

Commentary on the Book of 1 Thessalonians

Chapter 1

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

Paul, Silvanus (see also 1 Peter 5:12), and Timothy are the authors of this book to the church at Thessalonica. They acknowledge the authority of God and their dependence upon God and Christ as they wish their brothers and sisters grace and peace in God's name.

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

3 constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father,

4 knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you;

5 for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

They are thankful to God for these converts to Christ, and they express their gratitude to God regularly as they pray for these believers. They are mindful of their love and perseverance in hope in Jesus and in God. God loved these believers and chose them to be His vessels of glory. The gospel came to them not just as mere words spoken but in power and conviction of the Holy Spirit. A true life-changing transformation and encounter with God happened as they heard His gospel. True saving faith is preceded by a conviction of sin as these believers experienced. The godly testimony of these men of God gave authentication and legitimacy to the message which they preached.

6 You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit,

7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.

These believers followed the example of Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, and ultimately the example of Christ. At the time the gospel came to them, they experienced much affliction, whether external, internal, or both, it is not clear. There is an internal anguish that comes when we are confronted with our sin (2 Corinthians 7:10). Their sorrow led to great joy, however, as they were set free by the truth in the Holy Spirit. There is also evidence that their reception of the gospel led to persecution from the Jews (2:14, 2 Thessalonians 1:4). Their faith and faithfulness, however, became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia (Greece). Their example of repentance following the full conviction of the Spirit was a powerful testimony.

8For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything.

9For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God,

10and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.

These believers had quickly become witnesses for Christ themselves. They preached to many others in their area and in places elsewhere such that the gospel had gone forth as had their testimony. As Paul and his fellow missionaries traveled about, they found that they ran into other believers who would tell of the faith of the Thessalonians. They would recount the story of how the Thessalonians turned from serving idols to worshipping the one true God. They also spoke of waiting for Christ, Who had been resurrected, to return from heaven to rescue them from the wrath to come (see also 5:9). Certainly this implies that believers can rest assured that they won't have to face God's eternal wrath in hell, though it may also be implying that believers will be rescued from the tribulation wrath to come to all that live on the earth.

Chapter 2

1For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain, 2but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition.

When Paul, Timothy, and Silvanus preached the gospel to these at Thessalonica, they had just left Philippi, having suffered and been mistreated. Not giving up, however, they had the boldness and courage to preach the gospel to them despite the opposition. They didn't make excuses about pain, fatigue, or inconvenient circumstances, and because of this, they could now say that their visit to Thessalonica was not in vain. God had saved many souls there.

3For our exhortation does not come from error or impurity or by way of deceit; 4but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts.

They affirm the honesty and truthfulness of their motives in coming to them in the first place with the gospel and in the exhortations that they now give. They are not trying to deceive these believers or say things to look good and please men, but they are speaking the truth of God. Their purpose is to please God, for God knows hearts and judges motives. They know in their hearts that God approves of them and their actions. Furthermore, if they were trying to be popular, they wouldn't preach the message of the cross amid opposition, especially after just being imprisoned for doing so.

5For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed--God is witness--

6nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority.

7But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children.

Their speech wasn't flattering in nature as if they were trying to manipulate the Thessalonians or sell them something. They weren't greedy and trying to gain something selfish from them. They didn't seek glory from men, which even if they could have gotten, wouldn't have been appropriate. They were apostles and could have flaunted their position and authority, but they did not, choosing rather to be gentle and caring.

8Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us.

9For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.

They really genuinely cared about these people and shared the gospel with them as well as their own lives as they labored with them so as to not come across as freeloaders. They worked day and night so that they didn't have to take any money or goods from these people which could have jeopardized their witness.

10You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers;

11just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children,

12so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

They remind them again that they know as to how honorably and blamelessly their behavior was while they lived among them. They encouraged them and exhorted them as a loving parent would his children to live in a way that is characteristic of a child of the kingdom of God. Their discipleship was them showing the Thessalonians how to live out the Christian life practically as they taught them the truth of God's Word. It is important that the Thessalonians approached this learning process humbly, respecting these who were their teachers.

13For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.

14For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews,

15who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men,

16hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins But wrath has come upon them to the utmost.

Paul, Timothy, and Silvanus are grateful to God that these Thessalonian believers did not just treat the gospel message as mere words of men as if it was another interesting idea making the rounds through various societies. They understood it to be the very Word of God, and they believed it. The wonderful thing about true faith in Christ and in His Word is that it accomplishes “its work” of changing people from the inside out. It changes people when they put their faith in Christ, and it continues to change them as they hear and believe the Word of God as they grow in Christ. The Word is how we are sanctified (John 17:17). It was clear that the faith of these believers led to life change as they became imitators of the churches in Judea, learning to follow Christ and walk worthy of Him. Specifically, their faith was evident by the fact that they suffered at the hands of the Jews on account of their faith in Christ (2 Timothy 3:12). The same Jews who rejected Christ, the prophets, and Paul and his fellow missionaries also persecuted the Thessalonian believers. This, of course, is not pleasing to God but hostile to all people because it keeps the gospel from moving forward to the Gentiles as God desired it to. This hard-hearted behavior on the part of the Jews only stores up more wrath on their account because of the increase of their sins.

17But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short while--in person, not in spirit--were all the more eager with great desire to see your face.

18For we wanted to come to you--I, Paul, more than once--and yet Satan hindered us.

These faithful missionaries wanted to come and visit the believers at Thessalonica, and Paul in particular had wanted several times to do this. Yet each and every time their progress was hindered by the work of the devil. They weren't able to be with the Thessalonians in person, but they were supporting them in spirit by encouraging them through this letter and letting them know of their prayers and love for them. Satan did not want the Thessalonians to have the encouragement of seeing these faithful men of God face to face. Sometimes God allows Satan to oppose us “successfully” so that He can cause us to draw from His well of provision alone and learn to lean more fully upon Him (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). All things are in God's control, and He has a purpose in allowing Satan to oppose the saints. Rather than get angry at God or give up, Paul and his fellow missionaries wrote the Thessalonians a letter, for which we and they can be grateful. God always causes all things to work for the good of His children (Romans 8:28).

19For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming?

20For you are our glory and joy.

Our honor, hope, and crowning joy is that, when we meet Jesus in the air at His coming, we will have passed on His gospel to many dear believers whom we love in Him. This is why John says in 3 John 1:4, “I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.” What a privilege it will be to be able to offer Christ a return on His investment which He has made in us. If we have been unfaithful, we will lack confidence at His coming and shrink away in shame (1 John 2:28). We will still be accepted, but we will suffer loss when it comes to rewards and honor (1 Corinthians 3:15).

Chapter 3

1Therefore when we could endure it no longer, we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone,

2and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith,

3so that no one would be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this.

When it became clear that Paul wasn't going to be able to make the trip to Thessalonica to visit his beloved church, he decided to stay at Athens and send Timothy on ahead in his stead. He wanted Timothy to strengthen and encourage these believers, particularly in light of the fact that they were suffering, being afflicted by the Jews. Yet they had already been taught early on to expect persecution for following Christ.

4For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know.

5For this reason, when I could endure it no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor would be in vain.

As 2 Timothy 3:12 makes clear, all who desire to live godly in Christ will be persecuted. Paul, Timothy, and Silvanus knew enough from personal experience (Paul having been a persecutor of the greatest severity and determination before his conversion) to know that persecution was part of being a Christian. They were sure to warn these Thessalonians of the cost of being disciples of Christ (c.f. Matthew 16:24, Luke 14:25-35). Indeed, the affliction did come, and Paul grew concerned about their ability to persevere in their faith. Thus, he sent Timothy to find out about the state of their faith in fear that the tempter might have led them astray. Then Paul's labor would have been in vain in that the believers wouldn't have lived much like it at all, being thus unable to transmit their faith to others, making the Thessalonian church a dying entity.

6But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you,

7for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith;

8for now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord.

Timothy went to them and returned, bringing great news to Paul and Silvanus' ears that these believers had indeed remained faithful and caring for others. It was even evident that they had been thinking of Paul, Timothy, and Silvanus, wishing to be able to see them again. This brought great comfort to these men of God even while they were in distress, and it gave them great encouragement in the Lord to continue on with great joy in preaching the Word. To know that a spiritual seed has truly taken root and stood the test of trials is greatly encouraging to those who have poured their lives into others. When these stand firm, what a blessing it is.

**9For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account,
10as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith?**

Their gratitude is overflowing in light of the fact that they have so much joy in hearing of the faithfulness of the Thessalonians. They desire earnestly to see them again so that they can teach them more and help them to grow in their faith. There is more that they want to say and more truth they wish to communicate, but they haven't been able to do so in person yet, except for Timothy.

**11Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you;
12and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you;
13so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.**

Paul, Timothy, and Silvanus' prayer is that God and Christ will direct their way to them so that they can see them again. It is remarkable how much these spiritual fathers care about their spiritual children. They have invested their lives for the purpose of spreading the gospel, and to see its fruition is of the utmost reward to them. They pray that the Thessalonians will abound in love for one another and for all people, and their example is surely one to be imitated. They want these believers to grow in holiness and to be without blame at the coming of Christ with all His saints (presumably those who have died in Christ prior to the rapture who are then met with those yet alive at the rapture- see 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17).

Chapter 4

**1Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more.
2For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.**

There are standards that Christians must uphold in order to walk in holiness and please God. The prayer of these missionaries for the Thessalonians was that they would excel more and more in holiness according to the commandments which they gave them by the authority of Christ. They were not to obey these commands because Paul said so but because Christ commanded all Christians to do so.

3For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality;

4that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor,

5not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God;

6and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you.

7For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification.

8So, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.

As for some practical reminders, the Thessalonians are told to pursue the will of God which is their sanctification. That they walk in holiness more and more is undoubtedly always God's will. They are told to keep from sexual immorality and to possess their own vessels in sanctification and honor (see 1 Corinthians 7:1-5, 1 Peter 3:7, Ephesians 5:21-33). The marriage relationship is not about lustful passion, and certainly lust and immorality are wrong in and of themselves. Marriage is not about treating one another as objects to be used for selfish gratification, but we are to love one another as our own selves. We are to fulfill the sexual and romantic needs of one another, husbands must love their wives, and wives must respect their husbands. Possessing our own vessels in sanctification implies purity, while possessing them in honor implies seeking to meet their needs above our own. Adultery defrauds another, and if this is done in the church by one brother to another, the Lord will avenge the wrong. Paul, Timothy, and Silvanus had emphasized this point earlier and solemnly warned them of its severity and importance. Nothing can ruin a friendship, a church, and a marriage like sexual immorality. God's call is for purity, not immorality. Anyone who rejects this standard of God rejects not the messenger but God Himself. Though it is a sin against another human being, it is ultimately a sin against God and the Holy Spirit Who convicts our hearts not to behave in such a manner.

9Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another;

10for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more,

The call of the believer is growth and sanctification; it is to excel still more. These believers clearly did very well when it came to loving others, and they already knew that love was of God and that it was God's will for them. Yet the exhortation was that they get even better. We never spiritually arrive, so to speak, until Christ perfects us at His

coming, and in the meantime, we need to keep asking the Lord to grow us and shape us into His likeness. That we excel still more in love and holiness ought to be our prayer.

**11and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you,
12so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need.**

The command here is that they don't get entangled with divisions, quarrels, and strife, but because of their excellence in love, they lead a quiet life, minding their own business, working hard at the tasks given to them, and doing all that they can to be at peace with all people. The world watches how Christians live and behave. If they can't get along, then the world won't be interested in Christ and the gospel. If love and unity prevail and there is a peace and quiet that Christians have that they don't, their hearts can be opened (John 17:21, John 13:34-35). Furthermore, faithful, peaceable living is accompanied by the promise of God that there won't be any need in a corporate sense. Some will always lack and others will have more than they need (2 Corinthians 8:13-15). This is why the church elders need to look after all the needs of those in their flock (Acts 2:44-45, 4:34-35). Then, this corporate promise can be fulfilled.

13But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.

14For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.

Lest the Thessalonian believers lose hope when loved ones died, Paul wanted to remind them that there is a basis for great hope even after death. Death is not the end of things. Those who die in Christ will be seen again. To be uninformed of this would cause any follower of Christ great grief and hopelessness. Fortunately, death has been swallowed up in victory (1 Corinthians 15:54).

15For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.

16For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

17Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.

There will be a time that Jesus will come back. This coming is distinct from the day of the Lord (contrast with 1 Thessalonians 5:1-5), which implies imminent judgment and the pouring out of wrath upon the doers of iniquity. This coming of the Lord has been given the name "rapture" by theologians because of the idea of being caught up with Christ to meet Him in the air. Christ will descend from heaven with a loud shout and sounding of the trumpet to call His own home to Him just as the trumpet was used in the Old Testament to summon all Israel to assemble together (Numbers 10:7). At the blowing of this trumpet and the voice of an archangel, all the dead in Christ will rise first. The dead have been in paradise with Christ since they have died (Luke 23:43), but now they meet

Christ in the air to finally receive their new glorified bodies (Romans 8:11, 1 Corinthians 15:51-57). After they are changed in the twinkling of an eye (1 Corinthians 15:52) to inherit an immortal body, those who are alive and who are saved at the rapture will also be taken to be with God. Their mortal bodies will be left behind, leaving carcasses a plenty for the vultures to feast on (Matthew 24:27-28, Luke 17:36-37), but their spirits will ascend into the clouds to be changed and given imperishable bodies to be with Christ forever. Paul's point here has been to comfort the unnecessarily grieving Thessalonians and to give them hope. This message certainly accomplishes that end, knowing that they will see those who have died in Christ again. There is great hope also in knowing that we along with them will be forever with the Lord. In other words, when a believer dies, our separation from them will only be temporary.

18Therefore comfort one another with these words.

When life is difficult and loved ones are lost, believers are commanded to remind one another that death has no permanent victory. Death must take the mortal body so that an immortal body can take its place at the coming of Christ. What a great day it will be when Christ appears and all believers meet Him in the air.

Chapter 5

1Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you.

2For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night.

Paul now transitions to speaking of the day of the Lord, the time of Christ's return for ultimate wrath and judgment on the earth. All will see Him at this point as He comes on the clouds in great glory, and all on the earth will mourn (Matthew 24:30). This is directly the opposite of the previous description of the rapture where the believers rejoice, rather than grieve. Here, the unbelievers see their impending doom, and they grieve. They won't be able to practice their sin any longer. Those who endured the tribulation period and who are saved will be swept up to heaven (Matthew 24:31), and God will begin to deal with the armies of the earth and the Jewish people whom He loves.

What is interesting is that the writes speak of the Thessalonians already being familiar with the idea of the day of the Lord. This isn't surprising given that this was revealed repeatedly by the Old Testament prophets. They often spoke of the day of the Lord (e.g. Joel 2:31, Zephaniah 1:7, Malachi 4:5) describing it as a day of horror, darkness, judgment, and wrath. The Thessalonians knew such a time would come, but they were unsure about the details surrounding the resurrection of the dead. They knew that God's eternal wrath was not for them (1 Thessalonians 1:10), but they may not have understood whether the day of the Lord would come upon them. Fortunately, as the writers explained, they can have great hope because Christ will come to take His own prior to the coming day of the Lord (Revelation 3:10, Luke 17:22-37). This differentiation between a time and epoch that they understood and another event which up to this point had been a

mystery (1 Corinthians 15:51) is further evidence of two “comings” of Christ, one to rapture His saints (Matthew 24:27) and another for destruction of antichrist and the armies of the earth (Revelation 19:11-21).

The Thessalonians were aware of the day of the Lord, and it wouldn't overtake them as a thief coming to stealthily seize possessions under the cover of darkness. Believers are not in darkness lest they would be taken by surprise by the day of the Lord (v. 4). We are ready for it because we have prepared our hearts by washing them in the blood of the Lamb.

3While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape.

4But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief;

5for you are all sons of light and sons of day We are not of night nor of darkness;

The world will be drunken in its sin until the day that Christ comes at which point they will mourn, not in repentance but in anger that God is taking them from their pleasure. They will go about thinking all is fine and good and that they are safe when suddenly they will be destroyed. God will pour out His wrath (Matthew 24:15-22), and most of the earth will be destroyed. When Christ appears on the clouds to deal the final blow, this tribulation and death will be accentuated. Just as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman all of a sudden and then don't stop but grow worse and worse, so too will the day of the Lord be. As sons of light, the Thessalonians and all true believers will not be taken by surprise by this day for we will be taken earlier to be with Christ. Those who are saved in the tribulation period will have to endure this time, but for their sake, it will be shortened (Mark 13:20) until finally they are taken to be with Christ (Matthew 24:31).

6so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober.

7For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night.

8But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation.

9For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,

10who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him.

Since we as believers are children of the day, we need to live as such. We are not like the world who will be blind-sided by the coming of Christ in judgment, for we will be raptured. Since we are of the day, we are to put on the breastplate of faith and love, being steadfast in our trust in Christ and in love for all people, especially those who are of the household of faith (Galatians 6:10). We are to put on as a helmet our hope of our salvation. We are not destined for wrath but for life in Christ. This is our great hope and that in which we can find comfort. Those who are of the night and who get drunk on their sin as a way of life will face the day of the Lord. We are of the day and, though we

are capable of sinning and do stumble, we are not characterized by a lifestyle of practicing sin (1 John 3:9). We are not destined for wrath, for Christ bore God's wrath that we had stored up deservingly on the cross. Christ is Who keeps us from the day of the Lord and the wrath of God. The rapture is our hope and destiny, not the day of the Lord. The wrath of God is not for believers, and since both the lake of fire and the day of the Lord are outpourings of God's wrath, believers will be kept from them.

We have been saved through Him Who died for us. This is crucial because whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him. Yet it is not because of our good works but because of the grace of God. Whether we are sober and storing up many eternal rewards or whether we have made shipwreck of our faith (1 Timothy 1:19) and will make it into heaven though as through fire (1 Corinthians 3:15), we will live together with Him. Christ is our hope and our boast, though our call is to live for Him now. Indeed, rewards, honor, and eternal glory are at stake (2 Corinthians 5:10).

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

What great encouragement there is in knowing for certain that we will be with Christ when He comes to take us home (1 John 5:13). We don't have to doubt, but we can rest in the fact that we will be alive together with Him and those brothers and sisters whom we love forever. We are to encourage one another to be mindful of our future hope lest we become doubtful or discouraged. The Thessalonians were encouraging one another and strengthening one another to remain steadfast in serving Christ, but now they had some additional understanding as to exactly how they could encourage one another in relation to life after death and the coming of the Lord.

**12 But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction,
13 and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.**

There are those whom God has called to lead His church and shepherd the sheep. The sheep are to appreciate, have proper regard for, and pay attention to their shepherds as they labor among them and teach them the Word of God. If the shepherd is not instructing the sheep properly in the Word of God, the sheep will suffer. If they sheep are not listening and applying what they are being taught, they will do wrong. Both the shepherd and the sheep have a responsibility before God to teach and be taught. In the latter days, the sheep will get those to teach them what they want to hear rather than what they need to hear (2 Timothy 4:3). The shepherd who serves in a God-honoring way ought to be rightly esteemed and loved because of his service and work. There should be peace amongst the sheep and between the shepherd and the sheep, which is only possible as all submit to the authority of the Word of God above all else.

14 We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.

There will be those who need correction because they will be refusing to listen to sound teaching and choosing rather to indulge fleshly pleasures. These need to be exhorted to repent and change, getting back to love for others and a submission to God. To let sin and rebellion go unchallenged is to fail in Christian love. Those who are faint in heart, meaning that they are growing weak in commitment or in hope, need some gentle admonition and/or encouragement. These are not unruly and stubborn but just wearing down and growing weak. They don't need a pointed correction but more of a spiritual arm around the shoulder. The weak are those who are either physically or spiritually feeble and infirm, and maybe both in some cases. Obviously those who have physical infirmities need to be looked after and supported, but those who are spiritually ill are in great danger. It is not that they are just being lazy and insolent, needing correction, or that they are growing tired, and need some encouragement. These have been so taken and corrupted by sin and the flesh that they need to be held back from doing more damage. They are at risk of doing themselves or others severe harm. The command to help means to hold back, hold firmly, and pay careful attention to. Those who have really slipped into dangerous sinful habits or deception need to be essentially held back from destroying themselves. This is how these need to be helped until they begin thinking right again.

It is no accident that these admonitions come after speaking of living at peace with one another and speaking of interactions between the shepherds and the sheep. It is of vital importance that the family of God bears patiently with one another, enduring these difficulties and struggles that come upon all the people of God. It is not that we just tolerate weakness and failure as if it is to be excused. We don't accept spiritual infirmity as if it should be unchangeable. The truth is that we will encounter rebellion, fatigue, and spiritual sickness in the church, but the challenge from the writers of this epistle is that it is dealt with perseveringly. Church discipline is a tough, wearing process as is tough love and looking out for another brother or sister in need. But we are to persevere in these tasks. This is the admonition to be patient with all. It is not that we just settle for mediocrity but that we consistently and with endurance challenge it.

15 See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people.

Sometimes when these spiritual ailments and sins are present in the body, we can be tempted to deal somebody evil in return for their evil. This will not help anybody. We must confront the sin and not let ourselves be provoked to unrighteous anger and evil actions, thoughts, or words. There is a Biblical process of handling wrongs committed, and this must be allowed to take its course (Matthew 18:15-17, 1 Corinthians 5:5, 2 Thessalonians 3:6,14-15). This is what will be best for the individual in sin. This is the goodness that we must seek and be willing to commit to doing.

16 Rejoice always;

17 pray without ceasing;

18 in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Here we are given three very basic commands that we as Christians generally do miserably at keeping. We are to always be joyful which is only possible because of the love and presence of Christ. Circumstances can be downright miserable, but our God is good and faithful. He is to be our joy always (Philippians 4:4). We are to pray without ceasing. This is a command to individuals to be constantly depending upon God and yielded to Him, offering prayers to Him as much as is possible. Our most effective time spent can be in prayer, though we are not always to be in a state of actual prayer. God has called us to do other things such as serve, teach, work, love our family, and so on. We can't constantly be offering prayers; even Jesus didn't pray constantly. But we can be constantly yielded to God in a spirit of humility longing for Him to be honored in our lives. The church as a whole, to which the writers are speaking, could potentially be offering prayers constantly, if there are enough people to pray around the clock with each taking various shifts. Whether they intended this meaning or not, I am not sure, but the message is that we pray as much as is possible as individuals and as a church, being always yielded to Him in surrender and humility. In all things we are to maintain an attitude of thanksgiving toward God, not complaining and griping but rather receiving all things as ordained by God for a purpose (see also Philippians 2:14). We are not to dispute with God over our circumstances or complain about Him being "unfair." Rather, we are to praise Him and acknowledge Him in all things (Proverbs 3:5-6). God's will is that we have joy always, that we yield to Him constantly, and that we maintain a spirit of gratefulness.

19Do not quench the Spirit;

20do not despise prophetic utterances.

21But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good;

22abstain from every form of evil.

Quenching the Spirit is stifling the power of God at work in and through us. Sin does this, and so does a mindset of self-sufficiency where we rely exclusively upon our minds to understand and our wills to make right choices. Even our minds will fail us and our wills will grow weak, but it is by the Spirit of God that we are strong (Zechariah 4:6). When the Spirit of God is filling His people (Ephesians 5:18) and they are walking after Him, they will not be fulfilling the desires of the flesh (Galatians 5:16). They will have strength to pour into others, and God will inevitably use them to bear spiritual fruit by conforming their character (Galatians 5:22-23) and by providing good works for them beforehand to walk in at the appointed time (Ephesians 2:10). Apart from Christ, we can do nothing (John 15:5), and it is this we must believe by faith so that God can work in and through us to accomplish true, lasting spiritual fruit. The power is not in us or in our God-given gifts and abilities. The strength is not in the person, the resources, or the gifting but in the Spirit Who energizes, empowers, and provides. We must be willing to yield in submission and surrender to His leading and guidance in our lives (John 16:13, Romans 8:14).

23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

24 Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.

We will not be entirely sanctified until we receive new bodies at the coming of Christ, as was explained earlier in 4:14-17 (see also Romans 8:11). We have been regenerated in our spirits (Titus 3:5) and we have been given new hearts capable of purity (2 Timothy 2:22), but we still have flesh, we still have mortal bodies, and we still need our minds to be conformed to Christ. The clear teaching then is that until we meet Christ in the air and are glorified, we will be undergoing sanctification. There are thus no super-Christians, for we are all works in progress. But the hope of the believer is that one day our bodies, spirits, and souls will be made perfect, and we will be glorified.

We don't want to shrink away from Christ at His coming because of some unconfessed sin in our lives (1 John 2:28). We want to be pure before Him when He comes. As 2 Peter 3:14 says, "Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless." Somehow, Christ will refine us by fire (1 Corinthians 3:10-15), and the writer's prayer for the Thessalonians is that there would be very little, if any, refining yet to be done. Such a person could expect many eternal rewards. The desire of all believers should be to meet Jesus in the air without shame because of a clean heart before Him and a life lived faithfully to Him.

Now, as the writers had explained in 5:10, our hope of glorification is not founded fundamentally in our works as believers but ultimately in Christ Himself. His faithfulness is what will accomplish our sanctification. All believers will eventually be made blameless, complete, sanctified, and glorified. Some will take more rewards into heaven, but all of us will be made pure into the spotless bride of Christ (Revelation 19:7-8, Ephesians 5:27). Christ will see to it that this is accomplished, for He is faithful even when we are not (2 Timothy 2:13).

25 Brethren, pray for us.

26 Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss.

27 I adjure you by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brethren.

28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

These apostles know that they need prayer just as any other believer needs prayer. They set a good example to be willing to ask for it. They desire that the Christians greet one another as had become their custom with a fraternal kiss as is commonplace in the Middle East. They desire that this letter be read to all of the church at Thessalonica so that all can hear the Word of God for themselves. They close this letter praying that God's grace will be with them, sustaining them, keeping them, and caring for them, which it will. The issue and the implication of this prayer is that the Thessalonians will continue to respond in faith to the grace of God doing its sanctifying work in their lives.

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