the crowd. "Teacher," they said to Jesus, "this woman was caught in the act of adultery. The law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?" They were trying to trap him into saying something they could use against him, but Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust with his finger. They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and said, "All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!" Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust. When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman. Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, "Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?" "No, Lord," she said. And Jesus said, "Neither do I. **Go and sin no more.**" (John 8:3–11 NLT, emphasis mine)*

Hear these last words: **Go and sin no more.**

This is the will of God for the woman caught in adultery, her sanctification, that she would be made more and more holy.

This is the Word of the Lord which we dare not ignore. And as we keep it, we too find grace, not only for others but for ourselves as well, and we are made into new creations who desire holiness. Amen.

## 1 THESS 4 PT. 2 VV. 9–12

---

*Vv. 9–10 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, 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,*

Clearly, the Thessalonians had earned a reputation for loving others.

While many churches chase after many different goals and wish to be known for many different things (both admirable and not so admirable), this should be foremost among them – loving one another.

This is the heartbeat of a life of following Jesus – to love God and love others.

*Jesus replied, “You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments (Mat 22:37–40 NLT).*

This message, to love one another, and that we are, in fact, discerned as Jesus followers by our exceptional love for one another anchors us to our Lord.

*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another (John 13:34).*

So then, as an exercise in how much we truly focus on this, consider for a moment all of the other noise surrounding the evangelical-industrial complex that competes for center stage.

Political ideology and alignment, world power and influence, legislated morality, varying diets and fads, devotionals, types and forms of worship that go in and out of style generation after generation, varying theological frameworks, church size, church name, denomination, non-denomination, social justice (or opposition to social justice), and on and on and on.

**And** what's more, dearly beloved, Christian voices have become quite adept at framing whatever their pet cause is by some tenuous Biblical imperative or another.

**But** I can promise you that all of these various issues find their resolution in the person and work of Jesus Christ and His command to us to love one another.

If we ever hope to be of any value in any of these areas, we must frame our actions, our desires, our theology, our suppositions in the gospel of Jesus Christ distilled to its most potent form – love.

As the Apostle John writes:

*Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another (1John 4:7–11).*

Oh, how many of those competing interests would fall by the wayside if we took a minute to consider whether or not they are rooted in love



or hate and a desire to conquer other humans who are made in God's image?

May the Lord grant us wisdom and the eyes to see and carefully examine those things that compete for our hearts and our affections. One thing is sure, we are commanded by Jesus Christ Himself to love one another and to love our neighbors deeply.

As we consider the ugliness that has certainly manifested itself (all in the name of Jesus) over the past few years, Paul tells us what brotherly love in a society looks like practically as we go through our text.

As it turns out, there are some very real practical things that Christians **should** do that may be surprising when we consider what Christians **have done** recently.

Love is practical, observable, not just theoretical and invisible.

In the case of the Thessalonians, they were committed to loving one another. The evidence that God had been their teacher in their love was clearly evident in their lives.

It is so important for us to grasp hold of the truth that God is our teacher.

Yes, God has gifted his church with teachers (Eph 4:11–12), but He is ultimately responsible for teaching us how to love.

That is why we often pray that God would be our teacher every time we approach the Scriptures, because unless He leads us, we are lost! But, we take confidence in the fact that He **is** our teacher! He desires for us to know Him, to know His heart, and to have our hearts changed to resemble His own heart, a heart of vast love and affection for His creation.

That heart manifested itself to the broader region surrounding Thessalonica, and that's what the church **ought** to be known for to the glory of God!

**But** was it enough? Had they “arrived?” Had they loved enough? No.

Paul urges the saints to continue loving, to do so **more and more!** This reminds us of Paul's instructions to them in 1 Thess 4:1. So it appears that the Thessalonians were off to a good start!

Did they know everything? Certainly not. But what they did know was sufficient to cause them to love and continue to grow in their love towards others.

In the following verses, Paul continues to give them practical instructions to demonstrate their love, their faithfulness, and their care for others.

Adding to the continued exhortation to grow in their deep love for others, Paul instructs them to ...

---

### *V. 11a and to aspire to live quietly,*

The Thessalonians were encouraged to have as their ambition a quiet life. How many believers need to hear that!?

This doesn't mean we should stop being forthright about the truth of the gospel and the love of Christ. Part of loving our neighbor means sharing the gospel in truth and love.

What Paul is referring to here is "to live a quiet life or refrain from disturbing activity, [to] be peaceable [and] orderly."<sup>25</sup>

Christians are not to be rabble-rousers or provocateurs.

When we begin to resemble the mob that cried out to Pilate, "Crucify him," more than our Lord who, "When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly" (1 Pet 2:23), then we have lost our way.

Ellingworth and Nida comment, "It may be appropriate in some instances to translate this advice as 'don't go around all the time arguing loudly.'"<sup>26</sup>

We are to be a people of peace, as Jesus taught: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not

---

25. Arndt, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 440.

26. Ellingworth and Nida, *Thessalonians*, 89.

your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” (John 14:27).

Be at peace, loved one. Find as your heart’s desire a life of rest and peace in the Lord Jesus. While the world rages around us, remain steadfast in the peace of Christ, with hearts untroubled, and let your homes be marked by it.

This would have certainly been a needed encouragement for Christians in the first century who were competing with a majority pagan society that openly opposed and attacked Christians.

How do you live a life of peace in those circumstances? How did they live at peace without feeling the need to assert their own form of worldly power, their claim to human rights, or simply “standing up for themselves”? Only by abiding in the peace of Jesus Christ and letting it rule their hearts and their homes.

Paul gives us a little window into the life of first-century Christians: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us (Rom 8:35–37).

Are Christians ready to adopt the mindset of the early saints with hearts of peace? Are we ready to adopt as our motto, “For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered,” rather than being conquerors? This is a challenging question.

Now part of the job of the church is to equip saints for the work of ministry, and that we do while preparing Christians to endure suffering in peace, not placing our hope in world governments, power structures, or causes but only in the cause of Christ.

Again, Paul instructed the Romans: “If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all” (Rom 12:18).

**And** the author of Hebrews instructs: “Pursue peace with all [people], and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb 12:14 NKJV).

---

### *V. 11b and to mind your own affairs,*

Paul adds to the list of the requirements for growth: the Thessalonians are to mind their own business!

Again, appealing to the *UBS Handbook*: “[I]n some languages this concept may be expressed in a negative form; for example, ‘do not meddle in other people’s affairs,’ or ‘do not always tell other people how they should do things.’”<sup>27</sup>

But wait, aren’t we the most qualified to tell people how to live their lives? Aren’t we the best people to meddle in the affairs of others? Aren’t we?!?

When we adopt this mentality, we forget our own wretchedness and origin. We come off as self-righteous and arrogant.

The reality is that we are in no way qualified to talk down to the world around us. We are sinners saved by grace in need of instruction ourselves! That’s why we meet as a church! That’s why we place ourselves under God’s Word because we ourselves need constant instruction, encouragement, and urging.

Let us then view others likewise as we set about minding our own affairs.

---

### *V. 11c and to work with your hands, as we instructed you,*

The Thessalonians are here commanded to earn their own living as they continue in their faith.

“In some languages to earn your own living can be most effectively translated in a negative manner, for example, ‘don’t expect others to take care of you,’ ‘don’t make others give you food,’ or, idiomatically, ‘don’t rest on other people’s shoulders,’ or ‘don’t lie in your hammock all day.’”<sup>28</sup>

---

27. Ellingworth and Nida, *Thessalonians*, 89.

28. Ellingworth and Nida, *Thessalonians*, 89–90.

Unfortunately, as the church blossomed, there are hints in the NT that some sought to take advantage of the good nature of the church by quitting their jobs and becoming dependent on the church to feed them, even becoming burdensome to the church and its members.

That appears to have taken root in Thessalonica, and it has plagued the church throughout the ages.

More explicitly, Paul writes to them in 2 Thessalonians: “For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living” (2 Thes 3:10–12).

In 1 Timothy Paul writes: “But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Tim 5:8).

Now, Paul isn’t saying, don’t care for poor people.

We are instructed throughout Scripture to care for the poor and those who need help.

James tells us that: “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world” (Jas 1:27).

The problem that Paul identified was that within the church, there were certain able-bodied people who desired to defraud the church and other hardworking believers while sitting around all day indulging in their own laziness. That type of attitude was strictly forbidden.

Unfortunately, we learn in Proverbs that, “The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who can answer sensibly” (Pro 26:16). So it’s often difficult to reason with such people, but their path leads to destruction. “The desire of the sluggard kills him, for his hands refuse to labor” (Pro 21:25).

So, having received such practical instruction in living a godly life marked by peace and quiet, minding our own affairs, and working with

our own hands, let us ask the question, Why?

Why do these things matter? Why can't I just say, "I've got grace," and quit my job and build a commune and sit on my hands waiting for Jesus to return?

Paul gives the answer.

---

*V. 12 so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.*

Others are watching!

Do not defame the name of Jesus to satisfy the wretched desires of the flesh!

Do not give the enemies of the Lord, those outside, occasion to defame the name of Jesus!

What a shame when everything we know about love and peace and forgiveness, perseverance, endurance, suffering, truth, hope, and the rest are all dismissed because we fail to live our lives in a way that is shaped by all of those things.

When we participate in the world systems of outrage, hyperbole, shame, hate, aggression, dominance, and more, we do a great disservice to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

There is a way to walk properly before those who are unbelievers. It is the way of Jesus, marked by His peace, marked by minding our own affairs which ought to be the affairs of our Master, marked by laboring diligently in His vineyard (Matt 20:16) for His glory and the salvation of others.

Let us live that life! Let us do so in grace and peace and love and commitment.

## 1 THESS 4 PT. 3 VV. 13–18

AFTER ADDRESSING THE THESSALONIANS WITH REGARDS TO HOW they ought to conduct themselves – to aspire to live quietly, to mind their own affairs, and to work with their own hands (v. 11) – Paul turns to instruct the Thessalonians in an area that appears to have been characterized by perhaps a bit of confusion, misunderstanding, or even misinformation.

The following verses deal with the eschatological (end times) instruction that Paul gives to the Thessalonians. But we must acknowledge that these instructions are quite brief indeed.

The first thing that Paul deals with is the question: what happens when a Christian dies?

We get the sense that some form of misinformation had spread at Thessalonica that caused believers to despair at the loss of a loved one. Perhaps they believed that only those living at Christ's return would benefit from it.

Perhaps they believed that they had missed the return of Christ altogether.<sup>29</sup>

---

***V. 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.***

There was some level of ignorance among the Thessalonian Christians regarding what happens to somebody after their death, and Paul desired to correct that.

Notice that Paul's desire to correct this understanding was not born out of a desire for intellectual superiority or even necessarily doctrinal exactness, as admirable as that is.

His aim was to ensure Christians that there is hope, that we do not need to be buried in sadness when a Christian dies because we have a future, eternal hope. As a matter of fact, the term that Paul uses to describe the state of a Christian who has died is "asleep," denoting that this is not a permanent state but one that is temporary and only for a moment.

In this way, Christians can approach death with hope and joy.

There are marks of this in Paul's writings:

*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.... I am hard pressed between*

---

29. "From this clause we can see that the Thessalonians feared that their dead would lose out on the chance to be assumed to heaven at the time of the parousia. Plevnik ("Taking Up," 281) provides a highly plausible explanation of the situation. According to him, the Thessalonians were troubled about their dead because they believed that to be assumed to heaven with Christ at his parousia one had to be alive. What then of the resurrection? The apocalyptic tradition sometimes separated the resurrection of the dead from events comparable to the parousia of Christ, as 2 Esdr. 7:25–44; 2 Bar. 29–30; and Rev. 20:4–6 demonstrate. 2 Esdr. 13:24 is particularly interesting because it maintains that those who survive to the end are more blessed than those who have died. This clearly supports the possibility of the interpretation presented here." Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 172.



*the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better (Phil 1:21, 23).*

**And,**

*We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord.... Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord (2 Cor 5:6b, 8).*

So, we know then that for a Christian to leave this life, to be away from this body, means to be at home with the Lord Jesus. We can take great comfort in that. As Paul affirms:

---

***V. 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.***

Our resurrection hope is anchored in Jesus' own resurrection!

Believing unto salvation unites us in Jesus Christ's resurrection community and makes us participants in the promise passed down to us that having united with Christ in His death through faith, we shall also participate in His resurrection (Rom 6:5–8).<sup>30</sup>

The importance of the statement, "We believe that Jesus died and rose again," cannot be overstated!<sup>31</sup>

Consider Jesus' words: "For where your treasure is, there your heart

---

30. Charles Wanamaker writes that, "the words 'Jesus died and was raised' present the foundational belief distinguishing followers of Christ from the 'rest of humanity,' mentioned in the previous verse." [That is – "outsiders" from 1 Thess 4:12]. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 168.

31. Many scholars take this verse to be part of an early credal formula. Such a formula has certainly found purchase in the church throughout the ages. See Green, *Thessalonians*, 220.

will be also” (Mat 6:21). Now, we know contextually that this was used to warn against falling prey to the ills of worshipping wealth.

But let me ask you, Where is your treasure? Does Jesus fill that category entirely? If so, where is Jesus? Not in the esoteric sense, but where is the resurrected Jesus right now?

He is positioned at the right hand of the Father, preparing a place for His saints, us, who hope for and long for a resurrection who long to be where our treasure is, with the Lord Jesus Christ and the sanctified bride of Christ (Acts 2:32–36).

You see, sometimes we become fixated on building a new Eden here on planet earth, and we forget that “this world is not our home, we’re just a passin’ through!”

When we lose sight of the certainty and imminence or immediacy of Christ’s return, we begin to build up altars to hope in this life alone (putting lipstick on a pig). Some of us become functional humanists in the process, attempting to fabricate hope that is anchored in this fleeting life over and above the eternal promise.

But remember, as Paul taught the Corinthians: “[I]f our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world” (1 Cor 15:19 NLT).

Our citizenship is in heaven! Our hope is in heaven! And while we sojourn here, as ambassadors for the resurrected Jesus, our hearts long for home (Phil 3:20–21).

**Now**, it is right and good to bring the kingdom of God and the will of God to whatever ground we stand upon for however long the Lord allows us to walk this earth. That is certainly our prayer (Matt 6:10), but that does not change the fact that, in a final sense, our heavenly home calls to us. And any kingdom work we are busy with here (as we should be) testifies to the hope of Christ’s eternal kingdom.

Again, appealing to 1 Corinthians: “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Cor 15:20–22).

When we begin to consider this grand hope, a hope we cling to for our departed loved ones who loved the Lord and who we trust are upheld by His grace, we still have some questions. For instance, how does this all work out?

While the Bible tells us some of the things that will happen, we do not know all the details.

Unfortunately, many Christians have wounded one another and are divided over varying opinions of how this all works out chronologically, how exactly our lowly bodies are transformed into glorified bodies, or the disposition of the soul after an earthly death. These are things we can only speculate on.

Here’s what we can be certain of – the Lord Jesus will come again! Those who have died in Christ are His to keep and resurrect as He sees fit and as He has promised! The termination of this age will occur according to His perfect timing and perfect will in union with the Father and the Spirit. And eternity waits for all of us, believers and unbelievers alike.

Jesus taught in John 5:28–29: “an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.”

So let us now consider some of the specifics insofar as we can discern them from the text.

---

*Vv. 15–17 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. 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. 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.*

Paul establishes that these instructions are given “by a word from the Lord.” This is not opinion or conjecture or probability; this is a divine edict.<sup>32</sup>

Moving from the general resurrection of “those who are asleep,” Paul now gives some specific instruction on future happenings.<sup>33</sup>

Green writes, “His intention is not merely to reaffirm the reality of the resurrection but rather to show the relationship between this event and the destiny of Christians who are found alive at the moment of the coming of the Lord.”<sup>34</sup>

Notice that Paul compares the dispositions of the living and the dead at Christ’s coming.

Remember, the Thessalonians were laboring under the idea that those who had died would miss out on the glorious return of Jesus and only those who are alive in the moment would be able to experience that glorious moment. But we find here that is not the case.

Those who are alive will not precede those who have fallen asleep. Uniquely, Paul uses what is called an emphatic negation in the original

---

32. Whether this is through pre-existing written material, such as the gospels, as some suppose or direct revelation cannot be discerned from the text alone.

33. Bear in mind that a careful examination of the text still leaves us with many questions.

34. Green, *Thessalonians*, 221.

language (οὐ μὴ).<sup>35</sup>

This helps us understand the force of Paul's inspired declaration to mean that those who are alive at the return of Christ will never ever, or certainly not, have an advantage over those who are dead.

Our God cares for His dead. They are not lost or forsaken in His eyes or His kingdom, and those saints who have fallen asleep do not have second-class citizenship in the kingdom but are dear to Him – “Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints” (Psa 116:15).

**But** before Paul tells us how the living and dead experience the return of Christ, we find exactly what this experience will look like – or rather, **sound** like!

In v. 16, we find three distinct sounds that accompany the return of Christ, and they are amazing!

First, the Lord **himself** will descend with a cry of command.

The Greek text is written in such a way that emphasizes the personal identity of Jesus Christ<sup>36</sup> or as JFB notes: “in all the Majesty of His presence in person.”<sup>37</sup>

We can only guess what this cry of command is, but it will be glorious and binding upon all creation!<sup>38</sup> Given the context, it may very well be related to the resurrection (Rev 11:12)!

The second sound to be heard will be the voice of an archangel. Again, the contents are unknown, but the voice is mighty, the voice of a leading,

---

35. “Emphatic negation is indicated by οὐ μὴ plus the *aorist subjunctive* or, less frequently, οὐ μὴ plus the future indicative (e.g., Matt 26:35; Mark 13:31; John 4:14; 6:35). This is the strongest way to negate something in Greek.” Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 468.

36. The Greek text use of the personal pronoun αὐτὸς as an intensive predicative.

37. Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, vol. 2 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 390.

38. In one grand chiasm, God's Word is present at the beginning of all creation and will be present and authoritative at the end of this age.

heavenly messenger.

The third sound, equally significant and beautifully poetic, regarding the grand narrative of Scripture, is the sounding of the trumpet of God.<sup>39</sup>

In Exodus 19 at Mt. Sinai, God's people are called out to meet him by the blast of a trumpet and by the hand of their messiah figure, Moses: "On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain" (Exo 19:16–17).

Gerhard Freidrich writes, "As the horn sounded when God was revealed at Sinai, so it will sound at the events of the last time. The day of Yahweh will be announced by the sound of the horn.... The same signal will usher in the Last Judgment. As it announced the approach of enemies and thus caused anxiety and terror ... so God's eschatological judgment is proclaimed by it. It also proclaims the beginning of the age of salvation."<sup>40</sup>

So you see, the return of Christ will be a noisy affair! It will not be a secret, hidden, covert event but will be universal, undeniable, **loud!**

This is important for us to grasp.

The Jehovah's Witnesses deny this Biblical teaching (along with many other foundational teachings): "Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the second coming was an invisible, spiritual event that occurred in the year 1914. Biblically, however, the yet-future second coming will be physical,

---

39. Wanamaker notes that, "The 'trumpet of God' is an image occurring frequently in the OT in contexts of theophany [physical embodied appearances of God among humans] and eschatological judgment (cf. Ex. 19:16, 19; Is. 27:13; Joel 2:1; Zp. 1:14–16; Zc. 9:14) as well as in both Jewish and Christian apocalyptic traditions (cf. Pss. Sol. 11:1; 2 Esdr. 6:17–24; Apoc. Mos. 22, 37–38; Mt. 24:31; Rev. 8:2, 6, 13; 9:14). Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 173.

40. Gerhard Friedrich, "Σάλπιγξ, Σαλπίζω, Σαλπιστής," ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 80.

visible (Acts 1:9–11; cf. Titus 2:13), and will be accompanied by visible cosmic disturbances (Matt. 24:29-30). Every eye will see him (Rev. 1:7).<sup>41</sup>

Now listen, Christian. There are some believers walking around today whose eschatology more resembles Jehovah's Witness eschatology than it does Paul's or Jesus' eschatology.

There are some who have given into hopelessness in the passage of time and have given up believing in the imminent, visible return of Christ. That has led to kingdom building on earth rather than kingdom building in heaven (2 Peter 3:3–4).

The Scriptures are clear. Jesus will return visibly, audibly, physically.

We also find how the living and dead will relate to Christ's triumphal return – the dead in Christ will rise first.

In this, we are filled with questions, just like the early church! Paul goes into great detail about this in 1 Cor 15. A small excerpt serves to satisfy our curiosity, albeit only partially.

*I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. 54 When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor 15:50–54).*

**Then** those who are left will be caught up/snatched up together with Christ.

---

41. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/the-11-beliefs-you-should-know-about-jehovahs-witnesses-when-they-knock-at-the-door/>. Accessed 29 Jan 2022

There's a lot going on here.

Notice Paul's use of pronouns – “we who are alive.”

Paul firmly believed and taught the churches that they would see the return of Christ.

Now, was Paul a false prophet?

No! Paul didn't go around setting dates and telling people that Jesus was coming back at a certain time.

Paul was hopeful. And moreover, Paul was watchful, as we will see in 1 Thessalonians 5.

Paul's message, and ours, is this – the Lord Jesus Christ may return at any moment! Be ready, be watchful, keep your garments spotless, and keep oil in your lamp! Jesus is coming back soon!

All Christians ought to be marked by this hope. We don't fear Jesus' return as a wayward child who's been caught red-handed burning the house down. We rejoice at the prospect as a bride being united with her betrothed.

*Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect (Mat 24:42-44).*

Watch and pray! Be ready!

Here too, we see the foundation for what is called “the rapture.”

Some believers argue against the rapture, claiming that the word “rapture” isn't found in the Bible, so they don't accept the doctrine itself. Well, that depends on what kind of Bible you use.

The word rapture isn't found in the English or Greek text.

The Greek text employs the inflected, future, passive verb ἀρπαγισόμεθα (caught up) – “to grab or seize suddenly so as to remove



or gain control, snatch/take away.”<sup>42</sup>

The Latin Vulgate, an ancient translation of the Greek text from the 4th century, translates the Greek using an inflected form of the verb *rapio*<sup>43</sup> from which we have derived the term rapture to give a name to a concept that is clearly present in the text — that the Lord will snatch away those who are His at His coming.

Notice too where we will meet our Lord – in the clouds.

May I remind you once more of God’s people meeting Him at Sinai. Look again. “On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain” (Exo 19:16–17).

In that instance the people were terrified! They sent Moses alone because they knew if they touched that mountain, if they entered that cloud, they would surely die (Ex 19:16–25).<sup>44</sup>

But at the Lord’s coming to gather His covenant people, we will meet Him in the clouds, robed in His righteousness, changed into something glorious, completed, to be with Him forever. What a glorious hope!

Now, having addressed briefly some very big ideas, we need to close with the point of the whole thing.

---

## ***V. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.***

It has been said that the purpose of end times studies isn’t to cause us

---

42. Arndt, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 134.

43. Andrew Curtis and Isaiah Hoogendyk, *The Lexham Latin-English Interlinear Vulgate* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 1 Th 4:17.

44. “From the time of the OT the clouds of the heavens were associated with theophanies (cf. Ex. 16:10; 19:16), and in such texts as Is. 19:1 and the vision of Ezk. 1:4–28 a cloud becomes the celestial vehicle of God.” Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 175.

to build bunkers in our backyards; it's to encourage us to build bigger tables. That is certainly a lovely notion and holds some merit.

What we see here in Paul's writing is that it is to encourage one another. The teaching on the coming of Christ, the rapture, the last days, isn't so we can break out our eschatological math problems, or fan the flames of panic, or incite fear.

These words are written for our encouragement; we have a future hope. And they were written and passed down to us so that we might encourage one another.

Be encouraged, loved one; Jesus stands at the door. We are closer today than we were yesterday, and we shall soon see Him face to face. We pray, Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus (Rev 22:20).

## 1 THESS 5 PT. 1 VV. 1–11

WE ENTER INTO THE FINAL CHAPTER OF I THESSALONIANS, AND IMMEDIATELY we are able to detect that the beginning of chapter 5 is connected to the preceding material in chapter 4.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, Paul instructs the church on its Resurrection and Rapture.

We learned that those who are Christ's, whether living or dead, will share in His resurrection.<sup>45</sup> And that Jesus' second coming will be visible, physical, and loud!

Now Paul instructs the church on the timing of these events and confirms the historic, orthodox doctrinal position that the timing of the return of Christ is unknowable to us.

This is undoubtedly a challenging and frequently debated position among Christians and one that has caused deep division and hurt over the ages, but it need not be so.

There are perfectly lovely Christians who love the Lord, believe every word of the Bible, and have come to different conclusions regarding the

---

45. For more information see 1 Cor 15.

chronology of these future events. And that's okay.<sup>46</sup>

We are not saved because we hold a flawless view of end times events, rather we are promised that we who believe will participate in these end times events because we are saved by grace through Christ alone!

We should take great comfort knowing that the things we agree on as Christians are far more substantial than the things we disagree over.

Renowned theologian Wayne Grudem writes about Christians who disagree over these matters:

*No matter what their differences on the details, all Christians who take the Bible as their final authority agree that the final and ultimate result of Christ's return will be the judgment of unbelievers and the final reward of believers, and that believers will live with Christ in a new heaven and a new earth for all eternity. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit will reign and will be worshiped in a never-ending kingdom with no more sin or sorrow or suffering.*<sup>47</sup>

Let me also affirm publicly that we should never be afraid to pursue the truth.

I feel compelled to state that plainly because sometimes we feel constrained by our denominational frameworks, and we become too afraid to step out of line and read the Scriptures plainly and place ourselves

---

46. "Specifically, they differ over the nature of the millennium and the relationship of Christ's return to the millennium, the sequence of Christ's return and the great tribulation period that will come to the earth, and the question of the salvation of the Jewish people (and the relationship between Jews who are saved and the church).... Evangelicals who hold to these various positions all agree that Scripture is inerrant, and they have a commitment to believe *whatever* is taught by Scripture. Their differences concern the interpretation of various passages relating to these events, but their differences on these matters should be seen as matters of secondary importance, not as differences over primary doctrinal matters." Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 2004), 1094-1095.

47. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1094.

underneath God's transformative Word.

This has led to vast swaths of Christians who affirm doctrinal positions pushed by their denominations who don't actually believe what is taught! And then, when they are challenged on it, they will say something like, "Yeah, but it's just not that big of a deal." My response is – if it's not that big of a deal, then why include it? Is it a hill worth dying on or not?

I say all of that to say, where the Bible speaks, let us speak. Where the Bible is silent, let us be silent. Don't get sucked into clever semantic debates meant to evade the force of the text, such as, "Well, we can't know the day or hour of Christ's return, but we can know the general time."

That is an "evasion of the text" and undermines the spirit and the force of the teaching!<sup>48</sup>

Furthermore, be careful to avoid building doctrines from silence!

Submit to the sufficiency of Scripture, and you will be in pursuit of the truth!

God has given us everything we need in the Bible. It is perfectly sufficient for our sanctification without stretching it beyond what it was intended for.

It is likely that those portions of Scripture that we find ambiguous or unclear are intentionally designed that way; after all, they are inspired by the Holy Spirit.

The plain things are the main things, and the main things are the plain things.

---

48. "It is simply an evasion of the force of those passages to say that we cannot know the day or the hour, but that we can know the month or the year. The fact remains that Jesus is coming 'at an hour you do not expect' (Matt. 24:44), and 'at an unexpected hour' (Luke 12:40). (In these verses the word "hour" [ὥρα, G6052] is best understood in a more general sense, to refer to the time when something will take place, not necessarily a sixty-minute period of time.<sup>4</sup>) The point of these passages is that Jesus is telling us that we *cannot* know when he is coming back. Since he will come at an unexpected time, we should be ready at all times for him to return." Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1093–1094.

So then, let us examine these challenging Scriptures with hearts wide open.

Let us compare our own presuppositions against what God's Word states plainly.

And let us meditate upon those things that God's Word declares in a mystery, and may the Holy Spirit be our teacher.

---

***Vv. 1–2 Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.***

Again, we appeal to the thoughts of those who have wrestled with these texts before us:

*One of the significant areas of disagreement is over the question of whether Christ could return at any time. On the one hand, there are many passages encouraging us to be ready because Christ will return at an hour we do not expect. On the other hand, there are several passages that speak of certain events that will happen before Christ returns. There have been different ways of resolving the apparent tension between these two sets of passages, with some Christians concluding that Christ could still return at any time, and others concluding that he could not return for at least a generation, since it would take that long to fulfill some of the predicted events that must occur before his return.<sup>49</sup>*

This is a perfect example of a potential point of division that we discussed earlier, but it need not be.

As it applies specifically to the text at hand, it appears that Paul teaches that the imminent return of Christ will come upon the world suddenly.

---

49. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1095.

There are several other verses supporting this view that drive home how plain this message is and how pervasive it was in the first-century church.<sup>50</sup>

*But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.... Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.... Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.... the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know (Mat 24:36, 42, 44, 50).*

So then, it appears that one of the overall themes of Matthew 24 and Jesus' instruction on His return is that it will come at a time that is not expected.

Additionally,

*Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour (Mat 25:13).*

*But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come (Mark 13:32-33).*

*You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect (Luke 12:40).*

*You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand (Luke 12:40).*

*The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers (1 Pet 4:7).*

---

50. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1095. We shall approach the opposing view in 2 Thess 2.

*But the day of the Lord will come like a thief (2 Pet 3:10)*

Three times in Revelation, the Lord indicates that His return is imminent! “And behold, I am coming soon.... Behold, I am coming soon.... He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming soon’” (Rev 22:7a, 12a, 20a).

Now, we need to be aware that “a very prominent view among liberal New Testament scholars has been that Jesus mistakenly taught that he would return soon.”<sup>51</sup> But we whole-heartedly reject that view.

We believe that Jesus’ perspective of time far surpasses our understanding of time, and the time of His return is perfectly positioned within God’s heavenly prerogative.

Further, we understand that the delay of Christ’s return is a gift to the unsaved, and even as He stands at the door, it is His patience that allows still more time for people to come to know the grace and love of the Lord Jesus (2 Peter 3:3–9).

---

***V. 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.***

This is an interesting portion of Scripture when we consider how much disagreement and turmoil there is regarding the return of Christ.

People look for signs everywhere, believing everything to be a sign and even dipping into astrology, new-age beliefs, and quasi-spiritual literature to help inform their understanding of Jesus’ return.

One thing that people attempt to use as a gauge for the nearness of Christ’s return is all of the continuous strife in the world.

**But** Paul says that people will assess and declare the time immediately preceding Christ’s return as one of peace and security.

---

51. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1097.



Now, we live in a fallen creation that is marked by human sin. War, famine, inhumanity, murder, etc. have marked our world since the fall!

Humans have persisted in this wretched violent state for ages. War has dominated our own culture for the past two decades! Adversaries abound! It seems never-ending.

And yet, we persist; people live their lives. They play baseball, have cookouts, and go to work.

That is exactly the state that Paul describes here. People will be living their lives like usual, and then suddenly, the day of the Lord will be at hand!

That's why it's so important to be about our Father's business, reach out to the hurting and lost, and invite people to the Kingdom and to the King's table because there are no mulligans, no do-overs, on the Day of the Lord!

Our knowledge of eschatology, that this event will come upon the world suddenly, shouldn't cause us to cower or hide but to boldly proclaim the gospel and give people the opportunity to be saved from this wicked and perverse generation (Acts 2:40).

That is part of why the Apostles and the early church were so tenacious about preaching the gospel! They fully expected the Lord Jesus to return at any time! And the prospect of Jesus' imminent return is not our great fear; it is our great hope, the final redemption for all time!

---

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

Notice that between verses 3 and 4, Paul makes a distinction between people groups. In v. 3, “**they** will not escape.” But in v. 4, “**but you** are not in darkness.”

The force of this text isn't to explain that we can know the time of Christ's return but rather to explain that since we have been told in advance that Jesus will return at an unexpected time, we, the church, should not be shocked when it comes to pass.

When Jesus returns suddenly, visibly, physically, no Christian ought to be surprised! The message is plain, and we believe it!

Since we are familiar with the message, we shall not be surprised to see it come to pass.

This is true for all Scripture. When the events of God's Word come to pass, that is not surprising to believers. It is only surprising to unbelievers who think that the Scriptures have been corrupted or are simply a bunch of fairy tales.

**But** we know what to expect!

For example, if a friend of yours back in the 1990s, before cell phones, told you that they were going to pop in on you at some point, you would not be surprised when they did, especially if they were one of those characters who made it a habit to pop in unexpectedly! That would be perfectly within their nature, and if they forewarned you, all the better.

Or to use Paul's example of a pregnant woman going into labor, nobody is surprised when a pregnant woman begins to give birth. We can see that she is pregnant; now it's only a matter of time.

This is not a perfect analogy but serves to demonstrate what is meant here, that we should not be surprised at the sudden return of Christ on a date unknown and unknowable to us.

After all, the creation we dwell in is Christ's! He is the head over all creation and does not need to schedule an appointment or consult the front desk or some cosmic calendar before returning to His possession!

---

*Vv. 6–8 So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. 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.*

The point of Paul's writing isn't that **we can know the date**, but rather it is to demonstrate the difference in how unbelievers live compared to how believers live.

Paul makes a clear distinction between those who are in darkness and those who are in the light.

Our understanding of the soon return of Christ ought to bear on our life in practical terms not just intellectual terms.

The soon return of Christ should impact the way we dress (metaphorically speaking)! Don't be caught naked!

In light of Christ's return, we are not to be marked with frivolity and drunkenness, but we are to have a clear eye and a clear head. We are to be arrayed with faith, that is, the belief that saves us, our trust in the person and work of Jesus Christ. We are also to be arrayed in love!

Too many quarrelsome Christians with an unnatural fixation on the end times debate come off as brusque, unkind, and unloving, but we are supposed to be dressed with the breastplate of faith and love: God's love toward us, our love toward Him, and our love for others.

If end times is your thing, may you be dressed in love!

Additionally, we are to be people of hope!

We aren't to be morose, fatalistic believers, moping around preaching that the sky is falling.

This message, the love of Christ toward mankind and His soon return to finalize His already inaugurated eternal kingdom, is a message of hope!

All people are invited to the kingdom. That is a message of hope!

We have been made new, and all of our sins are forgiven. That is a message of hope!

We need not languish in darkness, depression, despair, and brokenness because Christ makes all things new. That is a message of hope!

Let our hope be the helmet that crowns our heads!<sup>52</sup>

---

*Vv. 9–10 For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.*

These verses give an everlasting cause for being adorned in the armor of faith, hope, and love. It provides the cause for our vigilance and the pursuit of holiness as we seek to follow Jesus and to live in the light. We have a great cause for those things – God has not destined us for wrath but salvation! So sure is this promise that it spans life and death.

That means we don't have to fear the Day of the Lord. We don't have to wonder if true believers will suffer under God's wrath because Jesus has borne God's wrath on our account.

The question for some Christians to deal with as this relates to the end times is: If God has not destined believers to wrath because of the salvation we have obtained through Christ (see 1 Thess 1:10), then what does that mean for those who believe that Christians will experience the Great Tribulation?<sup>53</sup> (Rev 6)

Even as I acknowledge the ambiguity of the matter and the complexity of the theology, it is my sincere belief, with all my heart and my blessed hope, that God the Father in His grace will deliver His bride from the wrath to come because of the blood of Jesus and that we who are in Christ are not bound for such a hellish landscape as that described as the Great Tribulation.

---

52. Notice the repeated theme through Pauline literature of the spiritual armor that Christians are instructed to bear (Eph 6; 2 Cor 6) and the trifold of faith, hope, and love (1 Cor 13:13).

53. See Rev 2:22 and Rev 3:10.

---

*V. 11 Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.*

Finally, we come to the point of all of this. The whole crux of eschatology is encouragement and edification toward one another.

May we all consider this as we delve deeper into these matters. May we approach one another as brothers and sisters of the cross and not enemies to be conquered. May we find in our study of these issues encouragement and the necessary foresight to build one another up in Christ so that we may be watching and ready at His return.

We can do this! It's not out of reach! While the conversation is sometimes dominated by many loud voices screaming at one another, we can use this teaching to anchor ourselves and one another in the hope of eternity that is quickly coming upon us.

Christ is coming to take us home! He promised to do it, and He will make it so! Let us encourage one another by this!

## 1 THESS 5 PT. 2 VV. 12–13

IN THE REMAINING VERSES OF I THESSALONIANS 5, PAUL OFFERS UP some very straightforward and practical instructions to the church.

These are sometimes the easiest portions of Scripture for us to embrace.

They comfort us in a topsy turvy world when we are looking for our bearings. And they inform us on how we are to be a people of peace, order, and love within Christ's church.

They serve to remind us of the intentionality of how Christ has built and is building His church.

Placing ourselves under the very plain guidance of Scriptures can be therapeutic, transformative, and healing.

As we approach these instructions, we must also recognize that the Christian ethic that Paul presents to the churches is not simply a rearrangement of the old legalistic religious requirement.

Instead, what Paul instructs the churches to observe and practice in our gatherings and our lives is the result of, and firmly anchored in, the truth and glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This is what scholars call a paraenetic construction; the imperatives (those things we are to observe) follow the indicatives (the things that are true).

*Since* the gospel is true, *then* we ought to live our lives in such a way that demonstrates its truth and goodness.

Furthermore, we must admit that following these very plain instructions is often easier said than done because the spirit and the flesh war against each other, and we are all sinners, gathered together by the Holy Spirit to comprise one Body.

That is a beautiful prospect. As we open our eyes to the truth of how Christ is building His church with all kinds of broken vessels, placing each member as He sees fit for the benefit of all (1 Cor 12:12–18), we get to learn more about grace, mercy, forgiveness, and love.

**But** this is also a daunting prospect because of the same thing. We get to learn more about grace, mercy, forgiveness, and love!

Often those lessons become clearest to us in the midst of failing and strife. And we must admit, being the humans that we are, that we often fail and require much grace, mercy, forgiveness, and love.

The first of Paul's final instructions to the church deals specifically with how church members ought to relate to church leaders.

---

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

These verses provoke at least one question: why was this a necessary admonition to the church?

Perhaps the contemporary poison of power struggles and political gamesmanship that many fractured churches have experienced is as old as the church itself.

Certainly, Paul experienced his share of pastoral turmoil regarding how the congregation related to him (1 Cor 9; 2 Cor 3).

Unfortunately, the answer is not explicitly stated. We can only make inferences. And even though our imaginations may search for answers, we cannot say with certainty what led Paul to write this statement other

than the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps an illustration serves us well to prime the discussion:

The Ideal Pastor:

Is always casual but never underdressed–

Is warm and friendly but not too familiar–

Is humorous but not funny–

Calls on his members but is never out of the office–

Is an expository preacher but always preaches on the family–

Is profound but comprehensible–

Condemns sin but is always positive–

Has a family of ordinary people who never sin–

Has two eyes, one brown, the other blue!<sup>54</sup>

In our current age of hyper-consumerism, we have all been led to believe that “the customer is always right.” We also find that many who sit in church pews on Sundays view themselves as the customer.

Since they are the customer, and since they perhaps put a few shekels in the offering box, sometimes these christian-ly customers feel like they should get an oversized voice when it comes to pastoral leadership or any decision at all for that matter.

So, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Apostle Paul establishes how church members are to relate to their overseers.<sup>55</sup>

Please also note that Paul does not write this for a self-serving purpose. He spent only a very brief time in Thessalonica (a matter of weeks), so these instructions are not for his own benefit.

Paul is not saying here, “I’m in charge.” He is saying, you members of the body make sure that you take care of the men that the Lord has placed in the church as your shepherds and overseers as they endeavor to care for you.

---

54. Hughes, *Liberating Ministry*, 186.

55. Bear in mind that this is one of Paul’s earliest letters and so establishes a framework applicable to all the emerging first century churches.



This demonstrates the mutual need that we all have for one another.

Also, note that such a young church would need this admonition! They needed to be taught everything, much like our own young children. They needed to establish good habits and pass them on to the next generation. One of those habits is caring for the servant-leaders in their congregation, honoring and respecting them.

Now, who are these men who should be respected?

Matthew Henry writes, “They are called labourers, and should not be loiterers. They must labour with their people, to instruct, comfort, and edify them.”<sup>56</sup>

An evident mark of these men whom Paul instructs the church to respect is that they are workers! They are about the Lord’s business, caring for the flock that God has entrusted to their care. They are daily engaged in the good warfare (1 Tim 1:18).

John Calvin adds a little detail, reading between the lines. He writes, “Paul intimates that the reason why less honour is shewn to teachers themselves than is befitting, is because their labour is not ordinarily taken into consideration.”<sup>57</sup>

We must be careful to recognize that the leaders of a church are committed to demanding labor on behalf of the members and for the glory of Jesus Christ.

Much of this work is hidden from the view of the congregation! And yet, many people make the terrible and disheartening assumption that the work of the pastor takes about 45 minutes a week.

The reality is far different. And it is becoming increasingly common for pastors to work two jobs, which we call bi-vocational ministry.

Another attribute of these servant-leaders is that they are “over you in the Lord.”

---

56. Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2344.

57. Calvin and Pringle, *Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, 291–292.

Now, our flesh may rebel at this language because we hold a uniquely democratized or egalitarian view of the church in the western culture. Pastors and leaders are hired and fired by deacon boards or congregational vote for many, many reasons, not all of which are Biblical.

Pastors and leaders find themselves often filling the dreaded place as a hireling, beholden to a church board, deacon board, or generational family influence, just so they can pay their bills and feed their families. When unaddressed, this can lead to unfaithful shepherding of Christ's flock and spiritual compromise, which is a disastrous recipe for any church!

**But** Paul here writes that these men "are over you in the Lord."

We may safely assume that Paul has in mind an ideal situation of fidelity and Christ's building up of His church as He wills and not some dysfunctional carnival where the leaders in a church are already disqualified and need to be booted out anyway.

The Apostle Peter gives voice to this ideal:

*So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock (1 Pet 5:1–3).*

Again appealing to Calvin, "[W]hile he commands that honour be given to those that labour, and to those that by teaching govern properly and faithfully, he assuredly does not bestow any honour upon those that are idle and wicked, nor does he mark them out as deserving of it."<sup>58</sup>

Another mark of these men who deserve the respect<sup>59</sup> of the congre-

---

58. Calvin and Pringle, *Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, 292.

59. Interestingly enough, the term here rendered as respect in the ESV comes from the Greek word οἶδα which means "to know." This adds a great deal of richness to the text and may convey the sense of intimacy which leads to respect.

gation (or rather earn the respect of the congregation because of these marks) is that they admonish the congregation.

To admonish means “to counsel about avoidance or cessation of an improper course of conduct ... [to] warn, instruct.”<sup>60</sup>

That is part of the work of the pastor, not just congregationally (preaching) but also individually (counseling).

This is a demanding task, a draining task, and an emotional task.

More often than not, the issues we deal with here are of the highest importance and concern the well-being of people’s souls!

Relative to this requirement, Kent Hughes writes, “Perhaps the greatest challenge in pastoring is ... the huge responsibility one bears in preaching the Word.”<sup>61</sup>

As the Apostle James writes: Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness (Jas 3:1).

Preaching God’s Word rightly is serious, weighty kingdom work! With eternal ramifications!

About the task, C.H. Spurgeon wrote: “It may be light work to you men of genius and learning; but to me it is life and death work. Often have I thought that I would rather take a whipping with a cat-o-nine-tails than preach again. How can I answer for it at the last great day unless I am faithful? ‘Who is sufficient for these things?’ When I have felt the dread responsibility of souls that may be lost or saved by the word they hear ... it made me wish that I had never ventured on so bold a life-work. How shall I give an honorable account of my commission at last?”<sup>62</sup>

Another timely quote from Bruce Thieleman illustrates the call to shepherd God’s people (for it is an unavoidable call and not a vocation): “The pulpit calls to those anointed to it as the sea calls its sailors; and like the sea, it batters and bruises, and does not rest.... To preach, to really

---

60. Arndt, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 679.

61. Hughes, *Liberating Ministry*, 182.

62. Spurgeon in Hughes, *Liberating Ministry*.

preach, is to die naked a little at a time and to know each time that you must do it again.”<sup>63</sup>

To do this work requires unique vulnerability, unique transparency, and unique obedience.

Each week, it requires pastors to place themselves in a uniquely vulnerable position to be criticized, critiqued, questioned, reviewed, censured, and contradicted.

And we can infer from the text that Paul knows, certainly through firsthand experience, that the tendency of the congregation may be to lean in the direction of criticality. So then, the instruction he offers to them is explicitly the opposite!

Nowhere in the Scripture do we read the imperative to the church: “Guys, you love and respect your church leaders too much. Maybe chill out with that.” It’s always the opposite.

Certainly, there are churches today that lean toward the cult of personality, but again, we must appeal to the ideal, not the aberration.

To illustrate the point:

*Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.... Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you (Heb 13:7, 17).*

**And—**

*Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching (1 Tim 5:17).*

---

63. Thieleman in Hughes, *Liberating Ministry*.

The church here is urged to esteem their elders, overseers, and pastors<sup>64</sup> very highly in love because of their work.

Showing that respect and affection is not about granting a title. As a matter of fact, notice that Paul doesn't use any formal titles that we are accustomed to in this text.

Nor is showing respect to those who shepherd God's people about any undue mystical or esoteric reverence.

The church can show that they see, know, and respect their leaders through sincere love – to care for them, acknowledge that they are engaged in a uniquely absorbing task, pray for them often, and offer words of encouragement and support.

Kent Hughes enumerates several practical ways the congregation can encourage their pastors and leaders, many of which deserve more in-depth treatment, but I will leave them here for you to chew on.

1. Encourage your pastor by living biblically ... in encouraging your pastor, the place to begin is with your own heart.
2. Encourage your pastor by your personal commitment to help him know true [biblical] success ... commit to freeing your pastor from a ministry of numbers.
3. Encourage your pastor by not expecting (or allowing) him to be involved in everything ... the congregation must be willing to assume much of the burden, so [the pastor] can give himself to “prayer and the ministry of the word.” (Acts 6:4)
4. Encourage your pastor by providing adequately for him and his family ... [by doing this you are] gently reminding him that his calling does not cancel his humanity. (1 Cor 9:14)
5. Encourage your pastor by loving his family ... the fishbowl life of ministry can take its toll especially on the pastor's family! Honor their individuality and give them space to grow.

---

64. One may benefit from a more in depth study on these terms and ecclesiastic polity.

6. Encourage your pastor by treating him with respect – your pastor is to lead by being a servant, but such a call is intrinsically honored [and divinely established by Christ – Eph 4:11).
7. Pray for your pastor! That’s the most important thing!<sup>65</sup>

You may be saying to yourself, “A Pastor teaching on how the church should treat him seems pretty self-serving.”

Well, the beauty of teaching the Bible verse by verse is that we deal with every single verse, even those topics we may be prone to avoid. No pastor in their right mind relishes the thought of teaching the congregation how he should be treated!

The second thing is that this isn’t for me! It’s for some other pastor in your future (or perhaps your present one if you attend a different church).

The reality is that “many churches see an annual turnover rate of 25%,”<sup>66</sup> which means that a church may very well be completely turned over in as little as four years, with only a faithful few staying for the long term.

But just because people change churches, or move, or grow, or whatever, doesn’t mean that how we live together as a church should change.

No matter what church you attend, please know that (in an ideal situation) the pastor and staff are working hard for the kingdom, to serve you and your families, and be there when the heavies of life come knocking on your door. And often, those people serve in the shadows, as unto the Lord.

Know them, see them, love them, esteem them for their labor.

Matthew Henry writes: “There is a mutual duty between ministers and people. If ministers should labour among the people, then.... The people must know them. As the shepherd should know his flock, so the sheep must know their shepherd. They must know his person, hear his voice,

---

65. Hughes, *Liberating Ministry*, 189–195.

66. <https://www.churchplanting.com/living-with-turnover/>.

acknowledge him for their pastor, and pay due regard to his teaching, ruling, and admonitions.... They must esteem their ministers highly in love; they should greatly value the office of the ministry, honour and love the persons of their ministers, and show their esteem and affection in all proper ways, and this for their work's sake, because their business is to promote the honour of Christ and the welfare of men's souls."<sup>67</sup>

In closing, we must acknowledge one final clause regarding understanding, respecting, and caring for those in ministry.

Paul writes to the Thessalonians at the end of v. 13, "Be at peace among yourselves."

I believe this statement is so telling about why he needed to instruct the church on this issue at all – contention in the Body.

There were potentially power struggles occurring or blatant disrespect and wounding of one another.

**But** Paul gives the general instruction, Be at peace among yourselves.

Christ's church is to be a place of peace. "For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints" (1 Cor 14:33).

Don't concern yourself with the titles or the pageantry that many churches have adopted to fabricate honor for their leaders.

Embrace the peace of Christ, the humility of Christ, and the unity that comes through Christ.

It is my blessed honor and privilege to serve all of those whom Christ allows me to care for.

I am grateful to be loved and honored by the congregation that Christ has established here, and it is my prayer that we would be at peace with one another, as we are, and that we would seek to honor Christ first and foremost as we honor and care for one another.

---

67. Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary*, 2344.

## 1 THESS 5 PT. 3 VV. 14–28

THE CONCLUSION OF FIRST THESSALONIANS PRESENTS US WITH A number of instructions that are very straightforward and yet very necessary.

When the gospel of Jesus Christ finds purchase in our hearts, we are conformed to its truth and reality. This is made evident by how we live, not in the sense of some sort of elective morality but rather in the sense that we are living by the Spirit and not by the flesh.

As Paul writes to the churches, he not only instructs them on the weighty invisible truths of the gospel but also shows us how those invisible truths of grace, love, mercy, compassion, and holiness are manifested, made real, in how we live. That is what we see in the remainder of the text here.

---

*V. 14 And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.*

Here Paul presents to the church the shared responsibility of admonishing, encouraging, and helping.

Remember, in 1 Thess 5:12, we saw that part of the responsibility of overseers is to admonish the congregation.



We also learned that to admonish means “to counsel about avoidance or cessation of an improper course of conduct, ... warn, instruct.”<sup>68</sup>

We see that in the current text, this is more than just one man’s responsibility. The community of believers, the church, shares the responsibility of admonishing when necessary, especially those whom the text here calls “idle.”

Our inclination is to assume that these people are just being lazy, since that’s our understanding of being idle. But the Greek term holds within its range of meaning the sense of “being out of step and going one’s own way, disorderly, insubordinate.”<sup>69</sup>

The next shared responsibility is to encourage the fainthearted.

We see here a balance in our communal responsibility. Not only are we to correct those who need correction within our churches, but we also ought to be discerning enough to see those who need encouragement and meet that need as well.

We are to “have [a] strong interest in”<sup>70</sup> those who are weak (that is, in a spiritual sense, “of the inner life”<sup>71</sup>), and we are to assist them with that.

That is one of the shining marks of our sanctified community. No man is an island. We have people around us who love us with Christ’s love, and we love others with Christ’s love, and we are willing to do the hard things: correct when necessary, encourage in times of discouragement, and build up and assist those who are weak in the faith.

We do not abandon our wounded on the battlefield of life! We bear with them and for them.

Remember Paul’s writing to the Galatians: “Share each other’s burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ. If you think you are too important to help someone, you are only fooling yourself. You are not that important” (Gal 6:2–3 NLT).

---

68. Arndt, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 679.

69. Arndt, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 148.

70. Arndt, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 87.

71. Arndt, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 143.

**And** we are to be patient with them all.

This is perhaps the most challenging act of service for us to fulfill. Not many people are naturally gifted with patience. But patience is so necessary when carrying out the other roles that we have already examined: admonishing, encouraging, helping.

**Because** when admonition fails, and encouragement doesn't fan the flames of affection or motivation that we thought it might, or helping the weak saint seems to be all for naught as we witness our dearly loved brothers and sisters in the faith cave to their temptations again and again – and again, we are called to be patient with them all and so to demonstrate the nature of Christ who is ever patient with us (1 Tim 1:16).

---

***V. 15 See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.***

This verse fits nicely with all of what has already been said.

If we are honest with ourselves, we will find that we are far more likely to lose our tempers and our patience and seek to give somebody “what they deserve,” rather than patiently doing good. That tendency of ours certainly ignores the spirit of mercy.

**But** the text couldn't be more clear. We are not to seek revenge even when we ourselves suffer evil.

Paul wrote similarly to the Romans: “Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord’” (Rom 12:17–19).

As Christ's people, we are people of peace, created for good works that we should walk in them (Eph 2:10).

**And** what's more, sometimes the recipients of those good works don't deserve them! And **that** is grace!

Inasmuch as we have received grace, let us be people who dispense grace and goodness to others regardless of their hearts, attitudes, or any of their hangups.

---

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

These verses present to us the will of God for our lives.

The much toiled-over question asked by many is, “What is God’s will for my life?”

Ideally, when we ask that, we want to know what specific thing God wants us to carry out for His kingdom and glory.

But more commonly, we want to know when we are going to “hit it big” – have a successful career, be debt-free, make a lot of money, start a business, grow a business, have a big church (if you’re in ministry), and so on and so forth.

Not many of us consider that God’s will for us could be much like the prophets of old – engaged in preaching a message to people who didn’t want to hear it and who suffered greatly for the privilege.

*Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—of whom the world was not worthy--wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth” (Heb 11:36–38).*

The universal will of God for the saints is not simply a one-string guitar, but we can discern a few things from Scripture about what God’s will is for the lives of **all** the saints.

One thing we know from this very letter is that God's will for us is our holiness! As Paul writes: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification"(1 Thes 4:3).

The second thing we know about the will of God for our lives is that He desires for us to rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and give thanks in all circumstances!

And these things we will do as we are made holy by the Spirit and as we carry out the Word of God in our lives collectively and individually.

We are to be a communicative people in our faith, rejoicing, praying, and giving thanks no matter the circumstances because we have an eternal hope and a risen Lord who is over all creation!

---

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

Many, many Christians need to hear the imperative found in these verses!

This deserves a simple but forceful repeating: **Do not quench the Spirit! Do not despise prophecies but test everything; hold fast what is good, abstain from every form of evil!**

Many Christians are living their lives but missing out on the third person of the trinity, the Holy Spirit.

On the night of His betrayal, Jesus Christ taught His closest disciples: "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you" (John 14:16–17).

The promise of the Holy Spirit was not only limited to those men.

In Acts 2, Peter tells a large mixed crowd: "And Peter said to them, 'Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself” (Act 2:38–39).

We know that part of the work of the Holy Spirit is to convict the world of sin and righteousness and judgment (John 16:8).

Another role of the Holy Spirit is to empower believers for the work of bearing witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ (Acts 1:8).

The Holy Spirit also seals us for the day of redemption (Eph 4:30) and gifts the saints with specific graces for the benefit of the church (1 Cor 12:4–7).

So, why are so many people squeamish when it comes to the Holy Spirit?

Many Christians are willing to accept the idea of the Holy Spirit but with a lot of caveats, policies, and explaining away the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit because it makes us uncomfortable. We find then that we are often unwilling to accept the Holy Spirit on His own terms.

Now, I’m not speaking of charismania, where there is an over-emphasis on the experiential, but rather, decent and orderly conduct (1 Cor 14:40) led by God’s Holy Spirit.

When the Holy Spirit is leading, guiding, and empowering, then we can be exceptional in our kingdom work. Otherwise, we are just operating under our own strength and resources, which may produce fruit for a time but will ultimately prove unsatisfactory.

When Christians stifle or suppress the Holy Spirit, we become at the very best moralists, adhering to an ideal moral code but one that has no intrinsic transformative power.

It is the Holy Spirit who empowers us to live in such a way that is pleasing to God. So, we should not fear the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives and the lives of others.

See what else Paul says here: Do not despise prophecies.

The prophetic voice in Scripture is presented generally in two forms.

1. Foretelling, that is, telling of events that will come to pass in a future time from the perspective of the prophet.
2. Forthtelling, that is, declaring an instructional or didactic word from the Lord.

Perhaps the church had begun to sneer at people who “had a word from the Holy Spirit.” Maybe, we do that today.

Now, I am not suggesting that every “word from the Holy Spirit” is legitimate or timely or good. But neither does Paul!

Look at what he commands the church. Test everything! Hold fast what is good! Abstain from what is evil! (My paraphrase).

Just because we slap a Holy Spirit label on our speech doesn’t make it prophetic nor good.

First things first, we believe that the Scriptures are uniquely inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:19–21).

So, we believe that as the Holy Spirit speaks through God’s people, He does not contradict Himself but remains consistent in His eternal message and active role in testifying of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Second, we want to be sure to **test** everything! Against what? The Spirit-inspired Scriptures!

If what is being declared as a word from the Holy Spirit is in agreement with the Scriptures, then we want to accept that and hold it close.

On the other hand, if what is being declared contradicts the Scriptures, then we judge those things to be in discord with the Scriptures and reject them.

The Apostle John gives further instructions to us: “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God” (1 John 4:1–3).

We could spend quite a while examining John’s instructions, but suf-

fice to say that it agrees with Paul's sentiment to be discerning in how we receive prophetic utterance.

Many swindlers in the world have adopted the moniker "prophet, apostle, etc." but are peddling snake oil to lovely people who only want to see the Spirit move. It is a shame that people have to look for the Spirit to move through charlatans because we as the church have become so accustomed to suppressing His voice.

Listen to the Holy Spirit, loved one! Embrace Him as the third person of the trinity, equal in power, glory, and authority with the Father and the Son.

---

*Vv. 23–24 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. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.*

These verses are a lovely benediction to the church.<sup>72</sup>

But I would suggest that there is more here than just ceremony. There is rich truth wrapped up in this blessing.

Paul reminds the church that it is the God of peace who is making them holy, who is keeping them from sin and in His righteousness until the return of Jesus.

**And then** some of the most powerful words we can embrace regarding our salvation are found here – "He is the one who is faithful, He will surely do it."

So, even as we acknowledge that there are many instructions for us to keep in faithfulness to Christ, ultimately, His faith towards us will keep us, make us holy, and bring us peace!

---

72. A benediction is simply "A ceremonial blessing administered during a worship gathering." John D. Barry et al., eds., "Benediction," *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

As Paul wrote to the Philippians: “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6).

---

***Vv. 25–26 Brothers, pray for us. Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.***

Paul concludes with a final, personal request for prayer. This is humbling. Paul was so committed to the gospel, yet he was not above asking for prayer. The power of congregational prayer was not lost on him – as it often is on many of us.

He also commands the church to demonstrate their affection for one another by a “holy kiss.”

This unsettles people in our era, especially in the western culture, where we are used to handshakes, fistbumps, or very brief hugs.

But customary greetings involving very brief kisses are common throughout the world even today and, as we see here, were customary in the first century as well.<sup>73</sup>

The point isn’t about the method but about the meaning: show each other that you care for one another. Love each other. Be affectionate, be engaged. This is so important! There is encouragement here for those who come to church without engaging anybody, who sneak in at the beginning and make a mad dash for the exit at the end.

---

73. “Greeting with a ‘kiss’ was common in the ancient world, just as it is in many cultures today. Paul also commanded the churches at Corinth and at Rome to greet ‘one another’ with a holy kiss (see Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12). That it was a ‘holy’ kiss indicates its nature and motivation. It was not an erotic kiss and may well have been restricted to kissing others of one’s own sex.” D. Michael Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians*, The New American Commentary 33 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 190–191.



People love you! You are part of a heavenly community, knit together with other members in the love of Christ, sharing responsibilities to care for one another, admonish, correct, encourage, and assist, doing good to one another, being patient with one another, rejoicing, praying, giving thanks, listening to the Spirit, testing everything, embracing what is good, rejecting the evil, being made holy, and being kept by the faithfulness of Christ.

This is amazing. It is truly supernatural when all of this comes together, and we get to be a part of something miraculous and holy!

I can barely comprehend the glory of the Lord demonstrated in the fullness of how this all works out in the blessed body called the church.

We also see here the solemn charge to read this letter to others; this is not a secret! God's Word holds the way to eternal life (John 6:68)!

This is part and parcel of why we endeavor to present the whole counsel of God – each book, each chapter, each verse, each word.

We believe that it is God's will and desire that His Word be declared in fullness and that we accept the solemn charge to declare these truths to all.

Lastly, and importantly, Paul ends this letter exactly how he began it – with grace (1 Thess 1:1).

This is something we can certainly embrace – begin with grace, end with grace, and let the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be the rule of our lives until we see Him face to face. Amen.

## 2 THESS 1 PT. 1 VV. 1–8

2 Thessalonians is the Apostle Paul's second letter to the church in Thessalonica, authored by himself and his co-laborers, Silas and Timothy.

This was probably authored in the early 50s AD and represents some of Paul's earliest writing to any church.

The community in Thessalonica was predominantly a pagan society and was considered a "free city" but with a strong Roman influence.<sup>74</sup>

Gundry notes:

*Some scholars reverse the order of 1 and 2 Thessalonians; but that view lacks support in ancient manuscripts and, among other considerations, 2 Thessalonians 2:15 ("you were taught through our letter") seems to presuppose 1 Thessalonians. So Paul writes 2 Thessalonians from Corinth on his second missionary journey, shortly after writing 1 Thessalonians. During the interval between writings, fanaticism increased in the church at Thessalonica. The fanaticism arose out of a belief in the immediacy of Jesus' return. Apparently that belief arose in turn out of a desire for de-*

---

74. Thessalonica was made a free city in the first century BC (Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*). This meant the city was free of Roman occupation (it had no soldiers within its walls), taxation (it minted its own coins), and civic government (it had no Roman governor) (Green, *Thessalonians*). Thessalonians were strongly characterized by their Greek cultural orientation, but they remained pro-Roman in their sentiments. As Green explains, "the city enjoyed the benefits of the imperial government without the burden of its presence" (Green, *Thessalonians*). See also Guyer, "Thessalonian."

*liverance from persecution. (The wish was the father of the thought.) Paul therefore writes this second letter to the Thessalonians to quiet the fanaticism by correcting the eschatology that gave rise to it.<sup>75</sup>*

Remember too that Paul had only spent a very brief time with the Thessalonians, a matter of weeks before being forced out of town.

Both letters followed closely on the heels of Paul being urged to leave the city by concerned, new Christians in the midst of much community upheaval and even violence (Acts 17:1–10).

---

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

This is a typical Pauline introduction, but I never tire of reminding the saints of Paul's words.

Very often, Paul begins his letters similarly, and he often closes his letters likewise, appealing to the grace of God.

It is good and right to remind ourselves and one another of the foundational principle of our salvation – grace.

*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast (Eph 2:8–9).*

We are people of grace. We are in need of grace daily, hourly even.

So important was grace to Paul that he used it to introduce his letters over and over again, and this serves as the resounding drumbeat of God's Word to us – grace.

---

75. Gundry, *Survey of the New Testament*, 400.

We desire earnestly to grasp hold of God's grace and turn it back toward others in our churches and our lives.

The same can be said for peace. God has gifted us with His peace as well.

It is especially needful for us to remember, as we delve into the theological meat that Paul presents to the churches, that he nearly always begins his discourse with grace and peace.

That is so crucial for us to remember as we wrestle with the Scriptures, theology, and all of our big questions.

Sometimes we come upon Scriptures that rub us the wrong way. Sometimes we find that these Apostles have written things that challenge our individual worldview or personal theological frameworks, perhaps even challenging how we ourselves handle (or mishandle) the Scriptures.

But first and foremost, there is grace and peace, and our theological conversations and Biblical exploration and examination must be anchored in the grace and peace of God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

And it is so important that we embrace grace and peace before we enter into theological debate because we will find the book of 2 Thessalonians certainly opens the door for such debate.

---

*V. 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.*

Paul's language<sup>76</sup> indicates that he feels a sense of duty to pray for these saints, that he feels a sense of "moral obligation and personal duty, rather

---

76. From the verb "ὀφείλω" (opheilo), "to be under obligation to meet certain social or moral expectations, owe ... be obligated ... one must, one ought." Arndt, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 743.

than being forced to do something because of outward pressure.”<sup>77</sup>

Paul’s compulsion to pray for the saints and the churches is a theme throughout his writing (Rom 1:8; Eph 5:20; 1 Thess 1:2; 2 Thess 2:13). In Paul’s mind, there is no alternative. Not praying for the saints is not an option. He *must* do it! Oh, that our hearts would be similarly shaped.

Notice too that Paul’s prayers are prayers of thanksgiving because of the continued growth of the Thessalonians saints, which he specifically prayed for in 1 Thess 3:12–4:1.

*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. 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 (1Thess 3:12–4:1).*

Prayer is effective! Paul’s earlier prayers and his heartfelt exhortation for the continued maturity and growth of the Thessalonians weren’t wasted!

As we will see, even though the Thessalonian church was born into, and existed in, less than ideal circumstances – they were persecuted and harassed – their faith and love continued to grow!

When we find ourselves in less than ideal circumstances, we wrestle with the temptation that our faith and love begin to grow cold, to shrink back a little bit. But that doesn’t have to be the case. We can find seasons of growth in our trials. We certainly ought to be praying that this be the case for one another!

As their love for one another grew, these saints truly demonstrated the marks of a Jesus follower.

As Jesus taught: “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).

---

77. Ellingworth and Nida, *Thessalonians*, 135.

Sometimes, in seasons of turmoil, the church has lost sight of the priority of love for one another.

Regardless of our circumstances, we must never subjugate Christ's command to love one another to other things. And that is the great temptation!

Perhaps a PR campaign would have benefited the Thessalonians in their persecution. Perhaps they should have gone on the offensive and started fighting fire with fire. While these are attractive strategies to gain favor with a hostile public, they are not the solution.

Rather, we see that during their season of struggle, their love for one another was noticeably increasing. That is truly remarkable and must be attributed to the work of the Holy Spirit.

Like Paul, whenever we see the faith and love of other saints growing, truly our hearts soar! It is amazing to watch people grow in grace, peace, faith, and love! There is much cause to offer up thanks to God for that maturing process, which sometimes includes hardship.

What was going on at Thessalonica proved to be a great testimony to the work of Jesus in their lives and one that Paul shared as exemplary with other churches.

---

***V. 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.***

The Thessalonian saints weren't easily moved from their position in Christ. While being mightily tested through persecutions and afflictions, their faith remained intact (and even grew).

Paul used their example of steadfastness, faithfulness, and endurance in the face of hardship as a tool to encourage other churches.

Understand that Paul did not use their example as a sort of competitive driver, nor was it meant to inspire envy or guilt, but that the other

churches would see what is possible in the Lord Jesus in spite of suffering.

If we agree with the scholarly material that places Paul at Corinth when he wrote this letter, then certainly the Corinthians, who were fraught with division, discord, potentially greed, and hyper-charismania, could learn a thing or two from the persecuted church (acknowledging that they themselves were not exempt from persecution).

Persecution and affliction are universal experiences for Christ's bride: "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world" (1 Pet 5:8–9).

And –

*Remember the word that I said to you: "A servant is not greater than his master." If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours (John 15:20).*

There is something quite stirring when we hear of stalwart believers, brothers and sisters, who stand firm defiantly in the face of persecution that gives us the courage to do likewise. And as they stand, the fruits of their faith – as presented in the text – are love for one another and a bold faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

In those rare moments (at least in our cultural context), we truly have a chance to see the grace, peace, faith, and love that are foundational in our faith (and gained through Christ) blossom to life. And by the grace of God, the saints endure, and shall endure, for His glory.

---

***V. 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—***

Charles Wanamaker writes, “The interpretation of this verse is pivotal for a proper understanding of the whole letter. Unfortunately it resists easy explanation.”<sup>78</sup>

If this is, as Henry Alford suggests,<sup>79</sup> in apposition to v. 4 (“your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions”), then the evidence of God’s judgment is their standing fast in their afflictions without being terrified by them.<sup>80</sup>

Alford references Philippians 1:28 as having a similar construction and certainly a cursory examination demonstrates the association:

*Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God (Phil 1:27–28).*

Verse 5 reinforces the universal Christian experience of suffering.

Gene Green succinctly communicates what he calls the “theology of suffering” when he writes, “In the divine plan, the suffering of God’s people plays a central role and should not be construed as a sign of God’s rejection or neglect of his own.... In the city of Thessalonica, the Christians had suffered rejection and dishonor at the hands of their contemporaries ... but in the plan of God the source of social shame is transformed into a sign of honor.... So intimate is the relationship between the Kingdom of God and the suffering of the people of God that Paul included the teach-

---

78. “Uncertainty exists concerning the connection of ἔνδειγμα τῆς δικαίας κρίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ (‘evidence of the righteous judgment of God’) with its immediate context and the significance of the term ἔνδειγμα (‘evidence’ or ‘sign’).” Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 220.

79. Henry Alford, *Alford’s Greek Testament: An Exegetical and Critical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Guardian Press, 1976), 3: 285.

80. Alford, cf. Phil 1:28.



ing that ‘We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God’ (Acts 14:22) as part of his basic instruction of new Christians.”<sup>81</sup>

In the following verses, we see Paul building toward the main thrust of 2 Thessalonians, the final judgment or “climax of history,”<sup>82</sup> which includes God’s judgment upon the disobedient and those who afflict His people because God is not unjust to allow His children or His creation to be abused without recourse. He is the avenger of His own.

In this way, Paul steadies the Thessalonians in their conduct; they are commended for their steadfastness, not their vengeance.

As it is written – “Do not say, ‘I will do to him as he has done to me; I will pay the man back for what he has done’” (Pro 24:29).

And again – “Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’” (Rom 12:19)

But when is enough, enough? Christians throughout the ages have struggled with this question.

We ask ourselves, When can we stand up for ourselves? Perhaps we find a partial answer in Revelation as we see the saints asking God a similar question.

*When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been (Rev 6:9–11).*

You see, there is an enduring imperative for Christians to bear up

---

81. Green, *Thessalonians*, 283–285.

82. Ellingworth and Nida, *Thessalonians*, 139.

under persecution and resist becoming our own defenders. Carrying out our own justice, making wrongs right for ourselves, can never be perfectly right, as we know God's judgment is. God is the one who will one day make all wrongs right.

While Christian suffering is promised in Scripture and will come at the hands of others (and ourselves too!), those who afflict God's people are due for a reckoning. And while Christians are often "told to rest a little longer," God's judgment is imminent.

That is part of the reason we pray that those outside of Christ's Kingdom may be reconciled to Him, so that they might escape the wrath to come and might become sons and daughters of grace, peace, love, and faith.

Paul explicitly states as much with regards to God's judgment in the following verses.

---

*Vv. 6–8 since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, 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 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.*

God will make things right. Those who have been afflicted will find relief, while those who have done the afflicting, the attacking, the abusing, will themselves subject to punishment.

Our question is, When? Is there any way we can speed this up?

Paul has a final eschatological sense in mind when he writes this, for when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven, then will all wrongs be set right. All men will be held to account.<sup>83</sup>

---

83. We must balance this with the immediate sense of retribution e.g., Rom 1:18–32.

So we may desire a more immediate response, a quicker solution to the problem of suffering, but the ultimate solution to human suffering will not be resolved completely until the return of Jesus Christ for judgment at the end of the age.

Notice, too, there are two sets of people: those who do not “know” God and those who perhaps have heard the gospel but refuse to obey it.

One note on the verbiage here. When we come to this verse, which promises God’s righteous vengeance, we may rightly ask, “How could God punish somebody who doesn’t know any better?” But is this verse claiming such an action?

The *UBS Handbook* explains that “the word ‘know’ normally means, not intellectual knowledge of a fact, but a relationship with a person (cf. Mark 14:71; John 7:28; 2 Corinthians 5:16, ... Titus 1:16). In Luke 1:34 ... a different, but semantically related, verb is used. ‘Not to know God’ means, therefore, refusing to enter into a relationship with him.”<sup>84</sup>

We find then that both of these conditions are related: refusing to enter into a relationship with God and refusing to obey the good message of Jesus Christ.

The author of Hebrews captures the thought dramatically:

*For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.” It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb 10:26–31).*

---

84. Ellingworth and Nida, *Thessalonians*, 146.

While this message is not popular, it is certainly needful. The gospel is proclaimed so that people might be reconciled to God, and yet we understand that the gospel is not universally accepted.

In many places, the gospel is scorned, and the saints, heirs of the New Covenant - participants in the gospel - are persecuted and murdered for their blessed hope.

**But** – there is a judgment coming.

For the house of God and for those outside: “For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?” (1 Pet 4:17)

There is an almighty, holy God who sees and whose scales are perfectly balanced. And He will repay.

Final thought: While this may seem to have developed into “fire and brimstone,” we must remember that Paul’s writing to the Thessalonians (who were facing tremendous persecution) was meant to serve as a reminder of hope, a reminder of justice at the end, and encouragement to stay the course. Their cause was righteous, and they needed to remain steadfast in the faith, knowing that God saw them and would be the one to keep them and deliver them from every adversary, visible or invisible.

## 2 THESS 1 PT. 2 VV. 9–12

AS WE CONTINUE IN SECOND THESSALONIANS, WE FIND OURSELVES considering material that has caused contention among certain portions of the church for quite some time.

The study of the last things, eschatology, concerns the return of Christ, the Rapture, the Great Tribulation, the Millennial Kingdom, the Final Judgment, and the new creation (among other things). This has caused bitter contention and even division among believers.

It appears that, at times, our enemy, the accuser, Satan, has used what should be a blessed opportunity to delve deeper into God's treasury of wisdom and knowledge as a tool to sow discord among believers.

One reason this divisive tactic is effective is because the seed of pride begins to germinate within us whenever we start to grow more knowledgeable.

As Paul wrote, "Knowledge puffs up" (1 Cor 8:1). That is to say that knowledge can have the effect of producing pride within each of us, which leads to arrogance, which leads to division once we can no longer participate in theological discussion without being condescending or thinking that those dear saints who disagree with us are going to hell because they are so ignorant.

Any discussion or examination of eschatology must begin with humility, intellectual honesty, grace, peace, and love. Just because we are passionate about a particular theological topic doesn't mean that we forfeit

the key distinguishing marks of our belief (love) when we dig in!

We should never weaponize our eschatology or any of our theological understandings to wound others, especially other Christians!

Additionally, to truly grow in knowledge and wisdom, we must come to a place where we can recognize the limits of our understanding, interpretation, and expertise. We must be teachable!

Far too often, those who have labored only very briefly and haphazardly at the task of interpreting God's Word count themselves as experts! What a shame!

When we fall into this trap, we find that we are more than willing to cast aspersions upon far more seasoned and learned saints than ourselves. We are even willing to defame them simply because we disagree with their examination of the evidence. We dismiss them outright as dull, uninformed, or worse – heretical.

Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard help anchor us in humility in their text on Biblical Interpretation by quoting Spurgeon:

*Of course, you are not such wisecracks as to think of ways that you can expound Scripture without assistance from the works of ... learned men who have labored before you in the field of exposition. If you are of that opinion, pray remain so, for you are not worth the trouble of conversion, and like a little [clique] who think with you, would resent the attempt as an insult to your infallibility. It seems odd, that [sic] certain men who talk so much of what the Holy Spirit reveals to themselves, should think so little of what he has revealed to others.*

*In the pulpit today this error may sound like this: "Dear friends, I have consulted no other books, human sources, or worldly wisdom. I have considered no commentaries. I have gone right to the Bible—and only the Bible—to see what it had to say for itself. Let me share with you what God showed me."*

... *This sounds very spiritual, but in fact it is a veiled egotism.*<sup>85</sup>

Loved one, this is veiled egotism not because the Lord isn't capable of using only His word to transform the heart of the believer and not because the Word isn't completely sufficient for our needs.

It is egotism because those who have the means and the opportunity to learn from others who have walked before them and yet still dismiss the work of the faithful as not worth their time commit a great crime against Biblical interpretation and the historic work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of others.

Furthermore, such a stance of relying solely on personal interpretation (in opposition to 2 Peter 1:20) is, at the very worst, treacherous work, which has certainly led to disastrous Biblical interpretation with disastrous consequences.

We need to be teachable, willing to listen, and humble in our examination of all Scripture. That prerequisite certainly extends to those realms of theology that are complex and require significant nuance.

The reality regarding the last things, including our subject for immediate consideration, the Final Judgment, is that we don't know everything.

Some of the things we know are opaque, but we believe that all Scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit, even the opaque parts.

But through careful observation of the text and the illumination that comes from the Holy Spirit to give us an understanding of how each part of the Scriptures contributes to the whole narrative of God's redemptive plan, we can know *some things* that God has revealed to us by His Word.

So as we move into this territory, let our hearts' prayer be that the Lord would teach us by His Holy Spirit, that He would keep us in His perfect peace, and that we can make allowance for disagreement while maintaining the unity of the Spirit with other Christians who dearly love the Lord.

---

85. C. H. Spurgeon, *Commenting and Commentaries* (New York: Sheldon & Company, 1876) in William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, Third Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 207.

And let us remember that we are all saved by grace through faith.

We are not saved because of our perfect understanding of eschatology. We are not condemned because of our imperfect understanding of eschatology. We are held by the grace of Christ, **and** since He is faithful to us, we shall all witness these things come to pass in due time. And we shall marvel at them and glorify Jesus even as He is glorified in us.

In the previous verses, Paul has introduced himself and his co-laborers, has commended the Thessalonians for continuing to grow in faith and love through their persecution, and has also comforted them by explaining to them that God is just. He will, once and for all, make all wrongs right and punish persecutors at the final coming of Jesus Christ, when He is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels 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 (2 Thess 1:7–9).

We were reminded that Paul's words are to Christians and meant to serve as a comfort to them in their distress and remind them to keep their eyes on the eternal Kingdom and the promise of justice in a final sense. This was meant to be hopeful, not hellish.

Now, for those who are outside of the Kingdom and have rejected the gospel, or for those who have “once been enlightened” but have trampled the blood of the covenant under foot, there is a certain fearful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation (Heb 10:26–31) which certainly parallels what Paul describes.

That is a terrifying prospect for those who are outside, but it is a comfort to those who know Jesus **because** we not only believe in eternal life to come. We also believe that God is perfectly **just**. He is just to hold those who have modeled their lives after the pattern of the thief in John 10, the devil who only intends to steal, kill, and destroy, that God will certainly hold them to account!

In the following verses, Paul continues to add detail to what this entails as he builds toward the central teaching in 2 Thessalonians – “the Day of the Lord.”



---

*Vv. 1:9–10 They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, 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.*

This subject of receiving punishment here refers to all those who have rejected the gospel.

In a sense, this partially answers the big question that so many people wrestle with, “What happens at the final judgment?”

So let’s review briefly the concept that Paul is driving at, the Final Judgment: “Throughout the Bible, the concept of final judgment is depicted as a future-historical event when God will issue a final verdict of all nations and humanity.”<sup>86</sup>

This day is often referred to throughout Scripture as “The Day of the Lord” or “The Great Day of the Lord” and is pre-figured by historic earthly judgment, particularly upon the nation of Israel.<sup>87</sup>

In such contexts, “the day of the Lord” referred to moments of judgment, retribution, and vindication ordained by God as a sign of His faithfulness toward His covenant (such as the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities).

*Both the OT and the NT envision the final judgment as a day of destruction and vindication. However, the NT uniquely reveals that God has appointed Jesus Christ as judge over all things (e.g., John 5:22; 1 Cor 4:5). At the eschatological judgment, all humanity will stand before the judgment*

---

86. Matthew Aernie, “Judgment, Final,” ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

87. See Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc. for uses of the “the day of the Lord” to refer to temporal, historic judgment. In particular the prophet Amos takes special interest in reframing “the day of the Lord” as a day of judgment and not just blessing.

*seat of Christ, who has full authority to administer the final verdicts upon the wicked and the godly.*<sup>88</sup>

So then, those who are apart from the gospel of Jesus Christ will be judged, for they are away from the presence of the Lord and deserving of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord.

This flies in the face of the increasingly popular idea that hell and eternal punishment are so unloving and unthinkable that they are incompatible with modern Christianity.

However, as we see, the Scriptures are clear that those who reject the gospel will be punished. They will not simply cease to exist but will have to bear the wrath of God themselves since they “judged themselves unworthy of eternal life” (Acts 13:46; John 3:18–19).

This answers the question, “How long would it take for a human to pay God back for our sins?” Forever.

That is why the phrase “dead in our sins” is so pertinent! Because without the gospel, without the righteousness of Christ, we are lost for eternity, not just for this life!

John Calvin almost poetically describes this punishment as “destruction without end, and an undying death.”<sup>89</sup>

Perhaps people are so quick to dismiss the Biblical teachings on eternal punishment because we can hardly wrap our limited minds around the thought. We find eternity difficult to grasp.

Paradoxically though, most people in our country believe in eternal reward and paradise in some sort of heaven.

Reportedly, 72% of Americans believe in heaven (both religious and

---

88. Aernie, “Judgment, Final.” “Although unbelievers pass into a state of eternal punishment immediately upon death, their bodies will not be raised until the day of final judgment. On that day, their bodies will be raised and reunited with their souls, and they will stand before God’s throne for final judgment to be pronounced upon them in the body (see Matt. 25:31–46; John 5:28–29; Acts 24:15; and Rev. 20:12, 15).” See also Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 824.

89. Calvin and Pringle, *Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, 318.

non-religious), while 58% believe in hell.<sup>90</sup>

Additionally, we must recognize that this punishment includes more than physical torment. It includes being away from the presence of the Lord, away from His glory. That means an absence of all that is good and holy.

There is no silver lining to eternal punishment, unlike what may be presented in modern media. There is simply terror, affliction, darkness, and separation from God (Matt 22:13, 25:30).

As Jesus taught:

*So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Mat 13:49–50).*

In v. 10, we see that the opposite condition will be experienced by the saints, those who have been made new by the gospel of Jesus Christ. The eternal state of those who are the Lord's is one of glory and awe.

Here, we see that part of that last day, the final coming of Jesus Christ, is that He will be glorified in His saints even as He is now (John 17:10).

The majesty, brightness, and fame of Jesus Christ are reflected within His saints currently and evermore shall be!

That is part of the glory that we embrace in the gospel. He has clothed us with His righteousness, He makes us holy as He is holy, and Christ is held in high esteem, honored, in our bodies, both mortal and eternal.<sup>91</sup>

And our reunion with Him on the last day shall be glorious!

Remember that glorification is part of our journey as saints. We travel progressively from justification at the moment of our belief, through sanctification as we follow after Jesus, unto glorification when He shall be revealed in us at the Last Day.

---

90. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/11/10/most-americans-believe-in-heaven-and-hell/>

91. Arndt, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 332.

Furthermore, we will all marvel at His glory!<sup>92</sup> That will certainly be the case. Having heard for so long, having believed and not yet seen, we will certainly be moved to awe as we “admire, wonder at” the actual glorified Jesus.<sup>93</sup>

How shall we arrive there? How shall the Thessalonian saints arrive at that distant shore in eternity? By belief! As Paul writes, “because our testimony to you was believed.”

Can you imagine how our hearts will soar when, having believed so long in this broken creation while longing for eternity, we finally see the Lord face to face with the great assembly of saints?!?

What glory awaits us! We shall be vindicated, comforted, established in peace forever!

---

*Vv. 1:11–12 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, 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.*

This is what Paul is praying for – resolve on the part of the Thessalonian saints.

This is my prayer for you! That you would endure, persevere, keeping this goal in mind.

There is a light at the end of the tunnel! There is a promise of a blessed reunion with the risen Christ. There is a promise of justice for every evil deed!

---

92. “Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; for it is written, ‘As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.’ So then each of us will give an account of himself to God” (Rom 14:10–12).

93. Arndt, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 444.

And as we see, in Paul's mind, it is God who will make them worthy of what He has called them to.

As he previously wrote to them: "He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it" (1 Thess 5:24).

It is by God's power that the saints are called, established, fulfilled, and moved to do the works of our Father. It is by His power that we will stand until the last day!

And why does God do this thing? Why is He holding onto His saints so tightly? Paul gives us the answer: so that the name of Jesus may be glorified **in you** and **you in Him**.

God is demonstrating His power and glory in the lives of His saints as we are united with the person and work of Jesus Christ not just in a theological, invisible sense but also in a practical, physical, visible sense too!

The power of God is revealed in the lives of the saints by our faithfulness, steadfastness, and perseverance.

As we follow Jesus and obey the gospel, He is glorified in us, and we are glorified in Him.

There is a unity here that must be grasped! The lives of the saints are inextricably bound up in the life of Christ. There can be no divorce, no half-measures, no separation; otherwise, we are found outside of Christ.

But Christ's prayer, His desire, in unity with the Father is a unity with those who are His.

Even as he prayed: "The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:22-24).

And notice here the framework in which Paul presents the theology of glorification and the unity of Christ with His saints. It is according to the grace of God and our Lord Jesus.

We are called to this divine union; we are gifted with the opportunity to participate in the glorification of Christ because of God's favor.

We have not earned this privilege, and we cannot merit it.

But for the grace of God, we are children of wrath, subject to eternal punishment and separation from the Lord.

**But** because of God's favor towards us, demonstrated by the cross of Christ and the good news of reconciliation through Christ's blood, we are brought into His Kingdom.

We are inducted into His Kingdom here in this life, and we shall live out the completeness of our heavenly citizenship in eternity when we finally behold His glory – full in the face – all because of His grace!

## 2 THESS 2 PT. 1 VV. 1–5

---

*Vv. 1–2 Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, 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.*

As we enter into chapter two, we must acknowledge that there are several interpretive issues in the text that have not been fully resolved to universal satisfaction.

There are several competing views regarding the subject matter of the last days, including questions regarding: whether or not the Rapture of the church and the Final Judgment occur simultaneously; whether or not Christians will live through what is called the Great Tribulation; the identity of the Antichrist; and so on and so forth.

There is much respectable scholarship on these matters, and each comprehensive treatment of the issues (typically seeking to synchronize each individual element with the others) holds a measure of merit even as they each hold within their various frameworks unresolved exegetical questions – enough so that none of the readily accepted views in broader

Christendom have been dismissed outright.<sup>94</sup> Nor have any of the individual positions been adopted as the standard eschatological view across Christianity.<sup>95</sup>

From what we can discern from the text, it does not appear that Paul intended to synchronize these events comprehensively or offer up a one-size-fits-all solution. Instead, he applies his efforts to offer comfort and encouragement to a group of Christians who were perhaps becoming disturbed by erroneous teachings regarding the last days.

Notably, Paul makes no reference to any definitive dates or times in this writing (in agreement with Christ's teaching that no one knows the day or hour – Matt 24:36).<sup>96</sup>

Rather he focuses on anchoring the believers in Thessalonica on what they **can** know while paying special attention to the general truths regarding the imminence of “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ,” commonly referred to as the Parousia.<sup>97</sup> “Paul begins to deal with their misunderstanding of the Parousia by saying that it is not immediate. Therefore, they should return to their jobs and businesses. Looking for Christ's return does not mean cessation of normal living.”<sup>98</sup>

Before moving on to the “juicy” details about the Apostasy (rebellion) and “the man of lawlessness” (Antichrist), it is important to deal with

---

94. For a good treatment of the pros and cons regarding the subject matter, see Grudem's *Systematic Theology*.

95. One could argue that *Amillennialism* has been the predominant historic view since about the 4th century or so, while the widespread *Premillennialism* view has only gained popular footing since the mid-20th century.

96. “It should be noted at the outset that the discussion of these includes few if any temporal references. The ‘first’ (RSV) of v. 3 and the occasional ‘then’ scattered in the passage may have more to do with the sequence of the list than with sequence in time. There is also no indication how soon these things might occur or how long the process would take once it began. Also the description of the events is not very detailed.” Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians*, 230.

97. Παρουσία “arrival as the first stage in presence, coming, advent ... in a special technical sense ... of Christ (and the Antichrist).” Arndt, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 780.

98. Gundry, *Survey of the New Testament*, 402.



several vital details in Paul's exhortation.

Notice Paul's encouragement to the church – and we praise the Lord for preserving this portion of Scripture for us! He asks them, as dear members of the family of God, not to be shaken or alarmed when they hear these kinds of teachings. **And**, what's more, is that Paul goes on to describe that sometimes these teachings are deceptive, whether that is intentional or not makes no difference. The faith of believers is not anchored in a perfect understanding of the Last Days; it is anchored in the redeeming work of Jesus Christ. So then, our faith ought to stand firm in the face of doubtful doctrines.

We see in the text several ways that Paul explicitly warns them to take care and be on guard against false teaching: somebody claiming special revelation by the Spirit, spoken word, or a forged letter seeming to be from the Apostles.

It appears that even back in the first century, there were groups of people who took a special interest in eschatology but whose work proved to be a work of deception.

Their work and teaching on the topic were not a blessing to the church nor an encouragement to the saints but served to stir up anxiety, fear, and unrest. These are not marks of the Spirit!

Remember: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law” (Gal 5:22–23).

It sure seems like whatever was going on with this errant teaching on the last days lacked these things!

Notice too how the church had to contend with this misinformation campaign along multiple fronts.

It appears that teachers were claiming a special revelation by the Spirit, not supported by the Scriptures, and they claimed to be authoritative on the subject by claiming, “The Spirit has revealed this thing to me.”

Remember the words of the Apostle John: “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many

false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1).

Additionally, they had to contend with a “spoken word.” This was certainly part of that false prophetic spirit that may have infiltrated the church but can also stand apart from any special claim to divine inspiration. Rather, this type of spoken word could rest solely on its own merit as eloquence or knowledge.

Many in our age fit into this category! They wouldn’t necessarily claim a special revelation from the Spirit. They would simply claim to be experts on the subject and would be able to eloquently present their ideas even though they may not line up with Scripture.

Finally, they had to contend with forged letters from supposed Apostles that contained bad information.

Think about how hellish that must’ve been! What a devilish scheme!

These poor saints received a letter that they believed was from a dear friend, from Paul himself, the one who planted their church. That letter contained all kinds of questionable information about the last days. Perhaps they gave that letter the benefit of the doubt, “believing all things” (1 Cor 13:7) because they loved Paul – only to find out it was a hoax! Oh, how shaken they must have been!

Such things are not far from us today, loved ones! The church has been assailed across the ages by various means, and our enemy is certainly clever enough to use all means to sow discord among the church!

Be careful with what you listen to or engage in, especially when it concerns the doctrines that we hold dear!

That isn’t to say that we should dismiss everybody who disagrees with our positions on eschatology, but it is to say that we should be discerning concerning who is presenting themselves as experts. Are they truly an expert? If so, why are they so keen to push disputable matters? What is their aim? Is it to build up the church or see it shaken? How are they presenting their information? Is it with the heart of Jesus, established in grace and peace? Does it bear the marks of the Spirit? Or is it fraught with bullish language and condescension?

By their fruits, you will know them!

Paul's desire was that the church would stand fast and NOT be shaken.

We should also bear this in mind in our own teaching and the information we share with others. Are we passing along clever forgeries to people we love, spreading false information regarding disputable matters, or are we seeking to see the saints established in the grace and peace of Jesus Christ? We should be seeking to see the latter.

Furthermore, Paul's chief concern on how this church was shaken concerns the day of the Lord having already come.

We can make some deductions here. This very new, very raw church had likely received some really bad instructions by bad actors seeking to undermine the stability of the church, and the chief lie they were pushing was that Jesus Christ had already returned.

The message to the Thessalonians was that they had missed the Rapture, the end of all things was at hand, and they had "missed the boat." Or Christ's return was so imminent that they could just stop living the gospel; they could just sit around on their hands and wait because it was **so very** immediate!

Paul corrects them on this and says, Listen, whatever it is that you've been told, Jesus has not yet returned, and the final judgment is not yet upon us. We know that to be the case because there are a few things that will happen before the termination of this age.

We don't need to get overly clever in our timing. We certainly don't need to get overly clever in demanding a dependent relationship between the coming of the Lord upon the revealing of the "man of lawlessness." It's not as if Jesus is delaying His coming because He is waiting for this agent of wickedness to give it a go in his own timing! This Antichrist figure is subject to God's authority along with all the rest of creation!

To use a rough analogy: The Lord God has written the syllabus! Everything will occur in His time, according to His purposes, for His glory.

---

*Vv. 3–4 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, 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.*

This verse presents us with an interesting but essentially resolved interpretive question. Verse 3 includes an “ellipsis” in the original language omitting the words “that day will not come.”<sup>99</sup>

Paul Ellingworth writes, “‘For the Day will not come until’ makes explicit, as do virtually all translations from KJV onwards, an idea which is implicit in the Greek, and which Paul would have expressed if he had not broken off his sentence at the end of verse 2. The key clause in verse 3

---

99. Henry Alford: “There does not seem to have been any intention on the part of the Apostle to fill up the ellipsis: it supplies itself in the reader’s mind.” Alford, *Alford’s Greek Testament*, 289.

is literally “unless the apostasy comes first.”<sup>100</sup>

Once these conditions have been manifested in this age (regardless of where the church is, for Paul’s teaching is not one that concerns the disposition of the church but the termination of this age), then we can be sure that the Final Judgment is at hand!

This was meant to let the Thessalonians know that they were not on the cusp of the Final Judgment because this man of sin and this great rebellion had not yet come to pass.

Paul was telling them that if they were seeing these things come to pass, then they would have some cause for concern, but since these things had not yet happened, they can be assured that the Rapture had not occurred, and the Judgment had not occurred. Therefore, they did not need to despair, fearing that the Lord Jesus had left them to fend for themselves into eternity.

So a few things will surely happen before the Day of the Lord.

One is something here called “the rebellion.” In other versions, this

---

100. “We have a protasis which is generally completed with some such phrase as ‘the day of the Lord will not come (be present)’. Recently Giblin ... has challenged this and argued that the missing clause should be something like, ‘the judgement [sic] of God will not have been executed against the powers of deception, removing them once and for all’, or ‘the Lord will not have come in judgement [sic] to end definitely the deception that is the work of Satan’. The time element would then become relatively unimportant and Paul would be dealing with the ‘*qualitative*’ (Giblin’s italics) aspects of the parousia relevant to the end of a process hostile to faith, viz., divine vindication against the embodiment of the antithesis to faith’ ... We may agree with Giblin that Paul is normally more interested in the conditions that are required for the parousia than the chronological sequence of events which herald its arrival (in 1 Th. 5:1ff the image of the thief in the night implies lack of interest as to dating) yet the context created by v. 2c is such that any answer must include a strong temporal element. Paul’s readers could not be expected to see that he is answering a question other than that which lies in v. 2c unless he made this explicit. We therefore assume that the anacoluthon of vv. 3f is to be completed with a recasting of the words of v. 2c, viz., ‘the day of the Lord will not be present.’” Ernest Best, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, Black’s New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 1986), 280–281. See also Ellingworth and Nida, *Thessalonians*, 162.

is variously referred to as “the falling away” (NKJV), “the apostasy” (NASB), and “a great rebellion” (NLT).

The Greek term used here is ἀποστασία which holds within its range of meaning, “defiance of established system or authority, rebellion, abandonment, breach of faith”<sup>101</sup> and “to rise up in open defiance of authority, with the presumed intention to overthrow it or to act in complete opposition to its demands—‘to rebel against, to revolt, to engage in insurrection, rebellion.’”<sup>102</sup>

Inasmuch as rebellion, political instability, and revolt are common on the world stage, we expect that this rebellion and apostasy will be so significant that it will be clearly linked to the approaching Day of the Lord.

Just as Paul here writes to the Thessalonians, “Let no one deceive you in any way,” Jesus taught:

*See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, “I am the Christ,” and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come (Mat 24:4–14).*

Jesus teaches that when we see instability in our fallen creation, we are not to be alarmed because these things must come to pass. However, as

---

101. Arndt, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 120.

102. Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 495.

Christ says, “the end is not yet.”

We also see that because of this lawlessness, this rebellion, this falling away, the love of many (presumably Christians) will grow cold.

So we find here a warning to be careful not to allow the things which precede the coming of the Lord to extinguish our love, and yet we can be sure that this will undoubtedly be the case for vast swaths of one-time believers.

On the heels of this rebellion, or perhaps in conjunction with it, will be the coming (the revealing of) the man of lawlessness.<sup>103</sup>

Now, the trick with this man of lawlessness is that he will seem to be an answer to all of the upheaval and rebellion.

At various times throughout history, the church has equated this man of sin with various charismatic political figures, including Antiochus IV Epiphanes,<sup>104</sup> Caligula, Nero, Domitian, any number of popes, Adolf Hitler, and Josef Stalin. Whenever people see supreme evil in the world, we can easily fit that person into the role of Antichrist. But we must also acknowledge that this person will appear attractive at first glance as a “peacemaker.”<sup>105</sup>

Daniel tells us that “he shall make a strong covenant with many” (Dan 9:27).

---

103. In other translations called “the man of sin.”

104. It is my belief in agreement with JFB that, “The words used there as to Antiochus Epiphanes, Paul implies, shall even be more applicable to the man of sin, who is the New Testament actual Antichrist.” So then, this pre-Christ figure which afflicted the Jewish community serves as the Type to be fulfilled by the Antichrist. Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory*, 396.

105. “It is also suggested that Paul has in mind the unfulfilled order of Emperor Caligula in A.D. 40 that a statue of himself be erected for worship in the temple at Jerusalem. Perhaps so, but Daniel’s prophecy concerning the abomination of desolation (9:27; 11:31; 12:11), the desecration of the temple by Antiochus Epiphanes in 168 B.C., and Jesus’ allusion to a still future abomination of desolation (see the references above) provide the primary background for Paul’s statements.” Gundry, *Survey of the New Testament*, 402–403. See also Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1103.

**And –**

“He shall seduce with flattery those who violate the covenant” (Dan 11:32).

What is certain is that this will be a person who is opposed to Christ, probably subversively at first and then eventually more brazen, even demanding that he be worshiped as God.

We must bear in mind that part of the concept associated with “Antichrist” is that this person presents himself as a type of alternative Christ and will show himself to be a type of messiah figure. That’s what makes the deception and his coming so wicked.

JFB notes, “Contrast the King ... Jesus: (1) righteous or just; (2) having salvation; (3) lowly; whereas Antichrist is: (1) the man of (the embodiment of) sin; (2) the son of perdition; (3) exalting himself above all that is worshipped.”<sup>106</sup>

Appealing to the words of Christ: “For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect” (Mat 24:24).

“This evil figure will demand worship of himself in the temple of God. That is, he will try to force people to worship his image, which he will place in the Jewish temple at Jerusalem (compare Mark 13:14; Matthew 24:15; Revelation 13:1–18).”<sup>107</sup>

So there are a few actions that this man of sin will do that will make him unmistakable!

Finally, as we conclude this section, Paul asks the church a rhetorical question to be further explored in the following material.

---

106. Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory*, 396.

107. Gundry also suggests an alternative interpretation, not without merit, that “since elsewhere Paul calls Christians the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16–17; 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:21), the antichrist will arise as a self-deifying apostate within the church.” Gundry, *Survey of the New Testament*, 402.



---

*V. 5 Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?*

This lets us know that Paul had already instructed the church in these things. So by extension, as part of the Apostolic teaching to the first church, they warrant careful consideration and examination in our age as well.

However, what is troubling is that Paul's question indicates that even though he had instructed the church in these matters, it appears that they (being babes in the faith) were quickly moved from what they had been taught.

We should never be afraid to seek the truth. But that doesn't appear to have been what was going on at Thessalonica.

Paul doesn't accuse them of being overly academic or rigorous in their examination of eschatology. His concern is that they are giving in too easily to bad teaching, overly spiritual extra-biblical declarations about the last times, and false writing on his behalf! What a shame!

And so the encouragement for us is to stand firm and stick to what we know and are certain of because we do know a few things about the last days. And as we consider those things, we are to consider our blessed hope in Christ.

We long for His soon return; we do not dread it! We are to remain anchored in our faith, unshakeable in our service, persistent in our preaching and teaching, and gracious in our love for one another.

And, with the Lord's help, we shall stand fast until He comes again.

## 2 THESS 2 PT. 2 VV. 6–12

AS WE CONTINUE IN OUR TEXT, WE ARE PRESENTED WITH A FEW more details regarding the end times, specifically concerning the revealing of the “man of lawlessness.”

Paul attempts to jog the memory of the Thessalonians regarding some past teaching that we do not have direct access to but can make inferences about.

Making these inferences is certainly achievable by piecing together (systematizing) various portions of Scripture that concern eschatology.

And many wise saints have made great progress in doing just that thing.

But if we are being completely honest on a personal, individual level, we must be willing to admit that those portions of Scripture that we rely on to develop our carefully knit-together chronologies of the end times are a little fuzzy at various points. This has led to various interpretations of the same material over the past two millennia.

Verse 6 serves as a perfect example of the type of opacity that we all must wrestle with and ultimately become comfortable with.

---

*V. 6 And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time.*

What is plain from the text is that in Paul’s mind, the Thessalonian saints

already understood what he was talking about without him needing to explicitly write about this material again in great detail.

Refer back to v. 5 and see why this is the case. Paul writes, “Do you not remember that when I was still with you, I told you these things?”

So we know then that part of Paul’s oral instruction to the church related to the last days and was probably more detailed than what is recorded in this portion of 2 Thessalonians.

Here’s what is troubling to us with this text. While we infer that the Thessalonian church already knew of Paul’s teaching on the end times, it doesn’t seem that they were too secure in that teaching given the fact that Paul found it necessary to write to them these corrective notes.

Even though he had faithfully taught them about the end times, the church had drifted into unstable territory that shook their faith and polluted their conduct.

We get the sense from 2 Thessalonians 2:2 that they were the victims of fantastical, aberrant, potentially heretical end-times teaching from false teachers.

Paul sought to stabilize their doctrine by reminding them to hold fast to the true things that he had already taught them (ref. 2 Thess 2:3).

The message to not be deceived, stand fast, and hold onto good doctrine is a timeless message for saints of every generation (2 Tim 3:14; 2:2).

This also reminds us that we should be very careful when attempting to make doctrinal assertions from silence.

Allow me to demonstrate.

V. 6 tells us that the Thessalonians were already aware of what was restraining the revealing of the man of lawlessness (Antichrist). However, the text is explicitly silent on what that restraining power actually is.

During our study of such material, we may be sorely tempted to fill in the blanks because we are uncomfortable with uncertainty and silence. So then, if we are not careful, we can errantly supply a wrong answer for the portions of Scripture that are silent or ambiguous.

This isn’t necessarily done with evil intentions (although it could be).

The reality is that, for better or worse, we each have an interpretive perspective from which we approach the Scriptures. I had an old boss one time who used to say, “What you see depends on where you sit.”

That perspective is shaped by a lot of things, not the least of which is how deeply and broadly we have studied the rest of the Scriptures.<sup>108</sup>

To use a rough illustration: “The computer industry popularized a basic truth, immortalized in the acronym, GIGO – “garbage in, garbage out.” That is, what you get out depends on what you put in. This principle is certainly true in interpretation. The aims and presuppositions of interpreters govern and even determine their interpretations.”<sup>109</sup>

So if we haven’t studied the topic deeply enough, or broadly enough, or long enough, we can wind up filling the silent, opaque parts of Scripture with shallow, skewed, or downright erroneous possibilities.

If we’re not careful, we can wind up being neurotically consumed with deciphering an infinite number of future probabilities because we aren’t familiar with the certainties of Scripture.

**And** we embrace the idea that the plain things are the main things. The certain things in Scripture are what we can bank on, what we can be assured of, and what are glaringly obvious!

Now, in an attempt to answer the silence of Paul’s statement that the Thessalonians were already aware of what was restraining the revealing of the Antichrist, we know that throughout the ages, some very sharp theologians have proposed several possibilities.

Gene Green summarizes the main competing views throughout church history on what this restraining power might be:

*The suggestions ... are legion, including God himself (possibly in the person of the Holy Spirit), the Roman Empire and the emperor, the rule of*

---

108. For a good treatment of Presupposition and Pre-Understandings in Biblical interpretation, see Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Biblical Interpretation*, 210–242.

109. Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Biblical Interpretation*, 210.

*law and government in general, or the preaching of the gospel and the apostle Paul himself (note that in Mark 13:10 Jesus stated that the end would come only after the gospel was preached to the nations).<sup>110</sup>*

Each of these views holds a bit of merit and each has been questioned by champions of the other views.

There is also the possibility that the restraining power that Paul writes about is a combination of these views.<sup>111</sup>

---

***V. 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.***

Now hear this, Oh, Christians! The mystery of lawlessness leading to the end has been at work since the first church!

The church has lived, and battled, and endured under the mystery of lawlessness from the beginning!

We should not be surprised as though some strange thing has come upon us (1 Peter 4:12)! The Apostle did not write that this would happen two thousand years in the future, but that it was already at work in their age! And so it is for us as well!

And yet, for these millennia, God has set as His purpose to restrain the final termination of this age in His patience (2 Peter 3:3–9).

The early churches were repeatedly warned that in their lifetime, they would have to deal with false prophets, false christs, and antichrists. We need this message, too!

---

110. Green, *Thessalonians*, 314–315.

111. “The decisive issue for understanding this verse, as we have seen, revolves around the interpretation of the neuter participle κατέχων. Whatever conclusion we arrive at must account for the shift to the masculine participle of the same verb in v. 7. The simplest solution and the one making the best sense of the grammar is to take κατέχειν as meaning ‘to hold sway,’ ‘to rule,’ or ‘to prevail.’” Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 253.

The Apostle John wrote very plainly: “Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come.” (1 John 2:18)

**And –**

“Every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already” (1 John 4:3).

Now, as we think about these things, please consider that we can only know so much or comprehend so much. See here in v. 7 how these events are described as a mystery.

And when that term is used in the NT, it carries with it an idea of limited knowledge. In this particular usage, the term mystery holds within its meaning “that which transcends normal understanding.”<sup>112</sup>

So as much as we desire to be experts in this subject, certain facets of the subject will evade us for the present, and that is by God’s own design.

This shouldn’t be unsettling or surprising to us. There are portions of prophetic understanding and revelation that God has kept reserved for Himself and intentionally kept back for His own purposes – even concerning the Antichrist (Rev 10:1–4; Dan 8:26–27; 12:4, 8–9).

Paul writes to the Corinthians: “For we know in part and we prophesy in part” (1 Cor 13:9).

Multiple times in Daniel, the prophet himself says, “I did not understand,” concerning the visions that the Lord gave him. And after Daniel says these things, God replies to him, “Go your way, Daniel, for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end.”

**And** God says this to Daniel rather than explaining exactly what the visions mean, leaving the reader struggling to figure something out that the prophet himself didn’t understand and that God felt unnecessary to interpret!

But then we read in Daniel, “None of the wicked shall understand, but

---

112. μυστήριον Arndt, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 662.

those who are wise shall understand” (Dan 12:10). I would suggest to you that this too is a great mystery.

Admittedly, we are not wise enough to decipher these things on our own. Certainly, none of us would claim to be wiser or more understanding than Daniel! And what’s clear from God’s response to Daniel is that these things will become clear as they unfold.

This is how we take Paul’s meaning of the term mystery. We can know some things, but not everything. **And** as these things occur, by the help of the Holy Spirit and the certainty of God’s Word, those who are present to see these things come to pass will be able to discern what is happening.

Appealing again to Paul’s letter to the Corinthians: “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known” (1 Cor 13:12).

---

***V. 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.***

We see that the Antichrist, called “the lawless one,” will be revealed. That much is a certainty, it shall come to pass, and what else is certain is his destruction by Christ Himself (Daniel 7:11; Isa 11:4).

Paul doesn’t leave the Thessalonians to despair. He comments that Jesus Christ will destroy and kill the Antichrist by the breath of His mouth. We should take this to mean His words (Rev 19:15).

We can take comfort in Christ’s universal and supreme authority! There will not be a great struggle between the fraudulent christ and the one true resurrected Christ! Jesus’ very words and appearing are enough to destroy this impostor.

JFB notes: “Antichrist’s manifestation and destruction are declared in the same breath; at his greatest height he is nearest his fall.”<sup>113</sup>

---

113. Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory*, 397.

This figure will be completely wicked, evil, destructive; as we saw earlier, he will oppose God and demand that he be worshiped himself.

**But** are we supposed to read these two happenings as simultaneous?

Will Jesus immediately destroy the “man of sin” once he is revealed?

All signs point to no. This figure will have a period of time to rule and reign on the earth before Jesus executes His final judgment (2 Thess 2:3).

So then in v. 8, we see an example of what we call prophetic foreshortening, when the speaker or author presents two future events without any sense of intervening time between the events themselves.

Many believe that the reign of this man will coincide with the seven-year Great Tribulation (Rev 13:5).

But the main thrust of v. 8 isn’t the timing of these things. It is the oppositional nature of two supernatural appearances, one appearance for the man of sin and one for the Man of Righteousness.

The man of sin or lawlessness will be revealed in due time and put himself forward as a type of Christ, claiming that he is worthy of worship. But he is a counterfeit, a deceiver, destined for destruction at the coming of the one true Christ.

What’s more, we are taught here that Jesus will bring his work, his appearance, to nothing by His own appearing! So we ought not fear! The Lord Jesus, our Redeemer, is still very much in authority and will remain so throughout the last days.

Some people have in their minds this cosmic battle between good and evil. Some people even believe that the forces of evil, led by Satan and his workers, can even overcome the Lord Jesus. That is just not true – in a final sense! (Rev 13:5–8)

Their work shall amount to nothing!



---

*Vv. 9–10 The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.*

One of the defining marks that clearly reveals this person to be **the** Antichrist, and not simply **an** Antichrist, is that he and his workers will deceive many people through various signs and wonders.<sup>114</sup>

Notice again the spirit of this fraudulent christ. He is the one who presents himself as authoritative because of various signs and wonders and yet is wholly opposed to the true Christ.

That's why we can't place our faith in signs and wonders. They are no guarantee of orthodoxy or alignment with the Spirit of God. As we see here, signs and wonders will be part and parcel of the earthly deception perpetrated by the Antichrist in the last days.

We also see here that those who will be susceptible to this deception share a common trait with all those in human history who have rejected God; they refused to love the truth.

So then, we must understand that the key criteria lending itself to being deceived in the last times is refusing to love the truth.

What is the truth? This question has plagued humanity since the beginning. Jesus gives us the answer in John 14:6. "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'"

Take heart, Christian, you who love the truth. You are held by the grace of Jesus Christ, and He shall never let you go! Do not fear, but pray for endurance and trust in the faithfulness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is not a coincidence that Paul wrote by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit: "For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love

---

114. Cf. Rev 13.

of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:38–39).

---

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

Finally, those who reject the truth and love the darkness rather than the light will be once and for all given over to their sin.

This wretched condition has been the result of rejecting the truth throughout the ages!

This was the message of the OT prophets<sup>115</sup> “My God will reject them because they have not listened to him; they shall be wanderers among the nations” (Hos 9:17).

We also see a NT principle expressed by Paul to the Romans:

*For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen” (Rom 1:21–25).*

In a final sense, this results in an alignment with evil personified in the person and work of the Antichrist directly opposed to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

So then, this poor wretched group of humans who reject the gospel

---

115. 2 Kings 17:15; Hosea 9:17; Jeremiah 6:30 – just to name a few!

will turn to a false gospel.

Remember, gospel means good news. And what does this Antichrist bring but his own version of good news? He will speak against God and all things holy, proclaiming that he can save, he can deliver, and he deserves the adoration and love of humanity over and above God.

For those who find themselves in the Great Tribulation, the revealing of the Man of Lawlessness will certainly sound like good news! **But** it is a lie!

D. Michael Martin notes: “God’s act of sending a ‘powerful delusion’ to ‘those who are perishing’ is the result of their choice to reject the truth. Once the truth is rejected, the only alternative is to trust in that which is false. By refusing to receive the truth (v. 10) and then choosing to ‘believe the lie’ (v. 11), unbelievers compound their culpability.”<sup>116</sup>

Here, we see why it is so important to be anchored in the truth! Not the relative truth that has grown increasingly popular. Not the truth that we fabricate in our own hearts to absolve ourselves of guilt. But the certain Word of Truth, embodied in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

By knowing Jesus Christ, the Word of Truth, we can discern deception and counterfeit messiahs when we see them!

Know Jesus, loved one! Know Him for certain. Watch and pray and do not be deceived!

---

116. Martin, 1, 2 *Thessalonians*, 247.

## 2 THESS 2 PT. 3 VV. 13–17

---

*v. 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.*

Verse 13 begins with the contrastive conjunction “but,” recognizing a contrast in the lives of the Thessalonians compared with the fearful expectation of judgment for those who reject the gospel.<sup>117</sup>

Since 1:5, Paul has been (somewhat obliquely) addressing concerns that the church had regarding the last days, paying special attention to workers of iniquity – the “man of lawlessness” and those who reject the gospel.

So now in verse 13, Paul pivots to discuss the blessed hope of the saints. They are not appointed to a final fearful condemnation. Rather, they are different, called to a different purpose, and for that very reason, Paul is moved to thanksgiving.

Notice that the beginning of v.13 is in fact a very close parallel to 1:3 which reads: “We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers.”<sup>118</sup>

---

117. For various other interpretations regarding this conjunction, see Wana-maker, *Thessalonians*, 265.

118. Although in the Greek text the word order is different, the meaning is the same. GNT – 1:3 “Εὐχαριστεῖν ὀφείλομεν τῷ θεῷ πάντοτε περὶ ὑμῶν, ἀδελφοί”; 2:13 “Ἡμεῖς δὲ ὀφείλομεν εὐχαριστεῖν τῷ θεῷ πάντοτε περὶ ὑμῶν, ἀδελφοί.”

Let's not be confused about the main thrust of Paul's letter to the Thessalonians; it is not intended to answer all of their (our) eschatological questions but to encourage, exhort, and instruct a dearly loved church, which brings Paul sincere joy.<sup>119</sup>

We can also take hold of the idea for ourselves that we as believers can have unanswered questions about the last days and still be of great service in Christ's Kingdom. And mercy of all mercies, we can rejoice over Christians who are indecisive about those eschatological details that sometimes evade us or who disagree with us.

Paul was certainly joyful for the growing faith and increasing love of this church (ref. 1:3), even though it appears that they didn't have all of their end-times theology worked out very neatly.

Paul's gratitude here is directly related to the work of God among the Thessalonian saints.<sup>120</sup> His prayer of thanksgiving presents to us the mystery of election in God's love and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in connection with the faith of those who are being saved.

This all speaks of God's divine initiative as He intervenes in the lives of sinful human beings precisely because of His love! Furthermore, Paul lets the church know that the result of being chosen by God and brought into His Kingdom is that the Holy Spirit will work in us to bring about our sanctification and holiness.

This leads us to the theologically significant term sanctification.

Sanctification is an important concept for believers to understand. Whereas *justification* speaks to one's right standing in God's eyes based

---

119. Out of the 47 total verses in the letter, I would argue that only 17 verses deal explicitly with the last days (1:6–10; 2:1–12).

120. We must recognize here one theologically significant term that bears on our faith – εὐχαριστέω (the inflected form used in this verse is the infinitive εὐχαριστεῖν which has an imperfective (continual) aspect. This term is where we derive the term eucharist, which is often associated with the ordinance of communion. Unfortunately, many Protestant Christians have shunned this term because of its historic association with the Roman Catholic church. But we should not fear to use God's own words, inspired by the Holy Spirit, in our own tongue.

upon Christ's righteousness, *sanctification* speaks to the continual journey in which Jesus-followers partake at the hands of the Holy Spirit, the fruit of which is holiness in our lives.

The Westminster Confession of Faith treats sanctification in this manner: "They, who are once effectually called, and regenerated, having a new heart, and a new spirit created in them, are further sanctified, really and personally, through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection, by his Word and Spirit dwelling in them.... This sanctification is throughout ... the whole man; yet imperfect in this life, there abiding still some remnants of corruption in every part; whence ariseth a continual and irreconcilable war, the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.... In which war, although the remaining corruption, for a time, may much prevail; yet, through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part doth overcome; and so, the saints grow in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."<sup>121</sup>

Remember that in Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, he wrote to them: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification (1 Thess 4:3).

This reminds us that while so many of us believe God's will in our lives to be shrouded in mystery, we do see moments of clarity in the Scriptures that point us in the right direction. Nothing could be more clear for **every** believer – God's will for us is our sanctification! We should be growing in holiness, putting away sin and wickedness from our conduct, mouths, hearts, and minds. That work is not born out of our own power or our own initiative, but since we are chosen *in* Christ, then He is working *in* us by His Holy Spirit. The result of such work is that we who are being sanctified will naturally bear the fruit of righteousness in our lives.

Now, on this point, some may ask, "Why am I not growing in sanctification?" Or, "Why don't I feel compelled to mortify the flesh and the lusts thereof" (Rom 8:13, Col 3:5)? "Why am I okay living in lukewarm squalor" (Rev 3:16)?

---

121. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1186.

Or for those who call themselves Jesus-followers but don't bear any marks of it, who seem perfectly happy abusing the grace of our Lord, we have some serious questions about salvation! We look at those kinds of people, perhaps our own selves, and wonder, Is there any sanctifying work going on there?

Remember Paul's words to the Roman church: "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace (Rom 6:12–14)."

Remember, loved ones, you tell a tree by the fruit that it bears (Matt 7:15–20).

Now, please understand that this teaching is not intended to turn us into professional "sin-sniffers" trying to decide who is saved and who is not, but to turn the mirror on ourselves for some serious reflection and ask, Is the Spirit of the living God having His way in our lives? Are we becoming more like Christ? Or are we still living as Christ's enemy even though we profess to love Him (Matt 7:3–5)?

Crucify the flesh, loved one! Let the Spirit have His way! As Paul wrote: "[T]hose who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit" (Gal 5:24–25).

If we allow the Spirit to reign in our lives, we can be sure that He will work out holiness in them! If we insist on placing ourselves above the Holy Spirit and on obstructing His sanctifying work, then we will surely find ourselves stalled in discipleship, spiritual disciplines, holiness, and sanctification. Our hearts will grow harder and harder until they become so calcified that it will take a monumental act of God to break them open again to become something moldable and usable, good soil that bears fruit unto Him (Matt 13:3–23).

---

*V. 14 To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Verse 14 is backward-looking. God called them (and calls us) to sanctification by the work of the Spirit through belief in the truth, which Paul explains is the gospel, the good news, that Christ has borne the wrath of God on Calvary's cross and has been resurrected forevermore by the power of God. He alone has the power to forgive sins, and He invites us to be forgiven and march toward *glorification*.

Wayne Grudem defines glorification as: "[T]he final step in the application of redemption. It will happen when Christ returns and raises from the dead the bodies of all believers for all time who have died, and reunites them with their souls, and changes the bodies of all believers who remain alive, thereby giving all believers at the same time perfect resurrection bodies like his own."<sup>122</sup>

As the Apostle John writes: "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 John 3:2–3 NKJV).

Or, as Paul writes to the Corinthians: "And as we have borne the image of the [man] of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly [Man]" (1 Cor 15:49 NKJV).

As we embrace the gospel, we are justified at our moment of faith and sanctified for the remainder of our lives as we follow Jesus into eternity, where we shall one day see our Lord face to face and share in His glory.

So we see here in Paul's writing the entire Christian existence laid out from justification, through sanctification, unto glorification.

Now take a moment to understand what is going on here. We are not made like Christ by our own works.

At the moment of true (salvific) belief in Christ (not merely a confes-

---

122. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 828.



sion, but a soul-changing moment), we are justified in the eyes of God (Eph 2:8–9).

We are then seen as righteous, robed in Christ’s righteousness. Then we spend the rest of our lives living out that righteousness (2 Cor 5:17, 21) until the Lord calls us home.

The beauty of this all is that we have been called to glory. Though the way be marked with suffering (Acts 14:22), we are ultimately called to the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That is a hopeful message!

---

***V. 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.***

Paul concludes this thought by giving them some practical instruction.

Since the Thessalonians have been called in God’s great love, since they believe in the gospel, since the Holy Spirit is sanctifying them, and since (in sanctification) they are headed toward the glory of Christ, there are some things that they must prove faithful in.

That includes standing firm, remaining faithful, and remaining true to the doctrines that the Apostles passed to the church as inspired by the Holy Spirit.

We would call this “the apostles’ doctrine” or “the apostles’ teachings” (Acts 2:42).

Remember that part of what the Thessalonians were disturbed by in their infant state as disciples was bad, even fraudulent, teaching.

People were teaching crazy doctrines specifically with regard to the end times, and that caused quite a bit of instability in the church.

Be on guard Christian, that nonsense is still present in our age!

Later on in the pastoral epistles, Paul will give a laundry list of things for Timothy to be watchful for as bad doctrine continued to seep into the church.

*Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth (1 Tim 4:1–3).*

### **And–**

*For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths (2 Tim 4:3–4).*

So as you can see, the church has contended with misinformation, lies, insincerity, and warped teaching from the beginning. Paul even warned the elders of the Ephesian church: “I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them” (Act 20:29–30).

Be careful what you give your attention to! Do not be deceived! Hold fast to what we have received, what has been guarded for us, what is certain, and what is true. Do not be dragged into careless speculations, which give birth to heresy!

Understand that what makes a heresy so attractive is how close it sounds to the truth while perverting the character of God!

Heresies don’t come packaged with a big red warning label that says: This lie is from the pit of hell! They come neatly packaged with enticing anecdotes, grammatical loopholes, and perhaps most dangerous of all – “new revelation.” It is all false! Cling to the certain gospel of Jesus Christ! Cling to the Word of God like your very life depends on it!

One scholar writes, “It is a curious fact about Christianity that it is the

only major religion where many of [our] paid, full-time priests, prelates, and professors spend much time and energy trying to show that it is false and should be totally changed or perhaps even abandoned. Buddhists do not do this; neither do Hindus. Muslims certainly do not, or if they do, they do not live long. This shows ... that the religion of Scripture, historic, biblical Christianity, is obnoxious to the Prince of Darkness, so that he makes a point of tempting the professors and priests of Christianity to undermine their own doctrines.”<sup>123</sup>

Be a Berean! Search the Scriptures daily and try to discern if what you are being taught is true or not (Acts 17:11). If it is doubtful or not Scripturally plain, then note that teaching as such. If it is heretical and a twisting of Scripture, then note it as such and be plain in your assessment! If it is true and good and holy, then set your mind and heart upon it!

**And** before being led astray to major in the minors in our search, we must remember the blessed Apostle’s own personal devotion as an example: “And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God (1 Cor 2:1–5).

---

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

---

123. <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/heresy-in-the-early-church> accessed Apr 10, 2022.

As we arrive at verse 16, we come upon a benediction of sorts.<sup>124</sup> These are typically found toward the end of the letters, but this placement makes perfect sense.

Paul is about to change the topic again and start discussing some very practical matters with the Thessalonians in chapter 3, including how Christians ought to work diligently and not be idle (potentially caused by bad end-times doctrine creeping into the church).

**But** consider that the verses we have discussed have been decidedly theological in nature, discussing themes of election, sanctification, calling in the gospel, and the certainty of good doctrine.

All of that is juxtaposed against themes of the last days, a great apostasy, the Antichrist, and the final judgment of unbelievers. All of that is certainly enough to cause a spiritual stirring or even unsettling! Especially since the Thessalonians are being confronted in this letter with their own seeming gullibility after having capitulated to bad doctrine.

So now we see a tender reassurance from Paul to these dearly loved saints.

Paul reminds them that the Lord Jesus Himself<sup>125</sup> in unity with God our Father (we are in the family of God!) gives us an eternal comfort.

The comfort we receive from God is not momentary or fleeting; it is everlasting.

We also see that one of the gifts that God gives us is good hope. That is a lovely little term – good hope. It reinforces the idea that the hope that comes from God is sure to satisfy, and there is no grain of false hope, manipulation, or negative intent in His hope.

We also see that these things are provided to us through God's grace!

When we think of grace, we often limit that to salvation. Yes, we certainly receive salvation by God's grace.

But we also receive so much more in our salvation, including comfort and good hope!

---

124. Sometimes called a "wish-prayer" by other commentators.

125. An emphatic use of the pronoun αὐτός.

We are not saved by God's grace so that we might live in despair like some neurotic "Chicken Little" crying out, "The sky is falling."

We are a people of grace, and hope, and eternal comfort! So then, as the Spirit sanctifies us, let us learn to display those marks of our Lord!

Finally, having considered all of these things, we see the Lord Himself will continue to comfort their hearts and establish them in every good work and word.

Even as Paul called the church to stand firm in v. 15, he lets them know that Jesus will cause them to do so, He will establish them and comfort them in times of uncertainty. He will cause them to bear fruit by the work of their hands and by the words on their lips.

And **that** is glorious.

We do not need to fear or fret about the last days, bad teaching, or anything like that. Instead, as we hold fast to the certain Word of God, we can be sure that Christ is holding on to us.

## 2 THESS 3 PT. 1 VV. 1–9

---

*Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith. But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.*

The opening verse of this chapter informs us that Paul and company are concluding this letter to the church with instructions regarding life as a Jesus-follower.

Paul has concluded his previous instructions and will now teach on how those instructions bear upon the life of each and every Thessalonian believer, an application that we can certainly bring forward into our own time.

Notably, Paul begins these final instructions by issuing the imperative, the command, that the church should pray for them, noting his specific needs.

While we know this and embrace the imperative to pray for one another and for our church leaders, we must take a moment to reflect upon Paul's requests. In this instance, Paul does not request prayer for physical provision,<sup>126</sup> but rather he anchors his need for prayer in the ongoing

---

126. This is certainly necessary – Matt 6:11, 25–26, 31–32.

work of the ministry – a great necessity for all of us!

And, what's more, when we consider those things that we spend our time praying for, we come face to face with our own value system!

If we are consistently praying for physical satisfaction, more and more stuff, then we know where our hearts are.

However, if we are continually petitioning the Lord for the advancement of His Kingdom, then we know that our hearts are anchored in the Kingdom. This may be a simplification of the matter, but the point stands.

Certainly, it is good and right to pray, "Give us our daily bread," but let us first pray, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt 6:7–13).

Paul's prayer request is specifically for the advancement of the Kingdom, the advancement of the gospel, and that the unconverted, those outside of the Kingdom, would not only receive the gospel of Jesus Christ unto eternal life but that the gospel would be further glorified (honored).<sup>127</sup>

For Paul, this is not simply a remote possibility. He has seen this very thing come to pass in the lives of the Thessalonians themselves. They had received the gospel, and it was glorified in their lives and their church (eschatological questions notwithstanding).

So then Paul has every good hope and belief that as long as the gospel speeds<sup>128</sup> forward, lives will be changed, and Christ will be glorified. That is our blessed hope, too!

Furthermore, Paul understands that there will be opposition as long as the gospel is preached and the Kingdom is advanced.

Remember what Peter wrote: "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Pet 5:8).

---

127. δοξάζω "to cause to have splendid greatness, clothe in splendor, glorify." Arndt, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 258.

128. τρέχω "to proceed quickly and without restraint, progress." Arndt, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1015.

Christ's church is not unassailed nor guaranteed an easy existence free from attack! We have a very real adversary seeking to obfuscate the gospel at every turn.

We certainly understand that to be the case in our age! But this has been the condition from ages past.

Paul is mindful of the challenges of ministry, praying that they might be delivered from their adversary's agents – wicked and evil men (Matt 6:13).

It appears as well that Paul is implying that some of these men are in the church by noting that “not all have faith.” The condition of faithlessness is something we expect from unbelievers, often by their own admission, but we need to know that this is the case within the church as well (2 Cor 11:26; Gal 2:4).

Some of Satan's most effective campaigns to suppress the gospel have come from within the church, even behind the pulpit!

**But** we serve a greater God, a faithful God, who is able to deliver us from those wicked schemes and advance His gospel in the face of opposition. Never give up! Never stop proclaiming the good news of salvation regardless of those who oppose the message, however dear the cost may be.

The Lord is ever faithful to establish and keep His church from the evil one. The gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Matt 16:18).

---

*Vv. 4–5 And we have confidence in the Lord about you, that you are doing and will do the things that we command. May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.*

Verses 4 and 5 are quite lovely, considering everything Paul has written so far.

Remember that this church was very, very young. The time that Paul



and company were able to spend with them was very limited, and yet Paul asserted his confidence in the **obedience** of the church.

That is a tricky term to preach about – **obedience**.

We live in a uniquely individualistic society, in a post-modern and post-truth society. So to be obedient is something we don't even expect from our pets anymore, much less human beings.

The notion that the Scriptures command obedience from God's people tends to rub us the wrong way because we are tainted by the society that we move among.

Nevertheless, a simple word search for the term "obey" in the Scriptures is enough to keep any Bible scholar occupied for quite some time.

*Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you (Heb 13:17).*

This is all predicated upon the message of the preacher. What is being obeyed? Simple – the Word of God.

The ideal conduct of the church leader is found in 1 Peter:

*So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (1 Pet 5:1–5).*

So then, we expect the message of elders and pastors to be totally synchronized with a right, orthodox, historically faithful interpretation of the Bible and totally in sync with the heart of Jesus.

The fact that the Thessalonians could be depended upon for taking seriously what they were being taught and the commands of the apostles was a great credit to them.

As they grew through that obedience and in that obedience, Paul understood that their hearts would, in fact, benefit from being directed toward the love of God (that is part of the work of a pastor) and that they would grow in their “capacity to hold out or bear up in the face of difficulty,”<sup>129</sup> as first exemplified by the Lord Jesus.

Paul’s confidence regarding this matter is not founded upon anything other than their position in the Lord Jesus.

Loved ones, we must grasp this concept. Any love, obedience, consistency, faithfulness, commitment, or any good thing we have is from Christ and found in Him. Any stalwart heart we hope to have in our own discipleship must be found in Him.

Many believers walk around half-zombified in their discipleship, carrying a lot of guilt, and wondering why they seem to have stalled in their relationship with the Lord.

Some of us wonder whether or not we will ever be able to break out of our stupor. The answer is – only in the Lord and only by His own steadfastness.<sup>130</sup>

Wake up, oh sleeper! It is possible, but we must first admit we have no

---

129. ὑπομονή Arndt, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1039.

130. “In light of τοῦ θεοῦ being subjective genitive, it seems probable that τοῦ Χριστοῦ should also be rendered as subjective genitive. Once this possibility is accepted it is still necessary to interpret the meaning of ‘the perseverance of Christ’.... Either it refers to taking Christ’s perseverance as an example ...or accepting the perseverance that comes from Christ (cf. Rom. 15:4f.).... Thus Paul’s wish-prayer is for the Lord to direct the readers’ hearts to God’s love for them and to the perseverance which Christ demonstrated as a basis for encouraging what Paul considers proper Christian behavior.” Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 279.

strength of our own, and we must fall entirely on the grace and faithfulness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

---

*V. 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.*

Verse 6 arrives at a timely place in this chapter. Right after Paul has commended the church for their blessed obedience and his own confidence that they will continue to carry out those things that he instructs them, he lays a command on them!

It's almost as if Paul is saying, "Since you have been obedient and faithful, then you must continue doing so."

Perhaps this sounds familiar: "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil 2:12).

Now, what Paul commands them to do is totally in line biblically and totally in sync with Jesus' heart.

He does not command them to blindly heap unwarranted acts of devotion upon him or anything bizarre that some of our modern era church leaders have demanded of their congregations, all under the guise of "Christian obedience."

What Paul commands the church is actually for their own betterment! Namely to stay away from any "brother" who is walking in idleness.

This means that the Thessalonians were to take note of those claiming to be Christians but who behaved "in defiance of good order."<sup>131</sup> In this particular context, another nuance of this term is "freeloading."

So now, the whole of Paul's letter comes to bear upon this command.

---

131. ἀτάκτως Arndt, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 148.

Paul has previously instructed the church on the second coming of Christ, the Great Apostasy, the revealing of the man of lawlessness, and the Final Judgment. What does all of that have to do with these final commands to keep away from Christians who are freeloaders?

Well, it is believed that in Thessalonica, there were a number of believers who had fallen prey to bad end-times teaching and had quit their jobs and were essentially leeching off of the kindness and generosity of the church.

Paul says in no uncertain terms that is not acceptable. So then, we can embrace the truth that our hopeful expectation for the return of Christ ought not cause anyone named a Christian to bring disrepute on His name or His church through disorderly conduct, laziness, or shirking our responsibilities. Rather our conduct in all spheres of life should glorify (3:1) the gospel and the name of our Lord!

We also find that this was part of the apostolic teaching to the churches. It is good and right for them to labor with their own hands and thereby provide for their families. Not only was this instructed to them by letter and by oral instruction but also by way of example.

*And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure (1 Cor 4:12 NKJV).*

*But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God [which was] with me (1 Cor 15:10 NKJV).*

So essentially what was happening among this small band of disorderly believers was that they were ignoring apostolic instruction. And **that** is a mark of the disorderly believer in our day as well!

Notice that the authority Paul appeals to is not his own but that of the Lord Jesus Christ. “We command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

This isn’t about what’s best for Paul. This is about the glory of the

Lord Jesus Christ and the building up of Christ's bride, the church.

Certainly, this would have been a tricky topic to navigate practically. Confronting those who have already proven to be disorderly within the church is never an easy process, but it is necessary to maintain peace, keep the name of Christ from being needlessly defamed, and protect the body as a whole.

As Paul writes, "A little leaven leavens the whole lump" (1 Cor 5:6; Gal 5:9).

---

*Vv. 7–9 For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, 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. It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate.*

Here now, Paul appeals to his own personal example. I love this about Paul. It reminds us that Paul wasn't just a bunch of hot air. He was singularly committed to the ministry no matter what it cost him.

Paul was one of the very first bi-vocational pastors of the NT church.

Nowadays, if a pastor is bi-vocational, people believe that means they are in part-time ministry, which is miles away from the truth.

Some people even look down their noses at bi-vocational pastors.

Every bi-vocational pastor with the same heart and zeal for the Lord that Paul had truly has two full-time jobs, not to mention family obligations. Laboring night and day is a common condition for the committed bi-vocational pastor.

And we all share Paul's sentiment: "I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God [which was] with me."

Paul lays that out for us here, first reminding them of how he lived and labored among them, not only in the Word and spiritual matters but also in his "tent-making" jobs.

We get that term from the understanding that Paul's vocation was that of a tentmaker (Acts 18:3).

Notice that Paul reminds the church that he did this as an act of leading by example because he did, in fact, have the right to refrain from his tent-making job and be cared for by the church.

As Paul instructs the Corinthians: "If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more? Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel (1 Cor 9:11–14).

For Paul, interacting with this very new church, keeping their best interests in mind, deferring his own pay, and even paying them for the bread that he ate were more important to him than getting a paycheck.

His focus was on building them up, setting them on their feet, and pointing them to Jesus. And there is a lesson here for us. Again, what we prioritize reveals our value system, just as we discussed with prayer.

Paul didn't beat the church up about getting paid, about how they needed to give more so he could quit his job. Instead, he labored more abundantly, giving completely of himself and his own goods to serve the body of Christ. And in so doing, he modeled the way of Jesus, who gave Himself for our sakes.

Christ's example of perseverance, zeal, diligent laboring, and endurance in hardship should be enough to banish any idleness among the saints. Look to the example of Jesus! "Who, being the Son of God, persevered and gave all for our sakes" (2 Cor 8:9).

There is no Scriptural example of idleness or disorderly conduct that Christians can embrace as exemplary. What we have is the example of Christ, who gave His entire self for our sake. What we have is the apos-

tolic tradition and example, men who gave their entire selves for the sake of the Lord Jesus and His bride.

Let us then be of the same mind, laboring more abundantly in every aspect of our lives for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ and the furtherance of the gospel.

## 2 THESS 3 PT. 2 VV. 10–18

---

*Vv. 10–12 For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.*

Remember that in the previous verses, Paul presented himself as an example of good conduct when it comes to laboring hard for the gospel's sake so that he might not be a burden to anyone at the church.

Paul presents himself as an example to be followed in other letters as well.

Twice in First Corinthians Paul writes to that rag-tag band of disciples:

*I urge you, then, be imitators of me (1 Cor 4:16).*

**And –**

*Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ (1 Cor 11:1).*

In our minds, Paul shines as a unique example of the ideal Christian



(although he was certainly aware of his own flaws).<sup>132</sup> When we examine Paul's commands to others, whole churches, to follow after his example, even as he does here with the Thessalonians, we recoil at the thought of doing likewise.

It is not necessarily the following part that bothers us. Many are happy to follow Jesus (although with varying degrees of commitment).

It is the calling out to others to follow after our pattern of conduct, to follow us as we follow Jesus, that we resist. That example is what most of us feel uniquely unqualified to offer. And yet, there is a lesson for us here in calling others to follow the way of Jesus with our whole hearts.

There is a lesson for us here in calling others to follow us as we follow Jesus in our brokenness and imperfection, for that is where we learn of grace and the strength of Jesus that upholds us when we don't look like shining examples of sanctification.

Paul offered his whole life as an example of service and building up the churches, not because of who he was, but because He had encountered the risen Lord Jesus Christ and was confident of who Christ was.

That's what allowed Paul to issue these commands. Paul wasn't some sort of megalomaniac, in love with himself and trying to create a cult unto himself. He understood that the authority that He held as an apostle wasn't intrinsic in Himself but was from the source of the ultimate authority, the Lord Jesus, who calls people to Himself not out of a desire for authoritarian dominance but to raise the dead to life unto His own glory and our sanctification.

That is why we take these little things in Scripture so seriously – because they matter! After all, we believe that all Scripture is God-breathed (2 Tim 3:16), and so it does bear on our everyday lives.

So then Paul reminds them of the teaching they had received while he was among them – that church is a place of order and that its members are expected to walk in good order and labor to earn their own bread

---

132. See Romans 7; 1 Cor 15:8–9; Gal 1:13–15; 1 Tim 1:15.

rather than giving themselves over to idleness.<sup>133</sup> (Remember the potential cause for their idleness as discussed previously.)

This also reminds us that the teaching within the church was then, and ought to be now, quite broad in scope even as it is aligned with the Scriptures.

Here's what I mean. While present with the Thessalonians, Paul spent some time teaching them about the end times (2 Thess 2:5).

**But** he also taught them repeatedly about practical Christian living<sup>134</sup>

The beauty of the systematic exposition of Scripture is that we can just let God's Word speak for itself if we would allow it to and would just get our own selves out of the way and declare the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27).

The whole counsel of God, all of Scripture, speaks into every aspect of our lives, and so it is here as well.

The church **needs** to know about the end times insofar as we are per-

---

133. "The command given over and again to the church was, "If a man will not work, he shall not eat." The necessity of working formed part of the ethical tradition of the church (cf. Eph. 4:28; 1 Thess. 4:11–12), finding its roots both in the OT (see Gen. 3:17–19; Ps. 128:2; Prov. 10:4; 12:11; 19:15) and in Jewish literature (e.g., *Gen. Rab.* 2.2, "If I do not work, I have nothing to eat"). The same idea appears in Greek literature (Phaedrus, *Fabulae* 4.25.17, "You don't work? For this reason you don't have anything when you need it") as well as in later Christian instruction (*Did.* 12:1–5). The *Didache* says that if a traveler comes, the church may help him for a few days, "And if he wishes to settle among you and has a craft, let him work for his bread" (12:3). The church should reject anyone who is unwilling to work (12:4). Russell has argued that the root of the problem was the situation of the urban poor who could not find adequate work in the cities.<sup>46</sup> But the circumstance in this church was rather that the "idle" did not want to work (*ou thelei*, "Anyone *unwilling* to work should not eat," *NRSV*). The apostle reminds the congregation that they were not under any obligation to sustain such people, and even commanded them not to feed them." Green, *Thessalonians*, 349–350.

134. The phrase rendered "we would ... command" in the ESV is one Greek word, *παρηγγέλλομεν* (*parangelomen*), it is found in the imperfect tense and holds a continuous aspect. Another way to translate this could be: "we were commanding you...." Note, the idea of continuous action.

mitted by the Word of God. AND the church **needs** to know how to live a life that glorifies God, both collectively and individually.

We believe, in unity with the first church, that the Lord is coming soon!

**And** we believe that until He does, we ought to be about our Father's business, earning our keep and walking orderly to be good and faithful servants, so that the world might see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven (Matt 5:16).

Now, please note that in 2 Thessalonians 3:6, Paul's command is to the church body – "keep away from any brother that is walking in idleness."

Here in v.12, Paul's command is to the offender, the one walking in idleness. Notice that this person is supposedly a Christian, a believer. So then, that person is still within the sphere of Paul's apostolic authority.

This reminds us that we don't always have it altogether. There are times when we need to be corrected, to be reconciled to one another, and to let God's Word and God's Spirit have their way in our lives if we desire to remain as part of the Body of Christ.

Part of maintaining right fellowship with other believers is the responsibility we have toward one another.

The church, the holy bride of Christ, has a sacred responsibility to keep itself from endorsing or participating in the sin and disorderly conduct of those who claim the name Christian without bearing any of the fruit that ought to be there (1 Cor 5:7)!

The disorderly brother or sister, walking in idleness, has the duty to respond to the call to repentance and the exhortation of Scripture and be reconciled to their spiritual kin.

Take note that the responsibilities that believers have toward one another in Jesus Christ are quite significant and differ from how we are to relate to unbelievers.

Paul addresses this in 1 Cor 5.

*I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and*

*swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you” (1 Cor 5:9–13).*

We, the church, have an amazing, shared responsibility toward one another and the Lord. Perhaps the most majestic description of this is found in 1 Peter.

*As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Pet 2:4–5).*

So then, how we respond in times of turmoil and occasions for sin among our spiritual brothers and sisters matters. The Word **commands** us how we ought to live, **and** the Word **encourages** us in how we ought to live.

Notice that Paul issues more than a command to those walking in idleness. As you might expect, those found in such a state would naturally have a difficult time accepting any type of command, given that they are already walking in the flesh, so he offers encouragement, too.

This is where we often fail as a church regarding what we call church discipline. The pendulum regarding church discipline has swung widely over the centuries. At times, the church has embraced the commands while ignoring the encouragement.

And at times, we have ignored the commands altogether in favor of encouragement. But the two go together. Let us then endeavor to strike the balance presented to us, to be clear about what the Scriptures command,

to take those commands seriously, **and** to encourage those who need to be encouraged with our hearts set on maintaining the unity of the Spirit, and the bonds of affection, with the church.

---

***V. 13 As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good.***

It can be wearisome to deal with these matters and bring wayward believers back into order, but here Paul encourages the church at large to maintain their vigor.

This idea of not growing weary while doing good is also repeated in Paul's letters.

As it turns out, the churches all need a bit of the same medicine.

Paul's instructions to the Galatians bear significantly on the current topic of idleness among church members and the need for correction:

*For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.*

***And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.*** *So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith (Gal 6:8–10, emphasis added).*

We need to hear these words over and over and over. As the ages pass on and the saints look to the coming of Christ, we need to be reminded not to grow weary. And this we shall do with the Lord's help.

---

***Vv. 14–15 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. Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.***

In v. 14, it's almost as if Paul can sense the potential reaction of those to whom he has given special instructions. As Paul calls the wayward saint back to the Word, back to the gospel, and back to an exemplary life, there is the risk of protest or outright hostility.

In which case, Paul says, cut them loose. Notice that Paul does not teach violence against them. He doesn't command the church to burn them at the stake, assault them, or stone them (as he himself had previously done against the church), but to keep away from them.

This, too, is a theme in Paul's letters carried forward from the gospel of Matthew (Matt 15:17; 1 Cor 5:1–5; 1 Tim 1:20).

The way the church has approached this topic of excommunication has been greatly abused for many and various reasons throughout church history to consolidate power, to silence dissenters (even though they may be right), to allow those in power to continue to teach false doctrine, to gather filthy lucre, etc.

**But** Paul tells the church to temper their response and not regard this person walking in idleness as an enemy but warn him as a brother, a dear family member.

In these times, we must rely on the grace and mercy of our Lord, remembering that we ourselves are broken people, and it was grace that spoke to us loudest in the midst of our sin.

Poignantly Mark Dever writes about Biblical church discipline:

*Without hesitation, we should all admit our need for discipline, for shaping. None of us are perfect, finished projects. We may need to be inspired, nurtured, or healed; we may need to be corrected, challenged, or even broken. Whatever the particular method of cure, let's at least admit the need for discipline. Let's not pretend or presume that we are just as we should be, as if God had finished his work with us. Once we have come to that admission, however, we should notice that discipline is often positive, or as it is traditionally called, "formative." It is the stake that helps the tree grow in the right direction, the braces on the teeth, the extra set of wheels*

*on the bicycle.... We're to practice church discipline because, with humility and love, we want to see good come*<sup>135</sup>

---

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

We find here Paul's benediction to the Thessalonians.

Verse 16 is particularly important given Paul's corrective instructions to the church.

Although the believers have had to contend with aberrant end-times doctrine and are facing the challenge of correcting the disorderly among them, Paul prays for the peace of the church.

Paul knows that the church needs peace. And that desperately needed peace comes from one source, the Lord Himself.

We can depend on the peace of Christ to fill our lives and our churches.

We admit that the peace of Christ is unfathomable. It surpasses all understanding (Phil 4:7), and we need it so badly.

It is good and right to be anchored in the peace of Christ at all times, in every way, perhaps **especially** when we are facing difficult circumstances within the church.

In such difficult situations, we are often the victims of our own frantic over-reactions and over-correction.

We can be lured into conflict and sorely tempted to exert our own will and dominance over others, all in the name of Jesus. But we must resist, hold fast to the peace of Christ, and endeavor to be people of peace to the fullest extent that Christ provides His peace to us.

---

135. Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

---

*V. 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.*

See here the mark of authenticity.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:2, Paul warned the church against forgeries written in his name. Of particular interest to the church was that those forgeries contained misinformation that spread wildly among them concerning the return of Christ and the final judgment. Unfortunately, this is a hazard for our age as well!

But Paul reminds them to look for the seal of authenticity, his own signature, so that they might know the true Word when they saw it.

The same is true for us. Many, *many* platforms compete for our attention, offering up aberrant doctrines and arguments over various Christian-sounding words, etymologies, and hypotheses about how what we see with our own eyes doesn't really mean what it appears to say.

But we look for the seal of authenticity. We want to know what the Bible says about such things.<sup>136</sup>

Do these clever forgeries and rogue “teachers” go beyond the text, wandering into speculation and probabilities rather than holding fast to the certain Word of God? Do they seek to sow discord, doubt, and uncertainty rather than building up the saints in those things that are certain? Then those things and teachers are to be rejected.

Remember that the plain things are the main things.

---

*V. 18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.*

As is typical with Paul's letters, he ends where he began – with the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess 1:2). I never tire of reminding the saints of this. As we have begun in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, let us

---

136. 1 Cor 16:21; Gal 6:11; 1 Tim 1:4, 4:7, 6:20; 2 Tim 2:23; Tit 3:9; 2 Peter 2:1.



likewise finish in it. For it is by grace that you have been saved (Eph 2:8). So then walk in grace from beginning to end and encourage one another to continue in the grace that we have received.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.