

DIGGING DEEPER
1 THESSALONIANS



Digging

Deeper

1 Thessalonians

Study Guide

Acknowledgments

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Table of Contents

1 THESSALONIANS *Verse By Verse*

Chapter	Page
1	2
2	15
3	28
4	35
5	47

8/4/26
Revision 2

1 THESSALONIANS

Chapter 1

PAUL COMMENDS THE FAITH OF THE THESSALONIAN BELIEVERS—1:1-10

Paul and his companions arrived in Thessalonica in the early summer of AD 49. They planted the first Christian church in that city but had to leave in a hurry because their lives were threatened (**Acts 17:1-10**). At the first opportunity, Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to see how the new believers were doing. Timothy returned with good news: The Christians in Thessalonica were remaining firm in the faith and were unified; however, they did have some questions about their new faith. Paul did not have time to answer all their questions during his brief visit, and in the meantime, other questions had come to mind. Paul wrote this letter to provide some answers and to commend them on their faithfulness to Christ.

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1.

- Paul began this letter by introducing three men well known to the Thessalonian church—Paul, Silas, and Timothy. Paul (also known as Saul) was the head of this missionary team and key writer of this letter. Paul was first mentioned in Scripture consenting to the stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr: “***Saul approved of their killing him***” (**Acts 8:1**). Paul was a Jew from the tribe of Benjamin educated under Gamaliel, a well-known teacher of the day (**Acts 22:3**).
- Paul was also a Roman citizen, which was a great help to him (**Acts 22:27-29**). After Stephen’s death, Saul went on a vigorous campaign to wipe out Christianity: “***As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering***

every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison” (Acts 8:3). But God had other plans for this zealous Jew: throwing him from his horse on his way to Damascus and revealing to him that Jesus truly was the Messiah (**Acts 9:1-6**). Saul’s natural zeal and passion were redirected toward the gospel message, as God had chosen him for a special mission: *“[Saul] is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15)*

- Silas, or Silvanus, was a prophet (**Acts 15:32**) who was held in high esteem by the Jerusalem church. Silas accompanied Paul on his second missionary journey (**Acts 15:36-17:15**) and helped him establish the church in Thessalonica (**Acts 17:1-9**). Silas was one of the men chosen to deliver the important letter from the Jerusalem Council to the church in Antioch regarding Gentile inclusion in the church (**Acts 15:22**). He is mentioned by Paul in the salutation of both letters to the Thessalonians (here and in **2 Thessalonians 1:1**), and he ministered with Timothy in Corinth (**2 Corinthians 1:19**).
- Timothy, the young Christian, joined Paul and Silas during Paul’s second missionary journey. Paul and Barnabas had visited Timothy’s hometown Lystra on the first missionary journey (**Acts 14:8-21**). At that time, Paul met Timothy, his mother Eunice, and Timothy’s grandmother Lois (who had previously become Christians). When Paul and Silas returned there on the second missionary journey, Paul invited Timothy to join them. *“Timothy was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium” (Acts 16:2).* Timothy traveled the empire with Paul, preaching and teaching, as well as serving as Paul’s assistant and sometimes as his emissary (**3:2; Acts 19:22; 1 Corinthians 4:17; Philippians 2:19**).

Timothy and Silas also served together, staying behind to teach the believers while Paul moved on to unevangelized cities (**Acts 17:14-15; 18:5**). At one point, Timothy, like Paul, was imprisoned for his teaching (**Hebrews 13:23**).

- In many of Paul's letters, he introduced himself as "an apostle" (**Romans 1:1; 1 Corinthians 1:1; Galatians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1**), but not in the letters to the churches at Thessalonica. This may indicate that the relationship between Paul and the Thessalonians was strong and they were not doubting his apostleship (as was occurring in other places due to the infiltration of false teachers). Paul wrote letters to various churches to defend his message and ministry, but he did not do so in these letters to the Thessalonians. These are letters of encouragement and affirmation.
- Paul and Silas had evangelized the city of Thessalonica. The account in the book of Acts describes the preaching of Paul and Silas in that city and the conversion of "***a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women***" (**Acts 17:4**). Most likely, these godly Greeks were Gentiles who had become converts to Judaism and had believed in the one true God. From these people came the converts to Christianity. Envious and angry Jewish leaders watched many from their synagogue follow Jesus Christ. When a riot broke out, Paul and Silas left under cover of darkness. The Acts account mentions "three Sabbaths" during which Paul preached in the synagogue (**Acts 17:2**), but Paul probably was there for much longer than three weeks (a time period that occurred between **Acts 17:4** and **17:5**). He had to have been there long enough to do everything mentioned in this letter, such as work at his trade (2:7-9), win converts, instruct new believers in the Christian life (4:1-2), and form a strong bond of love with the believers (2:17-20).

- Paul's letter to the Philippians indicates that he was in Thessalonica long enough to receive financial help "more than once" from the Philippians (**Philippians 4:16**).
- Paul wrote to the "church" in Thessalonica. The Greek word for church is *ekklesia*, meaning "called-out ones;" these people were part of the called-out ones in Thessalonica who were *in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ*. This set them apart from all the other assemblies that may have been meeting in Thessalonica. This *ekklesia* was a community of believers who were positioned in "God the Father" and Jesus Christ their "Lord" (or Messiah). Not only were they positioned in Christ, but they were also abiding in Christ. They were a group united by their faith, set apart from a sinful world, and because of their co-crucifixion with Christ, were eager to live out their Christianity despite persecution and an immoral culture.
- Letters at this time often would begin by identifying the author, then the recipients, followed by a greeting of peace. "Grace" means God's unmerited favor; "peace" refers to not only the peace that Christ made between believers and God through His death on the cross (**Romans 5:1**), but also "peace from God" (**Romans 1:7**), as well as the peace of God (**Colossians 3:15**). In these two words of greeting Paul combined expressions from Jewish and Gentile cultures. Jews wished each other "peace" (*eirene* or the Hebrew *Shalom*); Gentiles wished each other "grace" (*charis*). Christ offers grace in the form of every good gift that comes down from God (**James 1:17**); He offers peace that is an inner calm no matter what the outward circumstances (**Philippians 4:7**). It would be good to also ponder **Isaiah 26:3**.

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:2.

- Paul told the Thessalonians, a young church facing persecution, that he and the other missionaries always

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

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:3.

- The Thessalonian believers had stood firm when persecuted (1:6; 3:1-4, 7-8). Paul commended these young Christians for their “***work of faith, labor of love and patience of hope***.” He and his companions continually remembered these qualities “***in sight of our God and Father***.” These qualities might characterize any hardworking group of people, so Paul described what he knew was the motivation behind their work, labor, and endurance. It was *faith, hope, and love*. These three qualities are foundational to Christian character (**1 Corinthians 13:13**).
- “***Work of faith***” could also be called “faith works.” The Thessalonians’ work had been produced by faith. Paul made it clear that believers are saved by faith alone (**Ephesians 2:9**), but true biblical faith will produce good works in the life of each believer (**Romans 1:5**).
- “***Labor of love***” could be called “love labors.” Because of His love, believers labor. The Greek word translated “labor” is *kopos*, meaning toil and hardship. The Greek word translated “love” is *agape*, a self-sacrificing love. The believers were willing to give of themselves (even if it meant hardship) in service to others. Only God’s kind of love could prompt such willing labor. **2 Corinthians 5:14** states, “***The love of Christ constrains***

(compels) us. Christ's love for us compels, controls, and motivates us to love and good deeds." Thus, the Thessalonians love had been prompted by Christ's love.

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

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:4.

- Paul, Silas, and Timothy could resolutely say to the believers in Thessalonica (their brothers and sisters beloved by God), "***We know...that he has chosen you.***"
- Regarding the subject of election and free will, let's take a close look at the terms used in Scripture. The word "election" is defined as a sovereign divine purpose that is totally independent of human merit. The word is used of Israel (**Isaiah 65:9, 22**) of the church (**Romans 8:33; Colossians 3:12; 2 Timothy 2:10; 1 Thessalonians 1:4; 1 Peter 5:13**) and of Christ (**Isaiah 42:1; 1 Peter 2:6**). "Chosen" is a synonym of the word "election." Like election, the term is applied to Israel (**Isaiah 44:1**)

and to the church (**Ephesians 1:4; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 2:9**), and is also used of the apostles (**John 6:70; 13:18; Acts 1:2**).

- The doctrine of election presents problems, which are actually insolvable by the human mind. Divine selection is not limited only to God choosing who will receive eternal life because we see it everywhere in the universe. There is variety in everything God created. There are classifications among the angels. One star is bigger and brighter than another star. Men are not born of the same race with the same advantages, nor with the same abilities. Let's add this also—man's will has no part in any of this. Men do not choose their race or their life conditions, such as where they are born, whether they are rich or poor, healthy or sick, have a position of honor or dishonor. However, it is very important to remember that God's attitude toward every human being is one of compassion and love. Divine election and God's love cannot be reconciled within our human understanding; it is so important that we give God the first consideration. Any system of religious thought which suggests that God is limited by the thoughts, prayers, or actions of man is just plain foolishness. The order of truth is seen in the first phrase of the Bible: "***In the beginning God.***" It is God who planned, He executed, and it is He who will do His good pleasure (**Philippians 2:13; Hebrews 13:20, 21**).
- The true system of biblical thought begins with God, and man is conformed to the plan and purpose of his Creator, not the other way around. Something else for us to give some thought to is God is never obligated in the exercise of His grace. He chooses whomever He pleases (**Romans 9:20-21**). He sees absolutely no good in man which might form a basis for His blessings (**Romans 3:10-18**). One other thought to ponder is that Scripture makes it clear that man has not chosen God.

Jesus emphasized this in **John 15:16**. Even Adam before the fall and totally free to choose, did not choose God. If that is true, then I believe we can safely say that fallen man will not of himself choose God.

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:5.

- Paul and his companions had brought the message to Thessalonica. There were no believers when they arrived; when they left, a strong church had been planted. When Paul brought the gospel message to people, he spoke with words, and God used those words to ignite the Thessalonians to understand and believe that message. God has used Paul's words by enveloping them in divine power (**1 Corinthians 2:1-5; Ephesians 6:17-18**). Paul's words alone could not persuade anyone to believe or open a needy heart to hear the message. But his words combined with the power of the Holy Spirit to convince, convict, and convert the listeners could bring many to believe what Paul was saying and give their hearts and lives to Christ for salvation.
- Notice what Paul wrote, "***Our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance.***" So we can clearly see that when the gospel comes into the life of an individual, power comes with it, the Holy Spirit comes with it, and much assurance comes with it. The words "***much assurance***" or "***deep conviction***" refers to the profound conviction or assurance of those who brought the message; they were convicted and convinced of the truth of the gospel.
- Through the leading and power of the Holy Spirit, not only did they travel around the world to share the message, but they also lived every day in the power of that message. Paul continued: "***As you know what kind***

of men we were among you for your sake.” The last half of this verse points to Chapter 2 where Paul writes of his ministry with them. The Thessalonians could see what Paul, Silas, and Timothy were preaching was true because these men lived it. They demonstrated this by their willingness to face opposition, travel under difficult conditions, and work without being paid, while dealing with severe problems in the churches.

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:6.

- The message of salvation, though welcomed with great joy, brought the Thessalonian believers severe suffering because it led to persecution from both Jews and Gentiles (3:2-4; **Acts 17:5**). This was to be expected, however, for Jesus Himself had said, *“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. 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 keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me [...] Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you”* (John 15:18-21; 16:22).
- Jesus had told His disciples that because He suffered, they would also suffer. The disciples had already faced much suffering. Just before coming to Thessalonica, Paul and Silas had been beaten and imprisoned in Philippi (**Acts 16:16-40**). Paul faced “severe suffering” during much of his ministry (some of these sufferings are recorded in **2 Corinthians 11:16-33**). So when the

Thessalonian believers suffered for their faith, they were in good company. First Thessalonians 1:6 is the second reference to the Holy Spirit in two verses. The same Holy Spirit who gave power to the words of the gospel message also opened hearts to receive the message and then gave joy to the hearers. The Holy Spirit works in those presenting the message and those hearing and accepting it. He gives “joy” (**Galatians 5:22**).

- The New Testament places a strong emphasis on following the example of godly leaders. Jesus told his followers to learn from his example of gentleness, humility, and servant leadership: ***“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me”*** (**Mark 10:42-45**).
- Paul urged believers to follow him as he followed Christ: ***“Be followers together of me and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you”*** (**Philippians 3:17**). ***“Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me, put it into practice”*** (**Philippians 4:9**).
- The new Christians at Thessalonica received training in discipleship from Paul, and even in suffering, they modeled before others what they had learned: ***“You became followers of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia”*** (**1 Thessalonians 1:6-7**).
- Paul used his unworthiness to receive Christ as an example of grace so that no one would see themselves as too bad to be saved by Christ. ***“But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life”*** (**1 Timothy 1:16**).
- The writer of Hebrews wanted the believers to imitate

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

- Peter taught Christian leaders to lead by example, not by commands: ***“Not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:3).***

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:7-10.

- The Thessalonians had followed the example of the missionaries as the missionaries had followed the Lord himself (1:6), and they, in turn, had become examples to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. Paul praised this church because, not only were they model believers to an unbelieving world, but they were also examples to other believers. “Macedonia” and “Achaia” refers to the two provinces that made up Greece and the area where most of the new churches were concentrated. Paul went even further by writing that these Thessalonian believers had a worldwide reputation and were an example to all the other churches.
- So well-known was the Thessalonians’ faith that Paul did not need to speak of it to other believers, as they were all talking about it. Their faith was universally known, and so, apparently, was the kind of reception the Thessalonians had given to the missionaries. The other churches had heard how some in Thessalonica had turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God. They had turned from dead, worthless idols to serve the one “living and true God.” The idols, the Greek “gods,” were considered to be extremely powerful. The Thessalonians lived barely fifty miles

from Mount Olympus where the Greek gods were said to live. To turn from their many false idols to the one true God had caused upheaval in all areas of their lives. No wonder they faced persecution. In addition to turning toward and serving the Lord, the Thessalonians were waiting for the Second Coming when Jesus Christ, who rose from the dead, will return and take His followers to be with Him. Thus, He will rescue His children from “the coming wrath,” referring to when God will destroy all evil (**1 Thessalonians 5:9; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10**). This “coming wrath” has been a difficult concept for many to accept, yet it is a reality that God will indeed bring wrath upon a sinful world.

- Some scriptures to ponder:
 - *John 3:36: “All who believe in God’s Son have eternal life. Those who don’t obey the Son will never experience eternal life, but the wrath of God remains upon them.”*
 - *Romans 1:18: “God shows His anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who push the truth away from themselves.”*
 - *Romans 9:22: “God has every right to exercise His judgment and His power, but He also has the right to be very patient with those who are the objects of His judgment and are fit only for destruction.”*
 - *Revelation 11:18: “The nations were angry with You, but now the time of Your wrath has come. It is time to judge the dead and reward Your servants. You will reward Your prophets and Your holy people, all who fear Your name, from the least to the greatest. And You will destroy all who have caused destruction on the earth.”*
 - *Revelation 14:19: “The angel swung his sickle on the earth and loaded the grapes into the great winepress of God’s wrath.”*

- *Revelation 19:15-16: “From His mouth came a sharp sword, and with it he struck down the nations. He ruled them with an iron rod, and He trod the winepress of the fierce wrath of almighty God. On His robe and thigh was written this title: King of kings and Lord of lords.”*
- God’s wrath is a certainty; however, believers can trust in their Savior who rescues them. Paul emphasized Christ’s second coming throughout this book. Because the Thessalonian church was being persecuted, Paul encouraged them to look forward to the deliverance that Christ would bring. A believer’s hope is in the return of Jesus, the “great God and Savior” (**Titus 2:13**). Just as surely as Christ was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven, He will return (**Acts 1:11**).

1 THESSALONIANS

Chapter 2

PAUL REVIEWS HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE THESSALONIANS—2:1-20

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

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1.

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

persecution, and becoming an example to believers across the world. Lives had been changed. Paul and Silas's visit had not been a "failure."

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:2.

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

delegation to Berea to follow Paul and Silas in order to stir up trouble against them (**Acts 17:13**).

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:3.

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

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:4.

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

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:5.

- The accusers could say anything they wanted, but the believers in Thessalonica could attest to the fact that Paul and his fellow laborers had never used flattery. “Flattery” is saying kind words for selfish motives. Paul had no selfish motives in preaching the gospel. The Thessalonians knew Paul and his fellow missionaries had not put on a mask to cover up greed. Many false teachers traveled about the ancient world saying whatever an audience would pay to hear. Paul and Silas were not out for money, nor were they greedy for fame or self-exaltation. The Thessalonians knew these facts, but more important, God Himself was a witness of Paul and Silas’s motives and mission.

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:6.

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

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:7.

- The apostles included the eleven men Jesus called (without Judas Iscariot), plus others, including Paul himself (**Romans 1:1**), Matthias (**Acts 1:26**), Barnabas (**Acts 13:1-2; Galatians 2:9**), Jesus’ brother James (**Galatians 1:19**), Silas (**1 Thessalonians 2:6**), Andronicus, and Junia (**Romans 16:7**). As apostles, Paul and Silas certainly had a right to make some demands of the believers such as expecting a certain

amount of monetary help. Paul practiced a trade (tent making) so as not to be a burden to his listeners (**2 Thessalonians 3:7-10**). It was far more important to him that the gospel reach unbelievers, and he did not want anything to hinder it. In **1 Timothy 5:17-18**, Paul establishes the right for ministers to receive remuneration: “Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,’ and ‘The laborer is worthy of his wages.’” Instead of exercising their God-given authority as apostles, Paul and Silas were as gentle among the Thessalonian believers as a mother feeding and caring for her own children. Some traveling teachers may have come into various towns with superior high-minded attitudes, but this was not the case with God’s missionaries. They had come with the authority of the God of heaven, yet they had served among the people with the kind gentleness of a loving and nurturing mother.

- Paul expected the Thessalonians to treat each other this way also. In his instructions at the end of this letter, he wrote, “***See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all***” (5:15).

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:8.

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

faked. The Thessalonian believers knew first-hand how much Paul and Silas loved them.

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:9.

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

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:10.

- Again Paul appealed to what the Thessalonian believers knew about himself and Silas. The believers themselves were witnesses of how the missionaries had conducted themselves. Paul could not make these claims before the Thessalonians and before God if the claims were not true. The accusing Jews could say what they liked, but everyone knew Paul and Silas had conducted themselves in a holy, righteous, and blameless manner. A study of the three words is helpful. The word “holy” (*hosios*) refers to acting responsibly before Him. “Righteous” (*dikaios*) focuses on being justified, coming up to His standard.

“Blameless” (*amemptos*) points to conduct, being without reproach. This consistent example of right living surely affected the Thessalonians. If Paul and Silas had shared the gospel message but had lived carelessly, their message would have had little impact. But they preached through both their words and their lives (**Acts 20:20**).

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:11-12.

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

Today Jesus Christ reigns in the hearts of believers, but the kingdom will not be fully realized until all evil in the world is judged and removed. Then God will reveal both His kingdom and His glory to those who have been “called.”

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:13.

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

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:14.

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

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:15-16.

- Paul's most recent relationship with the Jews had been when he was persecuted in Philippi (**Acts 16:22-24**) and driven out of Thessalonica (**Acts 17:5-6, 10**). In Corinth, from which he was writing this letter to Thessalonica, he had been so insulted by the Jews that he said, ***"From now on I will go to the Gentiles"*** (**Acts 18:6**).
- Persecution did not surprise Paul, for Jesus Himself had warned that His followers would face just such animosity (**John 15:18**). The churches had grown to expect persecution from both hostile Jews and Gentiles. Paul would later write to Timothy, ***"Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution"*** (**2 Timothy 3:12**). Why were the Jews so hostile to Christianity? The Jewish people had a history of killing their own prophets. Jesus had said to the Jewish leaders of His day speaking of the past and predicting what they would do to His followers:
 - ***"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous [...] Therefore you are witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets [...] Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, who you murdered between the temple and the altar [...] 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!” (Matthew 23:29, 31, 34-35, 37)

- This is a brief history of Old Testament martyrdom. Abel was the first martyr (**Genesis 4**); Zechariah is the last mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, which ended with **2 Chronicles**. Zechariah is a classic example of a man of God who was killed by those who claimed to be God’s people (**2 Chronicles 24:20-21**). Despite the Jews’ constant watching for the arrival of their promised Messiah, they missed Him when he came, and even killed Him (**Matthew 27:25**). The Jewish leaders thought Jesus was a false prophet, and they didn’t want His teachings to spread, so they opposed all who preached about Him (**Acts 4:18**). The Jewish opposition to Christianity continued after Jesus’ death.
- These surely were difficult words for Paul, a Jew from birth, to write about his countrymen. In another letter Paul wrote, “*My heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved*” (**Romans 10:1**). Paul understood the Jews were God’s chosen people and many of them would come to salvation in Christ. He also knew, however, that many would reject the truth (**Romans 11**). This pained him greatly, especially when those Jews were attacking him outright.

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:17.

- The accusers had pointed out the sudden departure of the missionaries and the fact that they had not soon returned, implying that Paul and Silas had lied and were afraid to return. So Paul explained that the separation had not been desired (they did not separate themselves but were separated from the Thessalonians). The word “separated” is also translated “torn away.” In addition, while physically

separated, the missionaries kept the believers in their hearts. They had attempted to return and had an intense longing to be back in Thessalonica with the believers. The next verse explains why.

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:18.

- Far from being afraid to return, Paul and Silas desired greatly to return to Thessalonica. Paul's inclusion of his personal emphasis—“*certainly I, Paul, wanted to again and again*”—simply gave credence to what he had written in 2:17. Yet they could not return because Satan blocked them. Satan is real. He is called “the god of this age” (**2 Corinthians 4:4**) and “the ruler of the kingdom of the air (**Ephesians 2:2**). What exactly blocked Paul and Silas from returning to Thessalonica—opposition, illness, travel complications—is unknown. But somehow Paul credits Satan for keeping them away more than once. Paul had wanted again and again to return, but each time had been prevented; they were “blocked.” Spiritual warfare between Satan and God constantly exists. Satan actively works to keep people from accepting Christ, and he also works to hinder God's people from doing God's work. While God is more powerful than Satan and often intervenes and overrides, he does not always do so. However, God is sovereign and He has not created something that He cannot control. Satan can only hinder to the extent that God permits.

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20.

- With overflowing love for this young church, Paul asked a question and then answered it himself. The hope, joy, or crown in which Paul and Silas would be able to glory in the presence of the Lord would be the

Thessalonian believers. The word “hope” describes Paul’s confidence in Christ to work in these believers. The word “joy” pictures his own inner feelings when he will see them presented to the Lord. The “crown” pictures a victor’s wreath—the believers were like a victory crown, giving Paul joy in having “run the race” for their sakes (**Philippians 4:1**). One day we all will stand together before the Lord Jesus at his second coming. Paul imagined how he would rejoice with the believers who had come to faith through his ministry. The words “glory and joy” left no question about how Paul felt toward these new believers. His love for them welled over into praise to God and joy in partnering with God for bringing them the message of eternal life.

1 THESSALONIANS

Chapter 3

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

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

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:1-3.

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

Silas would stay in Athens while they sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to visit the believers. The word “alone” is plural in Greek: “we should stay here ourselves.” Paul and Silas stayed behind and sent Timothy.

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

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

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:4.

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

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:5.

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

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:6.

- Timothy had been sent to nurture the believers and also to find out how they were doing and to report back to

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

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:7-8.

- Paul's certain relief and joy at the good news from Thessalonica was because they had remained strong in the faith. Paul and Silas had continued to experience very difficult times of suffering, but this report of the Thessalonian's unwavering faith encouraged and inspired them with new life and renewed energy and vigor (**Romans 1:12**). Their efforts in Thessalonica had not been in vain (3:5). The believers were remaining strong in the Lord, and that was a great comfort. Believers' lives are bound up with one another. It should bring great joy to a believer's heart when he or she hears that another believer is standing firm in the faith despite difficulties.

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:9-10.

- Paul's main prayer concern for these believers was their faith. It brings great joy to a Christian to see another person come to faith in Christ and mature in that faith. Paul experienced this joy countless times. He thanked God for those in Thessalonica who had come to know Christ and had held strong in the faith. As mentioned before, Paul had been forced to leave while they were still immature believers with incomplete

knowledge. Yet they had held on to their faith despite opposition and persecution and had come through by God's grace. No wonder Paul thanked God! "***Before our God***" refers to the context of prayer. Paul earnestly prayed, night and day, or constantly (**1 Thessalonians 5:17**) for their continued growth. He also asked God to let him and his co-workers return to Thessalonica. Thus far, Satan had hindered them, but Satan's hindrances only happen with God's permission. So Paul asked God to allow them to go back to fill up anything that may still have been missing in their faith. Paul wanted to give them further teaching, move on to deeper truths, and help these believers mature in Christ.

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:11.

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

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:12.

- Paul wanted to return and he prayed to do so (3:11). No matter what happened, however, Paul knew that the church needed the Lord to sustain them. A great need for the church would be love among the believers, as opposed to disunity, factions, or disagreements. The church would need love to survive. Although Paul had received good news from Timothy of the

Thessalonians' love (3:6), he knew that love can always be strengthened and deepened through the Holy Spirit's work in the lives of the believers. So Paul prayed that the Lord would make the believers increase and abound in love for one another, and not just one another but for all. The word for "love," *agape*, describes the selfless love that comes from God. Such love looks out for the best interests of those loved (**2 Corinthians 12:15**)—caring for fellow believers and reaching out to unbelievers. Paul and his companions already "abounded" in this love for the Thessalonians, as seen in their willingness to face persecution to bring the Thessalonians the Good News.

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:13.

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

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

1 THESSALONIANS

Chapter 4

LIVE TO PLEASE GOD 4:1-12

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

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-2.

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

Thessalonian Christians had learned from Paul and Silas how to walk by faith, and now Paul encourages them to abound even more (Romans 10:17).

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5.

- The phrase, “*This is the will of God*” is a parallel passage to **1 Thessalonians 4:7**. God has called us to live a holy life, but as **1 Thessalonians 5:24** states, “*He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.*” Christianity is not a list of do’s and don’ts but a relationship in which believers are molded into the image of Christ as the Holy Spirit reproduces the life of Christ in us. Apparently, immorality was plaguing the church in Thessalonica, as it was plaguing the Roman Empire as a whole. The many idols worshiped across the empire often had an emphasis on sex; some temples even employed prostitutes for the pleasure of “worshippers.” In general, people regarded any kind of sexual activity as acceptable. It was quite common for a man not to limit his sexual relationship to his wife. Homosexuality was common. Incest was overlooked. Slaves were kept and used for sex. Of course, God’s standards are the opposite, and Paul taught abstinence from sexual immorality (**Romans 1:24-27**). This included any kind of illegitimate sexual intercourse or relationship outside of marriage. He forbade any homosexual activity. In Corinth some of the new Christians had been prostitutes, adulterers, or homosexuals. When they came to Christ out of such perversion, they were taught to alter their attitude toward sexual activity in this particular area and accept God’s standards which Paul was proclaiming. We live in a society similar to the one in which Paul lived and taught. Every kind of sexual activity, including violence and abuse of children, has become

commonplace. As Christians, we must uphold the sanctity of sexual purity within the marriage relationship (**1 Corinthians 6:13-20; 2 Corinthians 12:21**). Paul taught believers to control their bodies and live in holiness and honor, not in lustful passion as the pagans in their ignorance of God and His ways. We must keep in mind that self-control is a part of the fruit of the Spirit. Paul tells us in **Romans 7:15** that he did the things he did not want to do and that which he wanted to do he could not. However, Paul also taught that as we live in the truth of **Romans 6:6**, our co-crucifixion with Christ, the Holy Spirit holds the flesh in the place of death and produces self-control and ultimately holiness. Sex is to be kept within the context of marriage between a man and a woman and should be done in “holiness and honor, not in lustful passion.”

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:6.

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

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:7.

- The Greek word translated “called” is the same word Paul used in **Romans 8:30**: “*And those He predestined, He also called; those He called, He also justified; those He justified, He also glorified*”

(**Romans 9:24; 1 Thessalonians 2:11-12; 2 Thessalonians 2:14**). The verb means “to call forth” or “to summon.” Paul always made it clear that salvation was God’s initiative and that people are called to be His.

- Because it is a call from God (**1 Thessalonians 5:24**) by God’s limitless grace, each believer has wisdom, the power, and desire to resist temptation and to live as God desires. Our part is to believe.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:8.

- Clearly, to live an immoral life is to reject and sin against God (**Psalms 51:4**). God is the one who said that sex is for married people (a man and a woman) only. Anyone who refuses to live by this simple rule, who treats sexual sin lightly, is not disobeying human rules because human rules change (consider the change in “sexual rules” in the American culture over the last fifty years). Paul would later write to the believers in Corinth (another sexually immoral city), “***Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body***” (**1 Corinthians 6:18**). In **Galatians 5:22-23**, Paul describes the fruit of the Holy Spirit in believers’ lives. One part of that fruit is self-control, referring to mastery over sinful human desires and ability to show restraint. When we believers appropriate our co-crucifixion with Christ, the Holy Spirit gives to us the power and desire to follow God’s rules. The Holy Spirit brings out the best in us, not the worst.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:9.

- Paul told the Thessalonian believers that it was not necessary to exhort them to love one another, for it seems that they had learned that lesson from God

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

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:10.

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

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12.

- Another group of believers in the church needed some exhortation (**2 Thessalonians 3:11**). Apparently, some of the Thessalonian Christians had adopted a life of idleness, depending on others to supply their needs. This did not show love toward fellow believers, for these folks were taking advantage of others' hard work. The reason for their idleness is unknown; however, because a discussion of the Second Coming follows this section, these people may have decided that since Christ could return at any moment, they would just sit back, enjoy life, and wait. Or they may have genuinely thought they should spend all their time working to bring others to Christ, but financially they were being a drain on fellow believers and therefore were not loving them. It also appears these people were not quietly going about life, so Paul first exhorted them to focus their attention on leading a quiet life and minding their own business rather than meddling in other

people's affairs (**1 Thessalonians 5:14; 2 Thessalonians 3:11**). The exhortation, "***work with your own hands***" may have been distasteful because Greeks looked down on manual labor as fit only for slaves. Paul was a tent maker, however, and used his hard, manual labor as an example to all believers (2:9-11). Paul wanted the believers to be involved in honest labor so that they might win the respect of outsiders and so they would not be a burden to others (**1 Peter 2:12**). Those who work to support themselves are a positive witness, both outside and inside the church (**Ephesians 4:28**).

REMEMBER THE HOPE OF THE RESURRECTION—4:13-18

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

The rest of Chapter 4 and the beginning of Chapter 5 seem to be addressing several questions that had come from the church regarding the resurrection of believers and the Second Coming.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13.

- The phrase "***I do not want you to be ignorant***" is a phrase Paul used several times in his letters (**Romans**

1:13; 11:25; 1 Corinthians 10:1; 12:1; 2 Corinthians 1:8). These words draw attention to a topic of great importance. The question to Paul from the Thessalonian believers regarded those who have died. They had been taught that Christ would one day return and take His people to Himself.

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

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:14.

- Paul writes in **1 Corinthians 1:30**, "*of Him are you in Christ.*" God took us and placed us into Christ; our position is in Christ. When He went to the cross, positionally, we went to the cross; when He went to the grave, we went to the grave; when He came out of the grave, we came out of the grave and ascended into Heaven with Him; that is our position in Christ.

Believers can have hope in the Resurrection because of what happened to Jesus. Because Jesus died and rose again, we can also trust that those who have died are not lost but will be resurrected as well (**1 Corinthians 15:12-20**). Then God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him (that is, those who have died as believers). Christians who have died are presently with God and will come back with Jesus. They haven't missed out; in fact, they are enjoying God's presence. **2 Corinthians 5:8** and **Philippians 1:21-22** teach that believers are absent from the body and present with the Lord at death. The separation of loved ones due to death is only temporary, for those in Christ will be reunited forever. Christians are said to "fall asleep," while Jesus "died." Jesus took upon Himself the full force of death so that He could transform it into no more than "sleep" for His followers

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:15.

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

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:16.

- The Second Coming will occur in God's time. Christ the Lord Himself will descend from heaven, for that is where He has been since His resurrection and

ascension. The book of Acts describes Jesus' ascension in this way:

- *“Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven’” (Acts 1:9-11).*
- In his letters, Paul wrote about the Christians' waiting for Christ's return:
 - *“For our citizenship is in heaven from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 3:20).*
 - *“You turned to God [...] to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead” (1 Thessalonians 1:10).*
 - *“[God will] give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels” (2 Thessalonians 1:7).*
- Christ's return will be unmistakable. No one will miss it, for He will descend with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. Whether these are three different ways of referring to one sound, whether they happen simultaneously, or whether they happen in sequence is unknown. But these sounds will herald His return. The “shout” stands for “word of command” such as a military officer gives to his soldiers (**John 5:28-29**). The “voice of an archangel” is the voice of a powerful angel who stands before God. Clearly the angelic hosts will be taking part in this celebration of Christ's return to take His people home (**Mark 8:38**). A trumpet blast will usher in the new heaven and earth. The Jews would understand the

significance of this because trumpets were always blown to signal the start of great festivals and other extraordinary events (**Numbers 10:10**). No one will miss the Second Coming—not the dead, not the living. Then *“the dead in Christ will rise first.”* They will have a prominent place, for Jesus brings them with Him (4:14) as part of His second coming. Paul later wrote to the Corinthians, *“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”* (1 **Corinthians 15:51-52**). At that time, when the shout sounds, the angel speaks, and the trumpet blasts, Christ will return and the dead will rise out of the graves with their heavenly bodies.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:17.

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

give a definite picture of the taking of the believers from the earth; they will be “caught up” (“the Rapture”) and they will be with the Lord forever in heaven. There are three main views regarding the timing of the Rapture of the believers:

- Pre-tribulationists point to the period of Tribulation (described in Revelation) that occurs before the second coming of Christ and believe that the Rapture of the believers will occur before this time of Tribulation. This view sees the believers meeting Christ in the clouds but places His second coming to the earth at a later time.
- Mid-tribulationists say the Rapture will occur at the midpoint of the time period of Tribulation. The believers will be on earth for the first half of that time of Tribulation but then will be raptured and will escape the last half, which will be a time of intense suffering. This view also sees Christ’s second coming as a separate and later event.
- Post-tribulationists say the believers will remain on the earth during the time of Tribulation prior to Christ’s second coming. Then when Christ returns in the clouds, believers will be caught up to be with Him. Post-tribulationists place the rapture and Christ’s second coming at the same time.
- View #1 seems to be the most accurate, and this verse, 4:17, is a key verse for those who make the Rapture a distinct event from the return of Christ to reign (**John 14:1-3; 1 Corinthians 15:51-53; 2 Thessalonians 2:1**). Paul’s point was not to give his readers a timeline or a literal description of how all the end-times events would fit together. Instead, he wanted to reassure the Thessalonians that their fellow believers who had died would not miss out on Christ’s return and eternal kingdom.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:18.

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

1 THESSALONIANS

Chapter 5

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

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

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-2.

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

discussed His second coming and at one point had compared it to the coming of a thief: “*But of that day and hour no one knows, no even the angels of heaven, but My Father only [...] but know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect*” (Matthew 24:36; 43-44).

- Some have attempted to pinpoint dates or prove how certain present events fulfill prophecy. Jesus made it clear and Paul also mentioned that no one knows when Christ will return. It will be unexpected and in God’s time. Jesus predicted that before His return, many believers would be misled by false teachers claiming to have revelations from God (**Mark 13:5-6**). According to Scripture, the one clear sign of Christ’s return will be His unmistakable appearance in the clouds. This will be seen by all people (**Mark 13:26; Revelation 1:7**).

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:3.

- The comparison of Christ’s coming to a thief (5:1-2) reveals that it will be sudden and unexpected; the comparison of it to labor pains on a pregnant woman indicates that it will be unavoidable (**Mark 13:7-8**). Some who will not be waiting for Christ will think that everything is safe; they will be lulled into a false sense of peace and safety (**Jeremiah 6:14; 8:11; Ezekiel 13:10**). However, they will find themselves facing sudden destruction. This word “destruction” (*olethpos*) is also used in **2 Thessalonians 1:9** and refers to separation from God: “*These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.*” When Christ

returns, that will be the end; there will be no reprieves, no second chances, no escape. In order to be ready for the Second Coming, the Thessalonian believers may have thought it would only make sense to know when that coming would be. So Paul further explained that the Second Coming is certain and will be sudden and unavoidable.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:4-5.

- The believers in Thessalonica were not in darkness; that is, they were not ignorant of what was to occur. God has chosen not to tell His people everything about Christ's return, but we believers know all that we need to know. God has not left His people "in darkness" so that we will be totally surprised when Christ comes back. From the moment Christ ascended into heaven, the promise remained that someday, just as He went, He would return (**Acts 1:11**). For believers, that promise is not something to fear; instead, it is a promise of hope. Because believers are all children of light and children of the day, that return will be a time of great joy. The contrasts of "light" and "darkness" and "day" and "night" are often used in the Bible to describe the difference between good and evil, between God's people and the people of the world. **1 John 1:5** states that "*God is light and there is no darkness in Him at all.*" Light represents what is good, pure, true, holy, and reliable. Darkness represents what is sinful and evil. God is holy and true, and He alone can guide people out of the darkness of sin.
- Light is also related to truth; light exposes whatever exists, whether it is good or bad. In the dark, good and evil look alike; in the light, they can be clearly distinguished. Just as darkness cannot exist in the presence of light, sin cannot exist in the presence of a

holy God. “Children of light,” God’s children, have nothing to fear regarding the Second Coming.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:6-7.

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

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:8.

- People who belong to the day, the believers who are living in the “light” of God, have a whole different reason to be alive. Life is not about personal pleasure but about a deep abiding relationship with Christ and getting to know Him better. In this sinful world, the world of “darkness” and “night,” believers are different. To the Ephesians, Paul had written about their need to put on the full armor of God. We find this in **Ephesians 6:13-18**. In this passage Paul gives a full list of the armor: (1) Gird loins with truth; (2)

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

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

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10.

- In order to wear “*hope of salvation*” as a helmet (5:8), believers must know in what (or in whom) they are hoping. Christians’ hope lies secure because God is sovereign. He has made the decision and did not appoint His people to suffer wrath. Because God has ordained it this way, it is certain. God’s wrath is very real, and those who have refused His offer of forgiveness will indeed suffer God’s wrath (**Revelation 20:11-15**). God’s people will not face the condemnation that their sins deserve; instead, they will be the recipients of God’s grace and they will receive salvation because they have put their faith in Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross for the forgiveness of their sins.

This salvation was offered through our Lord Jesus Christ. He said, “***I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me***” (**John 14:6**). How did Jesus accomplish this? Through His death. Jesus, the sinless Son of God, died for us, died in the place of sinful humanity, to spare us from punishment. Now all are welcome to come to God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through His death, the promise was sealed. Christ’s sacrifice for sins was not an afterthought, not something God decided to do after the world had spun out of control. An all-knowing, eternal God set this plan in motion long before the world was created.

- “***[You know] that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God***” (1 Peter 1:18-21).
- Our hope rests secure whether we believers are awake or asleep at Christ’s return. Salvation is a certainty because the Christ who is coming is the same Christ who died for sinners. All believers, those who have died and those who are still alive, will live together with God in heaven. God has appointed this to come to pass, and no power can change His plan (**Revelation 21-22**).

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:11.

- The words “***edify one another***” repeat Paul’s words in 4:18. Despite persecution and their sorrow over fellow believers who had died, by God’s grace Christians have the privilege of encouraging one another about the

certainty of their future reunion with all believers who have gone on before (4:13-18) and the promise of eternal life through Jesus Christ (5:9-10). We ought always to build up each other in the faith (5:1-8).

PAUL'S FINAL INSTRUCTIONS—5:12-28

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12.

- Christians in the church are to show honor to those in leadership (**Hebrews 13:7, 17**). The word “honor” is also translated “respect.” These leaders in the Lord’s work are the elders and hold positions of leadership and responsibility. “Elder” simply means “older.” Both Greeks and Jews gave positions of great honor to wise older men, and the Christian church continued this pattern of leadership. Elders carried great responsibility and they were expected to be good examples. These men worked hard among the believers and deserved to be honored. Paul expressed a similar thought in his letter to Timothy: “*The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching*” (1 Timothy 5:17). The leadership structure in local churches began very early; as Paul planted a church and then moved on, he left behind an organized group of believers (**Acts 11:30; 14:23; 1 Timothy 4:14; Titus 1:5; James 5:14; 1 Peter 5:1**). Paul could not stay in each church, but he knew these new churches needed strong spiritual leadership to teach sound doctrine, help believers mature spiritually, and equip them to live for Jesus Christ despite opposition. **Acts 14:23** describes Paul and Barnabas’s return to some of the churches that they had planted for the purpose of organizing the church leadership.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:13.

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

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:14.

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

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

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:15.

- To a church under persecution, the command against retaliation is especially pertinent. No Christian should pay back wrong for wrong. Personal revenge and retaliation are clearly forbidden to those who call themselves followers of Christ. Jesus said, “***But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on the right cheek, turn the other to him also [...] But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse***

you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you” (Matthew 5:39, 44). To many Jews of Jesus’ day, these statements were offensive. Any Messiah who would turn the other cheek was not the military leader they wanted to lead a revolt against Rome. Because they were under Roman oppression, they wanted retaliation against their hated enemies. Instead, Jesus suggested a new, radical response to injustice. Instead of demanding rights, give them up freely! According to Jesus, it is more important to give mercy than to receive it. To the Romans, Paul had written: *“Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. Therefore ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:17-21).*

VENGEANCE, JUSTICE, OR GRACE

Most times in this world, we think that we just have two choices: either vengeance or justice. We often pride ourselves on not “getting even” (vengeance) because we know that vengeance is not the way for Christians. However, we do have “our rights” (justice).

If someone does something to me, I immediately want to get them back. This is a very pagan, uncivilized way to live which many of us seem to be going back to today—taking the law into our own hands. Often, this is a lose/lose situation—one is dead and the ends up on death row.

Moving from vengeance, there is a second option—justice. In America today, most of us pride ourselves on having “our rights.” We really enjoy blaming someone else; blame shifting goes all the way back to the Garden (Genesis 3:9-12). When something goes wrong, we may not want to get even, but we sure do know whose fault it is. If something is missing, we immediately think we know who took it. In the Old Testament, on the Day of Atonement, the blame was transferred to a “scapegoat” (**Leviticus 16:8-10**). We often use that term today in our justice system; however, it’s a win-lose situation. One wins and one loses; the idea is for the right one to win. However, in the book of Habakkuk, it speaks of justice being perverted (**Habakkuk 1:4**).

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

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

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

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16.

- The next three verses give three simple ingredients that believers ought to daily mix into their lives: joy, prayer, and thanks. When these three qualities are present, believers will be vibrant witnesses to a needy world. Paul counseled this persecuted church to rejoice always (**Philippians 3:1**). He had learned the secret of being joyful, even in the middle of great trial and suffering:
 - *“But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them” (Acts 16:25).*
 - *“And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance” (Romans 5:3).*
 - *“But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fasting; by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet*

always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things” (2 Corinthians 6:4-10).

- *“I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10).*
- *“I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church” (Colossians 1:24).*
- Paul had just encouraged the believers to love one another and now he writes “rejoice.” Interestingly, when Jesus spoke to His disciples about loving one another, He often talked to them about joy: *“As the Father has loved Me, so I have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love. I have said these things to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:9-13).*
- True joy transcends the rolling waves of circumstances. Joy comes from a deep abiding relationship with Jesus Christ. When believers’ lives are intertwined with Christ, the Holy Spirit will begin to reproduce the life of Christ in us, and we will be able to walk through adversity without sinking into debilitating lows and to manage prosperity without moving into deceptive highs. The joy of living with Jesus Christ daily will keep believers rejoicing “always.” They can rejoice because of their sure salvation and their future hope—even more because it is *“no longer I but Christ” (Galatians 2:20).* Nothing

that happens on this earth can compare with the glory that awaits God's people. Believers are not required to conjure up this joy because the ability to rejoice has been given to us as a gift. The fruit of the Holy Spirit is joy (**Galatians 5:22; Romans 14:17**).

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:17.

- Paul did not expect believers to spend all their time on their knees or with their eyes closed when he said they should pray without ceasing. In fact, he was quite adamant that everyone must work (5:14; **2 Thessalonians 3:6-7, 11**). It is possible, however, for believers to have a prayerful, dependent attitude at all times. This attitude is built upon acknowledging God in everything and depending on Him. Prayer is not to be done by the church leaders only, nor is it meant to be carried out only in worship services. Instead, prayer is a part of every believer's daily walk, and Paul noted how important this would be for one's spiritual life (**Romans 12:12; Ephesians 6:19**). Jesus told His disciples that "*they should always pray*" (**Luke 18:1**).
- It might be helpful to stop a moment and define prayer. What is it? We could spend many hours looking up definitions of prayer, and to be quite honest, we'll probably find that most are rather shallow. For example, Webster's Dictionary defines it this way: "To beg, or implore; to address God; a form of worship." Other definitions were equally confusing and vague.
- Of all the definitions, John Darby seems to help us see the true meaning of prayer: (Paraphrased) "Prayer is the great means by which we are practically kept in awareness of the Father's presence. It is the proper expression of our weakness to the Father and of our confidence in His love and care day by day and ever

more. Prayer is confessing our constant need of dependence upon Him.”

- True biblical Prayer is acknowledging and depending on God. The asking and receiving is elementary; it is the part of prayer that we understand but should not be the focus of prayer. It would appear that true biblical prayer is not an action, but rather a life, which maintains a dependence on Him at all, times. Thus **1 Thessalonians 5:17** makes sense. Our minds must be saturated by and with Him. Prayer is not an exercise, it's a life lived occupied with Him.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:18.

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

of all situations and is working out His will for his glory and our good.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:19.

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

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21.

- God appointed certain people as prophets to the church (**Ephesians 4:11-13; 1 Corinthians 12:10, 28**). These people had special gifts in ministering God’s messages to His people. At times they would foretell the future (**Acts 11:28; 21:9-11**), but more often they would exhort, warn, encourage, and strengthen God’s people (**Acts 15:32**). God spoke through prophets, inspiring them with specific messages for particular times and places. The gift of prophecy had not so much to do with predicting future events as it had to do with bringing a message from God under the direction of the Holy Spirit to the body of believers. This gift provided insight, warning, correction, and encouragement (**1 Corinthians 14:3**). The Thessalonians apparently were treating some prophecies (perhaps the warnings and corrections with which they did not agree) with

contempt. The gift of prophecy is highly regarded, for it edifies believers (**1 Corinthians 14:5, 10-12**). Paul was not advocating blind acceptance of every word spoken by any self-styled prophet. Instead, believers were to test everything against God's words in Scripture, discern what was true and what was false, and then hold on to the good. How are believers to test for truth and genuineness? The apostle John explained this in **1 John 4:1-3**: ***"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. And this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming; and now it is already in the world."*** Christians should not believe everything they hear just because someone says it is a message inspired by God. There are many ways to test teachers to see if their message is truly from the Lord. One is to check to see if their words match what God says in the Bible. Other tests include their lifestyle (**1 John 3:23-24**) and the validity of their message (**1 John 4:1-3**). The most important test of all is what they believe about Christ.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:22.

- Separation from evil is real and important. Believers are to ***"hold on to the good"*** (5:21) and at the same time separate from every kind of evil. Paul did not mean that believers must literally withdraw from the world; to do so would mean they could not shine the light of Christ in order that more might come to Him. Christians cannot avoid contact with "every kind of evil" because this world is evil, ruled by the evil one

(**Ephesians 6:12**). Believers can, however, live in a way that does not give evil a foothold in their lives. This is done by living in the truth of Christ that the body of sin has been rendered powerless and knowing they are no longer slaves to sin. As we, by faith, live in this truth, the Holy Spirit will reproduce the life of Christ in us, and the outcome will be abstaining from evil (**Romans 12:9**).

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:23.

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

Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48 NLT). Believers are sanctified—set apart by the work of Christ. It is initiated and ultimately carried out by God’s Spirit. While perfection will not occur until believers are in heaven, sanctification is the process of moving toward that end, moving toward Christlikeness. Because we have been crucified with Christ, we are slowly but surely being set free from sin’s control, but sin is still an issue during our lives. Victories can be experienced every day in every area of life, as God sanctifies us, growing us into Christlikeness).

- **Romans 6-8** describes the process (**Ephesians 4:13; Colossians 1:28; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2**). In order to be sanctified “through and through,” God will work in all areas of a person’s life—the whole spirit, soul, and body. The spirit, soul, and body refer not so much to the distinct parts of a person as to the entire being of a person. This expression is Paul’s way of saying that God must be involved in every aspect of a believer’s life. A person’s spiritual life cannot be separated from everything else; being a Christian was never meant to be a “Sunday only” lifestyle.
- The conclusion of this sanctification process is the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ who will bring His people to complete perfection and take them with Him to His kingdom. ***“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself”*** (Philippians 3:20-21).

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:24.

- Why could the Thessalonians count on this ongoing sanctification, blamelessness at Christ’s return, and future perfection? Because He ***“who calls you is***

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

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:25.

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

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:26.

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

13:12. Peter also recommended the “holy kiss” to the believers (**1 Peter 5:14**).

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:27.

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

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:28.

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



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