

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO PAUL

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STUDIES IN PAUL'S SHORTER LETTERS TO CHURCHES

**FIRST THESSALONIANS**

**SECOND THESSALONIANS**

WITH CLASS QUESTIONS FOR EACH LESSON

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# **THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO PAUL**

## **FIRST THESSALONIANS**

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

## **SECOND THESSALONIANS**

**“But we are bound to give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief of the truth.”  
(2Thessalonians 2:13)**

**All Biblical quotations and references in the commentary and in the class questions are taken from the New King James Version [NKJV] unless otherwise specified.**

# First Thessalonians

## INTRODUCTION TO

## FIRST THESSALONIANS

### The History:

Paul and Silas had several remarkable experiences in Philippi as they preached the gospel on the second missionary journey (Acts 16:11ff).

1. They encountered a “seller of purple” named Lydia whose heart the Lord opened by the truth. She and her household were baptized.
2. They cast out a demon from a slave girl and incurred the wrath of her owners. They were imprisoned on false charges and seized the opportunity to convert the pagan jailor and his house to Christ.
3. They were hastily released from prison and were asked to depart the city after revealing their Roman citizenship.

From Philippi the two evangelists went to Thessalonica, where they reasoned with the Jews in their synagogue for three Sabbaths about the death and resurrection of Christ. A “great multitude” of Gentiles accepted their teaching, but envious Jews raised strong opposition to their message about “another king--Jesus” and sought to do them harm. Realizing that Paul and Silas were in grave danger, the disciples immediately sent them away by night to Berea, where, according to Luke, the residents were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica.

Paul arrived at Corinth a short time later and remained there for eighteen months, during which he wished to return to Thessalonica but was “hindered by Satan” from doing so. Instead, he sent Timothy to determine the status of the new Thessalonian Christians, and he wrote this first letter in response to the encouraging report he received.

### The City:

Thessalonica, an important seaport city of Macedonia, was populated by as many as 200,000 Greeks, Jews, and Romans when Paul preached there. The nation had been a Roman province since about 148 B.C., and Thessalonica was the capital city of one of its major divisions. The city worshiped many pagan gods, but Jupiter was its favorite. There was at

least one Jewish synagogue there to serve a sizeable Jewish citizenry. Politically, Thessalonica enjoyed the position of a *free city* [42 B.C.] like Tarsus and Athens. Conybeare and Howson explain this status:

The privilege of what was technically called “freedom” was given to certain cities of the Empire for good service in the Civil Wars, or as a tribute of respect for the old celebrity of the place, or for other reasons of convenient policy. There were few such cities in the western provinces, as there were no *municipia* in the eastern. The free towns were most numerous in those parts of the Empire where the Greek language had long prevailed; and we are generally able to trace the reasons why this privilege was bestowed upon them. At Athens it was the fame of its ancient eminence, and the evident policy of paying a compliment to the Greeks. At Thessalonica it was the part which its inhabitants had prudently taken in the great struggle of Augustus and Antony against Brutus and Cassius. When the decisive battle had been fought, Philippi was made a military colony, and Thessalonica became free.

Free cities enjoyed special privileges such as complete self-government, the retention of life-and-death powers over their citizens, and the absence of Roman soldiers and Roman insignia from their territory. Such cities were careful to cultivate the good will of the empire and to display the signs of loyalty and obedience to the emperor.

**The Letter:** Paul wrote this epistle to the church at Thessalonica while preaching at Corinth. Timothy had been sent, probably from Athens, to determine the conditions among the newly-converted brethren at Thessalonica. The young preacher carried his report back to Paul, who meanwhile had traveled to Corinth. The apostle was not only greatly encouraged by Timothy’s mostly favorable assessment of the fledgling disciples but also was somewhat concerned about several potential problems that might adversely affect their future in the Lord’s kingdom. This letter reflects both his joy over their significant accomplishments and his anxiety about several issues with which they were struggling.

**The Problems:** Many good things were observable among the Thessalonians:

1. They were characterized by “work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope” (1:3);
2. They had sent the word of the gospel into “every place” as a demonstration of their faith toward God (1:8);
3. They had shown courage and prudence as they turned from idols to serve the true God and to wait for the return of Christ to bring them eternal salvation and glory (1:9,10).

Several obstacles challenged the spiritual success of these mostly Gentile (1:9; 2:14-16) Christians in a hostile environment:

1. They were disturbed about the second coming (4:13-18);
2. They faced persecutions and were troubled by the persecutions raised against Paul and his companions, all of which could discourage their commitment to Christ (2:14; 3:2-5);
3. A relapse into their former sensuality and uncleanness could jeopardize their prospect of eternal salvation (4:1-8);
4. Some members seemingly had either elevated or diminished their respect for church leaders according to who did or did not possess gifts of the Spirit (5:12, 13, 19,20);
5. Attention to the basic responsibilities of the Christian life must be kept as a priority by each saint (5:14-22);
6. Certain disciples may have been influenced by tactics employed by opponents of the gospel which were very unlike those utilized by Paul and his fellow teachers (1:3-12).

Questions which were prominent in other letters of Paul, such as law-keeping and gnostic-like perversions of the nature and position of Christ, evidently had not yet emerged among the young converts at Thessalonica. At least, such things are not discussed in this epistle. Instead, the focus of the apostle is directed toward less complicated issues that could be addressed in simple and straightforward terms.

**Time and Place:** The best scholarship identifies Corinth as the place from which this epistle was written in A.D. 51 or 52. It was delivered to the Thessalonians only a “short time” after Paul had departed from their city (2:17,18). This letter therefore has the distinction of being the first written by the apostle to a local church [with the possible exception of Paul’s involvement, if any, in the writing of the letter to Antioch in Acts 15:22-29].

**The Overview:**

- I. Reflections on the Thessalonians. 1:1-3:13
  - A. Commendation for growth. 1:1-10
  - B. Founding of the church. 2:1-2:16
  - C. Strengthening of the church. 2:17-3:13
- II. Instructions to the Thessalonians. 4:1-5:28
  - A. Direction for growth. 4:1-4:12
  - B. The dead in Christ. 4:13-18
  - C. The day of the Lord. 5:1-5:11
  - D. Holy living. 5:12-28

[From, Nelson’s Bible Maps and Charts]

## FIRST THESSALONIANS

### Chapter One

#### Verse 1--

1. Paul had left Thessalonica under threat of danger from a mob incited to violence by the Jews (Acts 17:5-10). He and his companions went from there to Berea, where both Timothy and Silas remained after Paul had departed to Athens. The apostle next went to Corinth, from where this letter was written to the Thessalonians. Timothy and Silas apparently had joined Paul at Corinth, and both are included with Paul in the opening greeting of the epistle. Paul's usual wish for "grace and peace" is directed toward Christians, as it is in *every* letter to which his name is attached.

#### Verses 2-4--

1. Having wished God's grace and peace for them, Paul next expresses his thankfulness for their spirituality and for their accomplishments in the Lord's cause. This same gratitude is pronounced in all his letters to churches, except 2Corinthians and Galatians.
2. Paul's gratitude for the good things that could be said about his brethren were often incorporated into his prayers to God. He recognized that every success in the work of Christ depends on the concern that the Father has for His children and on His power to support them in their efforts to serve Him.
3. Three characteristics of the Thessalonians gave rise to Paul's good feelings about their prospects as individual disciples and as a local church.
  - a. Their work of faith. We are not fully informed about the work that these brethren had done. We know that they had "sounded forth" God's word (1:8); they had become "imitators" of the Judean churches (2:14); and they were exhibiting brotherly love toward other saints (4:9). But we are given no detailed information about any of these activities. Obviously, they understood that "faith without works is dead" (James 2:26), and their trust in Jesus had propelled them into obeying His commandments (James 2:24). Faith had led them to submit to God's requirements for salvation (Acts 2:36-38; 18:8, etc.), and faith was still leading them to "work" the will of the Lord for their Christian lives.
  - b. Their labor of love. "Work" usually means the same thing as "labor." However, the Greek terms may signify a difference. Labor [*kopos*-- primarily, "a striking, beating"] might suggest activity more strenuous than work [*ergon*-- "a deed, an

act”]. It is possible that the Thessalonians had made some significant sacrifices and had expended great energy in providing assistance to other people. The nature of any such labor is unknown, but it possibly involved the work of that church in sending out the gospel into other regions (1:8). Paul related this labor to “love.” It was a labor of love. While *every* service must be motivated by love for others (1Cor. 13:3), supporting gospel preaching is underpinned by a love for God, a love for the saving gospel, and a love for the individual who is willing to shoulder the responsibility to “go into all the world and preach the gospel.”

- c. Their patience of hope in Christ. Although some of the saints were troubled about certain aspects of the Lord’s return, others were confident in their convictions about the second coming, and they were determined to be steadfast because they believed that a precious reward awaited the faithful when that event occurred. Tribulation and persecution (1:6,14) did not make them impatient for better circumstances nor deter them from “keeping on keeping on” in doing their duty to a faithful God.
4. These three positive qualities were practiced “in the sight” of their heavenly Father. Not so much as supplying a cup of cold water goes unnoticed by the all-seeing eyes of God (Matt. 10:42). These disciples could be assured that every work of faith and every labor of love was known to God and would be wonderfully rewarded in His own time.
5. Not only was Paul encouraged about the Thessalonians because he *remembered* these admirable things about them but also because he *knew* a very important thing about God. God had *elected* them to be saved, and He would not disappoint them about the ultimate outcome of their election. Paul’s own trust could be theirs as well-- God would keep what was committed to Him until the day of judgment (2Tim. 2:12).
6. “Election” to salvation is a concept that has confused many people. Many have embraced the fallacy that individuals were elected by God, even before the world began, either to be saved or to be lost. They suppose that nothing can alter that election and that man’s eternal destiny is unaffected by his obedience or disobedience to God’s commandments. They ignore the facts that we must make our calling and election sure (2Pet. 1:10) and work out our own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12). Election has been determined by *class* rather than by *individual persons*. Peter declared, “In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted [elected, chosen] by Him” (Acts 10:34,35).

**Verses 5-7--**

1. The thoughts in verse four are closely connected with verse five, indicated by “For.” *Gar* is properly a particle [conjunction] of affirmation and conclusion [Thayer]. What

was stated in verse four is affirmed in verse five. Paul was confident of the election of the Thessalonians because of his confidence in the gospel message which they had heard and obeyed. That message was much more than words spoken by men. It was God's own inspired revelation, brought to Thessalonica in "earthen vessels" (2Cor. 4: 7) but consisting "not in words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (1Cor. 2:13).

2. The "power" of the word received by the Thessalonians was demonstrated in two ways: (1) the power of persuasion and the power of logic were evident in the things proclaimed by Paul and other messengers of the gospel. But other messages brought to Thessalonica by other men might also display some of the same characteristics as Paul's gospel. (2) However, no other message could boast the power of miracles to confirm its truthfulness and authority. Only *inspired* words would be accompanied by "signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will" (Heb. 2:4). These were the credentials presented by preachers of the gospel wherever the spoken word was carried (Mark 16:20). The miracles offered "much assurance" that one's trust in the gospel of Christ was well placed.
3. Not only did the power of miracles instill trust in the *message* but also in the *messen-gers*. Performing signs to confirm the authenticity of the preaching should also confirm the identity of the preachers as men of God, worthy of an audience with those whose attention they sought. These were not self-serving pretenders but God-chosen and God-equipped teachers of truth. It was not for their own sakes but for the sake of others that they had come to Thessalonica. They sought to gain nothing more than the *souls* of their converts to Jesus Christ (2Cor. 12:14).
4. Sincere hearts had given serious consideration to the gospel message and had judged it worthy of their commitment to its principles and promises. They had acted on what they heard (James 1:23,24), followed Jesus by practicing His will (1Pet. 1:21), and followed what Paul had preached about Jesus' plan for their salvation (1Cor. 11:1).
5. Acts 17:5-9 provides limited information about the "much affliction" in which the Thessalonian disciples had received the word of God. Luke wrote there of the uproar raised by envious and unbelieving Jews who sought to attack Paul and Silas, accusing them to the city officials of "turning the world upside down," breaking Roman laws, and promoting "another king-- Jesus." A disciple named Jason and some other brethren were also victims of this violence. This initial persecution by enemies of the truth probably was only the beginning of opposition encountered by the new church members from that first day until the time they received this letter from the apostle who had been the main target of resistance from zealous unbelievers.
6. Even while in the midst of hurtful activity against them, the young Christians could have "joy of the Holy Spirit." First of all, they were simply sharing in the persecutions that can be expected by all "who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus" (2Tim. 3:12).



Tribulation can serve as an indicator of one's godliness and faithfulness to the Lord, which is a joyous realization. Also, when saints partake of Christ's sufferings, they are privileged to glorify Him with a genuine display of devotion (1Pet. 4:12,13). Then, persecuted disciples can have joy in spite of their afflictions because faithfully enduring trouble proves faith to be genuine and promises praise, honor, and glory for the overcomer in the day of judgment (1Pet. 1:6,7). Equally reassuring to the persecuted Christian is the knowledge that through all our adversity he is "kept by the power of God through faith." Neither Satan nor his angels can interfere with Jesus' promise to His faithful sheep, "And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:28).

7. Other disciples throughout Achaia and Macedonia heard about the faithful endurance of the Thessalonians and were inspired to follow their example when similar problems overtook them. We never know just how far our influence for good [or bad] may go to affect the lives of others. This little group of struggling Christians was a "city set on a hill" for all to observe (Matt. 5:14), and the message they sent out was the same one that Paul sent to their Roman brethren, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18).

**Verses 8-10--**

1. The Thessalonian disciples had "sounded forth" the word of God into many other places. "Sound forth" is *execheo*, "to sound forth as a trumpet, to thunder." Their evangelizing had followed the pattern established by Jesus when He gave the Great Commission to His apostles, "...you shall be witnesses of Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). They should proclaim the gospel first among their own near neighbors, then move out to others not so close by. Ultimately, they took the message to as many places and as far away as possible. Thessalonica was located in Macedonia; Achaia was its nearest neighbor to the south, and "every place" comprehended wherever opportunity was presented to become witnesses of Jesus.
2. There were probably two ways in which these brethren had taken the truth into the strongholds of error:
  - a. Thessalonica was a city of considerable importance in the commercial activity of the first century, and its tradesmen regularly traveled into many locations near and far away to pursue their occupations. It may be that some of the principal tradesmen were converts to Christ; it is more likely that some of the sailors and others employed in the transportation of goods by sea or by land had become followers of Jesus and had realized their responsibility to enlist others to follow Him. These individuals would have been disposed to announce their new-found relationship to the

Savior wherever they went.

- b. They had “sounded forth” the word of God, which suggests a deliberate effort to spread the gospel into other locations. Probably some of their members had been sent into distant places to seek the lost with the truth. Jesus’ plan for evangelizing was to preach first at home, then in neighboring locations, and finally wherever there was a need to proclaim His message. The Thessalonian church had sent the word of the Lord into its own environs of Macedonia and from there to Achaia, its neighbor to the south. After that, their vision had expanded into “every place,” but we cannot know what areas were included in that term. They had been so successful in publishing their faith abroad that there was little that Paul or others could add. Their “faith toward God” involved both what they *believed* about the precepts of the gospel, what they had *done* in obeying the commands of the gospel, and how they had *changed* the basic practices of their lives because of the gospel. And by relating their own experiences which had transformed them from darkness into the kingdom of Christ (Col. 1:13), they had become examples to “all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe” (1:7).
3. It is undisclosed just who “they” were whose report Paul had received about conditions in Thessalonica. Obviously, they were among those in “every place” where the gospel had gone. The great changes wrought in Thessalonica were widely known.
  - a. It is always impressive to witness the ability of the gospel to change lives. Often, we are privileged to observe some life ravaged by the destructive effects of sin made whole again by the healing powers of the hope offered to sinners in the good news of Jesus the Savior. Many must have marveled that so drastic a transformation was possible as they heard what had transpired among the Thessalonians.
  - b. The first remarkable event had occurred when Paul and his companions proclaimed God’s truth to the inhabitants of this idolatrous city. Many would have judged his prospects of making a difference among these pagans to have been very dim. But thankfully, instead of rejection, Paul met with substantial acceptance of his preaching. He declared later:

“For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe” (1Thes. 2:13).
  - c. When Luke recorded in Acts the results of Paul’s teaching, he stated that “some of them [the Jews] were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas” (Acts 17:4). That was truly an impressive harvest of souls in a city where ignorance and false religion had dominated the thinking and practice of the populace for a very long time.
  - d. Paul’s work did not always experience the happy outcome that he witnessed at Thessalonica. He went from there to Berea, where many others were receptive

and obedient to the Lord's will, but his teaching at Athens, a large and influential city not far from Thessalonica, became the object of ridicule and largely fell on deaf ears. Only a few there were touched by the story of the cross and the crown (Acts 17:32-34).

- e. Such a favorable response to the gospel at Thessalonica could be attributed to *two* things involved in Paul's "manner of entry" to the people:
  - (1) Of course, it was what he said to them that brought their positive response to the truth. The gospel alone is the "power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16). It is "living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword...and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12). Honest hearts find it difficult to resist its appeal.
  - (2) It was also what he did that caused so many to give themselves to the Lord. As he first declared in verse 5, Paul's gospel came to them not only in word but also in power. Miracles such as those performed by Paul in Thessalonica were intended to "confirm the word" that he preached (Mark. 16:20). It would have been hard not to give attention to what he said after having seen what he did with the "signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit" (Heb. 2:4) by which the apostles had been empowered to succeed in their work. The miracles evidently had the desired effect on the Thessalonian audiences, and large numbers were obedient to the faith.
- f. Good hearts do good things (Matt. 12:35). It was not surprising that Paul's teaching brought about changes in the behavior of those who were moved by the evident truth of his message. There were *three* life-changing actions taken by Paul's listeners once they were convinced of the truth of his proclamation of God and His Son:
  - (1) They turned from idols to the *living* and *true* God. Paul's sermons must have included much of the same teaching that is recorded in his sermon at Athens, another city under the control of paganism and idolatry. There he spoke about the God who made the world and everything in it. Paul's God was not confined to the temples made by the hands of men; His presence was felt and His power was exerted throughout heaven and earth. He needed nothing from man, but man needed everything from Him (Acts 17:24,25). How different He was from any god these people had heard of before! Knowing this "unknown" God was the most exciting prospect ever faced by these people who, without realizing it, had been searching for something better than their sterile pagan rituals and unrequited passions;
    - aa. Perhaps Paul also called their attention to the foolish and illogical concepts and practices of the idolatry in which the Thessalonians had

lived for a long a time. Maybe he used Isaiah's description of how thoughtlessly men behaved in making and worshiping idols. How much sense did it make for them to cut down a tree, use half of the wood to build a fire to cook their food, and then use the other half to carve an idol, before which they fell down in submission as if the idol had made *them!*

[See Isaiah 44:9-20.] How far above such stupidity was the *living and true* God and the devotions of those who serve Him in spirit and in truth;

(2) They turned from idols to serve the *living and true* God. We know nothing about how active these idolaters had been in their pagan religions. We are sure they embraced the *living and true* God and His Son with the understanding that their Christian life would necessarily be an *active* life.

aa. Their transformation is described as a "turning." This is the same word that is translated "be converted" in Acts 3:19 in the NKJV.

There was a meaningful change involved when these idolaters made their move to serve the Lord instead of idols. That accounts for their steadfastness and faithful performance which Paul commends in verse three;

(3) They began to wait for the Son of the living and *true* God to come from heaven. There were *four* significant truths about a *living* Jesus in which these former worshippers of *dead* gods now placed their confidence:

aa. They now believed that Jesus is the Son of the *living and true* God;

bb. They now believed that He is in heaven and that He will come again;

cc. They now believed that the Son of the *living and true* God had died on the cross but had been raised from the dead by the *living and true* God;

dd. They now believed that the *living and true* God would bring wrath upon lost men and that faith in His Son offered their only escape from wrath.

Albert Barnes comments on the impact of Jesus' return on the Thessalonians:

It is eminently adapted to comfort the hearts of true Christians in the sorrows, bereavements and sicknesses of life;...to lead us to watchfulness and to an earnest inquiry into the question whether we are prepared to meet him;...to make us dead to the world, and to lead us to act as becomes the children of light;...to awaken and arouse impenitent and careless sinners;...and to excite Christians to self-denying efforts to spread the gospel in distant lands, as was the case at Thessalonica. Every doctrine of the gospel is adapted to produce some happy practical effects on mankind, but there are few that are more full of elevated and holy influences than that which teaches that the Lord Jesus will return to the earth, and which leads the soul to wait for his appearing.

1. \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_ are included in the greeting to the \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_.
2. What *three* commendable things did Paul remember about the Thessalonians?
  - a. Their \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_;
  - b. Their \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_;
  - c. Their \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_.
3. What did Paul *know* about their relationship to God? \_\_\_\_\_  
What did that mean? \_\_\_\_\_
4. In what *four* ways did the gospel come to the Thessalonians?
  - a. In \_\_\_\_\_;
  - b. In \_\_\_\_\_;
  - c. In \_\_\_\_\_;
  - d. In \_\_\_\_\_.
5. They then became followers of \_\_\_\_\_ and of \_\_\_\_\_.  
How was that possible? \_\_\_\_\_
6. They received the \_\_\_\_\_ in much \_\_\_\_\_ and with \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_.
7. They became \_\_\_\_\_ to all in \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ and to all who \_\_\_\_\_.
8. They had \_\_\_\_\_ forth the \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and in \_\_\_\_\_.
9. What had the Thessalonians done after hearing the gospel?
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_;
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_;
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_.
10. What had the Thessalonians accepted about the nature and work of Jesus?
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_;
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_;
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_;
  - d. \_\_\_\_\_;
  - e. \_\_\_\_\_.

**Chapter Two**

**It is likely that there were false teachers already in Thessalonica who were trying to diminish Paul's reputation as an apostle and as a promoter of truthful religion. While we are given no details of their identity or of their work against Paul, his remarks to the disciples seem to constitute a repudiation of charges made by adversaries about his earlier behavior. Much of this chapter is devoted to proving his pure motives and sacrificial work in behalf of those he sought to convert through the gospel he preached.**

**Verses 1,2--**

- 1. Reports from places other than Thessalonica had come to Paul, indicating that others who had heard about the favorable results of his labors there were convinced that what he had done for the Thessalonians was very worthwhile. Many had been impressed with their "new faith" which already had been expressed in so many good ways (1:3,8,9).**
- 2. If some persons were trying to raise doubts about the sincerity of Paul's association with them, the disciples only had to consider how exemplary his conduct had really been. They would quickly see the fallacy of any assaults made on his character.**
- 3. If saints far removed from Thessalonica could be comfortable with the events surrounding the conversion of the Thessalonians, surely those who were personally involved could be comfortable with them as well. "For you yourselves know that our coming to you was not in vain."**
- 4. The *first* proof of Paul's authenticity as an apostle of the *living* and *true* God was his reaction to being persecuted for the things he preached. Everyone was aware of the "spiteful treatment" he had suffered at Philippi when he encountered stiff opposition to his teaching about Jesus Christ. He had been wrongfully imprisoned and harshly mistreated (Acts 16:20-23), but none of that weakened his faith in Jesus or eroded his hope of salvation for the Gentiles that the gospel offered. He had arrived in Thessalonica with the same strong convictions and with the same uncompromising message as when he had first come to Philippi. As before, his teaching aroused violent reactions among the people (Acts 17:5). No false teacher would have been willing to continue to suffer in order to promote a doctrine he knew to be false. But Paul was not ashamed of his gospel, for he knew it was God's power to save both Jews and Gentiles (Ro. 1:16,17).**

## Verses 3-6--

1. It was important for the saints at Thessalonica to continue to trust Paul as an apostle and to remain assured of his genuine love and concern for them personally. He knew that their continued faithfulness was closely tied to these certainties. Any rumors that were being circulated and that might raise questions about his sudden departure from their city (Acts 17:10) must be put to rest.
2. First, Paul deals with the accusations of his detractors that he had abandoned his new converts because he realized that his doctrine was flawed and unable to survive the scrutiny of its opponents and the strong opposition they had raised against it (Acts 17:5). Moreover, they said, the so-called “apostle’s” conviction about the importance of his doctrine clearly had taken second place to his personal safety. These charges, of course, were totally false, but they nevertheless could shake the faith of weak converts. They called for Paul’s strong rebuttal.
3. Paul’s *exhortation* for the people of Thessalonica to exchange their idolatrous ways for practices with real substance and reward had come from *pure motives*. He had *not* behaved as accused by those who were jealous of his success. Deceit, uncleanness, and guile had played no part in his preaching.
  - a. “Deceit [*plane*-- “wandering”] is called “error” in several translations. Paul’s personal integrity would never have allowed him to promote any doctrine that was unworthy of his complete confidence (Acts 23:1).
  - b. “Uncleanness” [*akatharsia*] suggests “impure motives” [Thayer] and the “sensuality” that often accompanied evil doctrine in the first century [Vine]. Paul called attention to his own initial insistence (4:2) for their “sanctification.” His teaching demanded their absolute abstinence from the lustful practices that some claimed his doctrine would encourage.
  - c. “Guile” [*dolos*-- “a bait, snare, deceit”] would try to capture followers by false incentives. But Paul had always included the bad along with the good. His warnings were as stern as his promises were attractive: “...because the Lord is the avenger of all such [fraud], as we also forewarned you and testified” (4:6).
4. The despicable practices of which he was accused [above] could have no place in the teaching of a man who had been “approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel.” Contrary to the charges made against his preaching at Thessalonica, his work had exemplified only principles that honest men everywhere would approve.
  - a. He tried always to please God, not man. He told the Galatians that if he “still” sought to please men, he would no longer be a servant of God (Gal. 1:10). Since fundamental differences always exist between the thoughts of God and men, it is inevitable that some men will be offended at things that please Jehovah (Isa. 55:8,9). The choice about whom to please is always a severe “test” of a preacher’s heart.
  - b. He never used flattering words. Isaiah long ago pointed out that those in his time who had no desire to hear the Lord’s word were attracted instead by the “smooth

things” and “prophetic deceits” of false teachers (Isa. 30:19). In New Testament days Jude warned about the “great swelling words” with which evil men would flatter others and seek to gain an advantage (Jude 16).

- c. He did and said nothing intended to cover up covetous desires for personal gain. He was not preaching for money. Unlike some other teachers, he only wanted “them” and not “theirs” (2Cor. 12:14). This motivation accounted for his willingness to support himself by daily toil rather than by exacting his due as an apostle (2:6,9). This was a practice he followed in other places as well as at Thessalonica (2Cor. 11:7,8). The church at Philippi had supplemented his income by sending gifts to him at least twice while he was engaged in teaching in Thessalonica (Phil. 4:15,16), and for that he had been grateful.
- d. He did not seek glory from men. There had been a time in his life when Paul was anxious for recognition and advancement among his peers (Gal. 1:14). However, those ambitions completely disappeared from his agenda when he encountered the Lord and was commissioned to become a preacher and an apostle to rescue lost sinners (Acts 26:16-18). Personal glory was lost in the glory he sought for the cross of Jesus (Gal. 6:14). Sometimes, he had to take positive action to make sure that others did not exalt him and harm his mission of proclaiming Christ (1Cor. 1:12-15; Acts 14:11-18).
- e. Silas and Timothy were included as “apostles” in Pauls’ remarks. Of course, they were not apostles on the same level as Paul but were only men who had been “sent” by God to assist in the work in Thessalonica. Nevertheless, they also had displayed admirable conduct in everything they did as helpers in the cause of Christ.

#### Verse 7-12--

1. The second misapprehension about why Paul had left the disciples when they needed him most was that his concern for them was not as important to him as his concern for himself. He had considered his own *physical safety* more pressing than the *spiritual peril* from false teachers and vicious persecutors in which he had left them.
2. To prove the fallacy of this accusation, the apostle reviewed for his brethren the things he had done while among them that demonstrated how much he had really cared for them and how willing he had been to make any personal sacrifice necessary to further their progress in the gospel.
  - a. He had been as gentle in dealing with them as a mother would be as she nursed an infant child. He had been *patient* with them as he helped them to understand the things that confused them. He had been *kind* to them as he helped them to correct the mistakes that new converts make. He had been *tender* in urging them to embrace the practices of Christianity that were so different from the activities of the idolatry to which they had been accustomed. And, like a mother, he had never considered



- this giving of himself as a burden. It was his *privilege* to do whatever was required to promote the spirituality of his brethren.
- b. His personal fondness for these saints had demanded that he indoctrinate them fully with the truths of the gospel while he was serving them with his “own life” to prove the sincerity of his love for them. Because they had “become dear” to him, Paul was dedicated to improving both their spiritual condition in God’s kingdom and their physical state in the kingdom of Caesar.
  - c. He had thought it best not to seek material support from these saints while he taught among them. Perhaps that decision was made because he thought that his brethren would have been burdened financially if they had been made responsible for feeding another mouth. Or, it may have involved the suspicions of some that he was teaching a “new” religion as a way of enriching himself without having to work at a secular job like everyone else. Whatever the reason, he had “toiled and labored night and day” to be able to carry on his evangelism without having to take money from the Thessalonian church. It may have been that he found it necessary to work by day and teach at night to accomplish his mission in Thessalonica.
  - d. The Thessalonian saints knew first hand that his behavior in their city had been above criticism. The *quality* of his activity among them had been *pure*.
    - (1) He had behaved devoutly [*hosios*-- “religiously right, holily”]. He had practiced what he preached, and he had preached that the will of God was for the sanctification [holiness] of every man (4:3,4,7).
    - (2) He had conducted his affairs with justice [*dikaios*-- “righteously, in accordance with what is right”]. “Right” describes a relationship of “fulfilling duties towards God and men.” Fairness is a salient feature of justice. Paul had dealt impartially with everyone, commending the obedient and condemning the disobedient and irreligious.
    - (3) He had acted blamelessly [*amempios*-- “unblameably, faultless”]. Of course, Paul never claimed perfection for himself (1John 1:8), but he could profess a “consistency of character and faithfulness in duty” [Barnes] as he tried to do his best to manifest the character of Christ to all men.
  - e. The Thessalonians could also testify personally that Paul had given attention to the things that were most needful to their spiritual health. He had not wasted their time nor his own energy with meaningless and unprofitable exercises. The *nature* of his activity had been *consequential*.
    - (1) He had exhorted [*parakaleo*-- “admonish, exhort”] those who needed to be encouraged. We can only imagine how difficult it was for many at Thessalonica to give up their old ways in exchange for a completely different lifestyle. Faltering and discouragement must have been the rule rather than the exception. The importance of keeping on was a crucial lesson to be learned (Gal. 6:9).

- (2) He had comforted [*paramutheomai*-- lit., “near speech”-- “to soothe, console”] those who were in the throes of heartbreak and personal tragedy. Such trials are common to all men, and they always pose a real threat to spiritual steadfastness. Nothing is more important than offering consolation to the disconsolate and seeking to soothe the troubled feelings of hearts embroiled in unsettling problems (Rom. 12:15b).
  - (3) He had charged [*martureo*-- “to testify, to bear witness” (sometimes signifying solemn protestation)] those who had strayed into sin to correct their course. “Tough love” that confronts mistakes and demands change is often the only effective weapon against a disciple’s apostasy. Ignoring sin in our brethren does no one any favor (James 5:19,20).
  - (4) Paul looked upon his converts as his “children” (2Cor. 6:13; Gal. 4:19). He felt a deep responsibility for their spiritual welfare and was anxious to do anything that would enhance their prospects for heaven. He viewed his duty toward his spiritual children in the same way that a biological father regards his obligation to do whatever is in the best interests of his offspring.
3. Paul’s overriding goal in all his associations with his brethren constantly controlled his behavior among them: “...that you would have a walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.” His greatest challenge was to persuade them that sharing in the rewards of citizenship in His earthly kingdom and in the glory of His heavenly kingdom were worth any cost of walking “worthy of God.”

## Verses 13-16--

1. The success that Paul had enjoyed in teaching and nurturing his converts at Thessalonica was impressive. However, none of that success would have been possible had it not been for the attitudes and the actions of the Thessalonians themselves. These verses display Paul’s acknowledgement of *their* good behavior that gave *him* the opportunity to perform in the good ways described in the verses above (4-12).
2. They had received God’s word as an inspired message intended for their salvation. The gospel can work *against* those who are unwilling to recognize its power and authority in their lives (John 12:48). But it will work *for* those who are receptive to its ability to heal their spirits (Luke 8:8,15). Furthermore, it will work *in* people who truly believe it and allow it to guide them along the path upon which the Lord has planned for them to walk (Psa. 119:105). It will cause us to flourish spiritually and to produce a bountiful harvest of fruit in the Lord’s vineyard (Matt. 13:8).
3. God’s word had *worked in* the members of the Thessalonian church. They had exhibited impressive “work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope” in response to the commands of the gospel (1:2). But they also had demonstrated a perseverance in the face of persecution that was highly exemplary.

4. The church in Thessalonica had “imitated” the churches in Judea as the result of taking confidence from God’s word in His guardianship of His children. They knew that He has promised, “I will never leave you nor forsake you. So that we may boldly say: The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?” (Heb. 13:5,6). People who fear God have no need to fear anything else.
5. The Thessalonian Christians had suffered at the hands of their countrymen in the same way that the Judean saints had been afflicted by their fellow Jews. In this manner they were “like” their Jewish brethren and had “imitated” the courage and perseverance that those faithful saints had shown in the face of harsh adversity.
6. The evil practice of persecuting God’s people had been characteristic of the Jewish leaders for a long time. It was evident in the bad treatment they had given to their own prophets. It had erupted in its most violent form in their mistreatment and crucifixion of their own Messiah, and it had persisted in their concerted effort to destroy the Lord’s church and the messengers who proclaimed His gospel. Paul did not expect that the Jews’ persecution of holy things would soon cease.
7. The opposition of the Jews to the gospel, of course, took many forms. One thing that should increase the appreciation of Gentile Christians for men like Paul, Silas, and Timothy was that they had brought the word of salvation to Gentiles in Thessalonica and other places despite the determination of influential Jews to prevent it. Those men strictly forbade any preaching that would encourage the salvation of Gentiles who did not submit themselves to the Law of Moses and its traditions (Acts 15:1), and they would do whatever it took to enforce that ban.
8. This position was even taken by Jews who had become church members in different locations. They made it extremely difficult for the truth to be spread as God intended (John 10:16). In their opposition they were “filling up the measure of their sins,” i.e., this was “the straw that broke the camel’s back” with God. They were repeating the disobedience of their fathers who had refused to obey Jesus and had attempted to prevent others from obeying Him as well (Matt. 23:13).
9. Victims of persecution by Jews or Gentiles should take heart to remember that the Lord will not let the vile actions of their persecutors go unnoticed. Wrath has come upon them [the Jewish people in particular] to the uttermost. God’s wrath was even then being stored up against His professed nation and would break forth upon them in the day of reckoning (Rom. 2:5,6). The same thing could be said, of course, about Gentiles who raised opposition to the efforts of other Gentiles to pursue the salvation offered by faithful apostles and teachers of God’s truth.
10. God’s wrath would be visited on the Jews “to the uttermost.” Jerusalem would soon be destroyed by the Roman army in A.D. 70, fewer than twenty years ahead. The nation would face terrible suffering and would be brought to its knees to an extent never imagined... “Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, says the Lord” (Heb. 10:30).

**Verses 17-20--**

- 1. Paul had literally been “taken away” from Thessalonica by brethren who were concerned that great harm was about to be done to him by unbelieving Jews and a mob of evil men. They had “sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea” (Acts 17:10), perhaps without the apostle’s complete agreement to leave the city.**
- 2. Paul’s detractors likely had twisted his sudden departure into an accusation that it proved how fickle his loyalties were and how little he really cared for the continued welfare of his converts. Perhaps their attacks on Paul’s character were beginning to bring doubts to the minds of some of the new Christians. It was for their own good that Paul wanted them to know the truth about his leaving.**
- 3. An extended absence from Thessalonica had never been intended by the apostle. He had planned to return to them as soon as possible, but that had been hindered by Satan and his devices. We are not told about when or how these obstacles occurred, but we are convinced that Paul had “great desire” to be reunited with these disciples, and a prolonged absence from them could only bring him disappointment and pain.**
- 4. The church at Thessalonica was not perfect, but it seems to have held a special place in Paul’s heart. They were his “glory and joy.” He felt a deep satisfaction in what had been accomplished in their lives, and his spirit soared when he contemplated their eternal reward from the Lord in the day of judgment. *His presence with them now* would be a blessing to all of them, but *the Lord’s presence with them then* would be far more wonderful.**

1. Paul had been \_\_\_\_\_ treated at \_\_\_\_\_ but continued to be \_\_\_\_\_ in speaking the \_\_\_\_\_ in much \_\_\_\_\_.
2. His \_\_\_\_\_ was not in \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, or \_\_\_\_\_.
3. One \_\_\_\_\_ with the \_\_\_\_\_ would not speak so as to \_\_\_\_\_ men but \_\_\_\_\_ who \_\_\_\_\_ the heart.
4. What did Paul never do when he preached the gospel?
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_
5. Paul had given the Thessalonians the \_\_\_\_\_ and his \_\_\_\_\_.
6. He had \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ that he might not be a \_\_\_\_\_ while he \_\_\_\_\_ the \_\_\_\_\_.
7. He had behaved \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_ as he \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Paul's goal for the Thessalonians was a \_\_\_\_\_ worthy of \_\_\_\_\_.
9. They had received his preaching not as from \_\_\_\_\_ but as from \_\_\_\_\_, and the word \_\_\_\_\_ in them \_\_\_\_\_ because they \_\_\_\_\_.
10. Thessalonica was an \_\_\_\_\_ of churches in \_\_\_\_\_ because they suffered from their own \_\_\_\_\_ as those did from the \_\_\_\_\_.
11. What had the Jews done to demonstrate that they were "contrary to all men"?
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_
12. Jews had \_\_\_\_\_ Paul to \_\_\_\_\_ to the \_\_\_\_\_ about \_\_\_\_\_ and filled up the \_\_\_\_\_ of their \_\_\_\_\_; they would suffer \_\_\_\_\_ to the \_\_\_\_\_.

Chapter Three

Paul had left Thessalonica amid a violent disturbance raised by unbelieving Jews and “evil men from the marketplace.” He was sent by his brethren to Berea for his safety, but Jews from Thessalonica followed him there and “stirred up the crowds” against him. Once again he was hurried out of town and was sent to Athens. Timothy and Silas, who for some reason-- perhaps to encourage new converts-- had stayed behind in Berea and were commanded to join him in Athens as soon as possible. From there Timothy had been sent back immediately to Thessalonica to determine the outcome of the recent uprising against the disciples (Acts 17:5-15). Some suppose that Silas returned to Berea or Philippi for a time.

Verses 1-5--

1. Paul left Athens for Corinth before Timothy could return with his report (Acts 18:1). Both Silas and Timothy soon rejoined the apostle at Corinth (Acts 18:5), and Timothy was then dispatched to Thessalonica with this first letter to the disciples there. This epistle is Paul’s response to the mostly good assessment of the church’s circumstances which Timothy had brought.
2. Paul had decided that it was more important for Thessalonica [and perhaps Berea or Philippi] to have a “minister of the gospel” to strengthen their faith than for him to have the company and assistance of Timothy and Silas while he worked in Athens. Considering the depraved and idolatrous character of Athens and its inhabitants, it must have been a great sacrifice for Paul to send his closest associates away to help in other places.
3. Since Timothy had been sent to Thessalonica, it was on *his* mission that Paul focused his remarks. His willingness to forego the services of this worker so that the Thessalonians could be served was a strong proof of his love for them and of his concern for their spiritual steadfastness.
4. The extent of Paul’s sacrifice in sending Timothy was emphasized by:
  - a. Timothy’s value as a worker in the kingdom. He was, (1) a faithful *brother*; (2) a capable *minister* [servant]; (3) a zealous *fellow laborer* in the gospel;
  - b. Timothy’s mission in returning to Thessalonica. He was to: (1) *establish* them in the faith by adding the knowledge that they had not been given during Paul’s brief work among them and, (2) *encourage* them in more fully understanding and practicing the truths they had been taught while Paul was with them.
5. Both Paul and the Thessalonian disciples had suffered persecutions because of the gospel. Timothy’s task was to try to make sure that the disciples’ faith was not being

“shaken” as a result of these afflictions. Barnes has an interesting comment on the term “moved”[“shaken”]:

The word rendered *moved* (*saino*) occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. It is properly to wag, to move to and fro, as of dogs which wag their tails in fondness ...then to caress, to fawn upon, to flatter; then to move or waver in mind-- as from fear; to dread, to tremble. Here the sense is, to be moved or agitated by fear, or by the terror of persecution, as to forsake their religion. The object of sending Timothy was, that they might not be thus moved, but that amidst all opposition they might adhere steadfastly to their religion.

Some might have wondered about the validity of Paul’s apostleship since he had not stood up to his adversaries and had not put a stop to their opposition with miraculous power. Instead, some might have decided that he seemed powerless to do anything to insure his own personal safety except to run away by night.

6. He thought it good to remind them of the teaching he had done about afflictions while he was with them.
  - a. He and other apostles were “appointed” to trouble. Jesus had warned the original apostles, “In the world you will have tribulation...” (John 16:33). The Lord said of Paul at his conversion, “For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake” (Acts 9:16). Paul was not surprised when opposition to his work arose, and others should not have been surprised either.
  - b. The Thessalonians had doubtless been warned by Paul about persecution that they also would face because of their faith. He told Timothy, “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2Tim. 3:12).
7. Despite his efforts to admonish the disciples ahead of time about dangers that would harass both him and them, Paul was anxious to know whether or not his warnings had prepared them for the trouble that had happened. Timothy’s task was to find out and let him know.
8. If the tempter [Satan-- Matt. 4:1,3,10] had taken advantage of their situation and had led some of them back into previous lifestyles, Paul’s work among them would have been in vain [*kenos*-- “empty”-- “the synonymous word *mataios*, ‘vain,’ signifies ‘void’ of result; it marks the aimlessness of anything” (Vine)]. Paul warned the Corinthians that unless one “receives” and “stands” in the gospel, his faith is “vain” and will not save him! In the same way, the Thessalonians’ “election” [salvation] (1:4), which was effected when Paul labored to take the gospel to them, would be “vain.” This certainly proves that a saved child of God can be lost if his faith fails!

Verses 6-10--

1. Timothy’s return with the good news of their steadfastness of faith and love for God and the gospel was very comforting to Paul. Moreover, to learn that his brethren in Thessalonica had no ill feelings toward him was better still.

2. The saints were as anxious to see Paul again as he was to see them. If any had entertained doubts about his character or his devotion to them, Timothy had been able to explain the facts and erase any misgivings about Paul. Most of them now had no problem with their faith in the Lord or with their faith in Paul as the Lord's apostle.
3. "If" [since] they stood fast in the Lord, Paul could "live" again. His distress over any possible animosity toward him had taken away much of his joy of living for a time. But now, in view of their good will, joy had been restored to the apostle's heart.
4. His happiness was now so complete that words of thanksgiving were inadequate to express it. He had reason to rejoice because he would be rewarded for the work he had done in teaching and nurturing these fragile souls (1Cor. 3:14), but that was not the reason for "all the joy" with which he rejoiced before God. His joy was not complete just because what had happened made *him* happy. His joy was full because it was for their *own* sake that they were doing well in their service to God. Nothing else could be as important to him, and nothing else could give him so much pleasure.
5. Paul prayed constantly ["night and day"] in behalf of the Thessalonians and many other Christians in many other places. Prayer was characteristic of him as it had been of Jesus. He urged saints to "pray without ceasing" (5:17), and he set the example for doing just that.
6. His prayers were focused on being reunited with the church at Thessalonica. He had personal relationships to renew and enjoy, but he also had some spiritual business to finish. His first opportunity to ground these disciples in the truth had been aborted, and he cherished another chance to add to what he had taught them earlier.
7. Paul's prayer for reunion was answered a couple of times. About five years after he first prayed this prayer, he was allowed to return to Macedonia and he went "over that region" (Acts 20:1,2). We can assume that Thessalonica was among the places he revisited on that journey. Another reunion seems to have occurred as mentioned in 1Timothy 1:3. We are not given any details of these subsequent visits to Thessalonica.

## Verse 11-13--

1. Once more Paul declares his wish to be with the Thessalonian church again. But he recognized that the Father and Son were totally in control of that eventuality. His plans meant nothing if they did not coincide with the plans of heaven. There were occasions in his travels when it became necessary for him to change from what *he* wanted to do to what his *Lord* wanted him to do [e.g., Acts 16:6,7].
2. Whether or not his plan to return to Thessalonica was ever fulfilled, his wish for the spiritual health of the saints in that city would never change. He wanted them to "increase" and "abound" in their love for one another and for all [men.] These two words are similar in meaning, but possibly suggest slightly different degrees of attaining the goal proposed by the apostle. "Increase" is *pleonasai*, "to make to increase,"



while “abound” is *perisseuo*, “to be abundantly furnished” [Thayer]. Perhaps Paul seeks to impress these disciples that he wants them not only to get better in showing their love for other people but also to *keep* getting better until they became the best they could be. “Abounding” probably is open-ended; we can never abound in *any* Christian virtue to our fullest potential. We can *always* get better at getting better!

3. The Lord would not force His love on them or cause them to do anything they didn’t want to do. He would “make” them increase in their love for others only by increasing their opportunities to be taught about their *duty* to love and by increasing their opportunities to *practice* what they had learned about showing love.
4. The extent of his own love for the Thessalonians could serve as an indicator of how deeply they should love one another. This was just another way in which they would do well to follow his example as a servant of Christ (1Cor. 11:1).
5. If they would cooperate with the Lord by trying their best to grow stronger in spiritual qualities, God would in turn:
  - a. Establish their hearts in the principles of holiness. That would fulfill the purpose for which they had been called by God through the gospel (4:7);
  - b. Make them ready to give account of themselves as Christians when Christ returns to judge his people for their treatment of others. “Blamelessness” is determined not only by what we do but also by how we feel toward those who become the objects of our love (1Cor. 13:1-3).
6. Christ will return with His “saints” to judge the world. Since Christians [“sheep”] will be judged along with unbelievers [“goats”] (Matt. 25:33), these “saints” [holy ones] apparently are angelic beings who will accompany the Lord to observe and possibly to participate in some way in the events of that great day (2Thes. 1:7,8). [See Deut. 33:2; Zech. 14:5; Jude 14.]
7. James Macknight makes these comments on the coming of the Lord:

On that awful day, all the righteous, after their resurrection, shall stand before the judgment seat of Christ. The wicked likewise shall be there as criminals. And even the evil angels who are now reserved in chains of darkness to the judgment of that day, being brought thither, shall be sentenced to punishment. The design of Christ in coming to judgment, is to complete the kind design of his first appearance. Then he came to put man in the way of salvation; now he will appear to bestow that salvation on the heirs thereof by a solemn pronouncement in the hearing of the assembled universe. God grant that we may be among those whom Christ’s sentence shall establish unblamable in holiness, and who shall go with him into heaven.

1. Paul was in \_\_\_\_\_ alone because he sent \_\_\_\_\_ away to \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Timothy was described as a \_\_\_\_\_, a \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_, and a \_\_\_\_\_ in the \_\_\_\_\_.
3. He would \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ the Thessalonians in their \_\_\_\_\_ so they would be unmoved by \_\_\_\_\_.
4. The apostles were \_\_\_\_\_ to afflictions and Paul had foretold his own \_\_\_\_\_ just as it happened.
5. Paul feared that the disciples had been \_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_ and his \_\_\_\_\_ might be in \_\_\_\_\_.
6. Timothy brought \_\_\_\_\_ of their \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ and reported that they had good \_\_\_\_\_ of Paul.
7. Despite all his \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, Paul was \_\_\_\_\_ concerning the \_\_\_\_\_ of the disciples.
8. "For now we \_\_\_\_\_ if you \_\_\_\_\_ in the \_\_\_\_\_."
9. Paul prayed \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ to see their \_\_\_\_\_ and to \_\_\_\_\_ anything \_\_\_\_\_ in their \_\_\_\_\_.
10. He wanted the Thessalonians to \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ in their \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ and to \_\_\_\_\_.
11. Their \_\_\_\_\_ could be \_\_\_\_\_ blameless in \_\_\_\_\_ at the \_\_\_\_\_ of Christ with all His \_\_\_\_\_.

Chapter Four

The first three chapters of this First Thessalonian letter have been largely devoted to Paul's reassurances to his brethren of his personal love for them and of his concern for their spiritual well-being. His adversaries in Thessalonica likely were attempting to use the circumstances of his departure from the city to raise doubts in the minds of the disciples about the genuineness of his commitment to their discipleship. Hoping that he has put that issue to rest, he now turns to several doctrinal and practical matters that called for his attention. These problems probably had been reported to Paul by Timothy when the two were reunited at Corinth (Acts 18:5; 1Thes. 3:6).

Verses 1-8--

1. "Finally" does not mean here that Paul is closing his letter. It indicates rather that he has some remarks he wishes to add to what he has just observed about their steadfastness in the faith and about his desire that they remain *blameless in holiness*, prepared in both heart and life for the Lord's return, whenever that might be.
2. Paul always set the bar high for faithfulness and service by the Lord's disciples. He was an achiever, and he thought that others should be, too. He uses "abound" in its various forms numerous times in his epistles to churches. Sometimes, he urges saints to "abound *more and more*," as he does in this passage. He had taught them about how to walk and to please God. They had done well in following his lead, but now he wants them to do even better--do their best to be their very best. J.W. Shepherd has these words about "progressive holiness" and love among God's people:

There is no finality to progressive holiness while the believer remains on earth. Life is either marked by growth or decay. Hence, Christians are to be "rooted and grounded in love" (Eph. 3:17), to be "sound in faith, in love, in patience" (Tit. 2:2); for as they "walk in love" toward one another and toward all men, they walk so as to please God (Eph. 5:2). To please God is the highest ambition of the true Christian; the consciousness of pleasing him is the highest Christian joy. But walking implies progress. Standing still is dangerous. They must go on from strength to strength, forgetting the things that are behind and pressing on to those which are before.

3. They "knew" God's commandments concerning pure lives, but the heathen environment was so corrupt and the temptations confronted by the disciples were so strong, Paul felt he needed to remind them again of the Lord's expectations.
4. God's demands could be summarized in *one word*: "*sanctification*." Sanctification [*hagiasmos*-- "separation to God by a fitting course of life"] is fundamental to discipleship, and it must regulate every aspect of the Christian experience. Sanctification has

both positive and negative implications; in some things the Christian is separated from the world by what he *does*; in other things separation is demonstrated by what he *doesn't do*.

5. Paul's immediate concern was that the Thessalonians must not participate in any form of the sexual immorality [fornication, ASV] so widespread in their society. Corinth, from where this letter was written, and whose patron goddess was Venus, the goddess of love, was rife with such sins. Thessalonica must have been similarly infected. Pagan society did not disapprove of fornication except within certain circumstances. The danger posed to the disciples by lustful temptations was great.
6. The Christian who "knew" God's commandments was aware that he must "possess his own vessel" and abstain from fornication. However, he might not have thought enough about *how* to do that. God provides a way of escape from temptation (1Cor. 10: 13), but He expects us to recognize the way out and to be ready to take it. That requires pre-planning about *what tests* we may face and *what actions* we will take in response to each test. Preparation is the surest route to success in being sanctified.
7. One's "own vessel" is understood in two different ways:
  - a. Peter's reference to wives as "weaker vessels" (1Pet. 3:7) leads some to think that Paul urges men to have wives. But even though the apostle encouraged marriage as an effective preventative of sexual sins (1Cor. 7:2), there are several good reasons why the "vessel" here probably is not a wife;
  - b. The human body is also called a "vessel" (2Cor. 4:7; 2Tim. 2:21) to be used by the spirit in pursuit of righteousness. The bodies of the Thessalonians must be employed for purposes other than those often entertained by their Gentile neighbors.
8. Gentile behavior was generated by Gentile ignorance. Although astute in many areas, most Gentiles had little knowledge of the true God. Paul charged them with having "exchanged the truth of God for the lie" of idolatry. When they did that, God "gave them up" to the vile passions that flooded the void left by God's departure (Ro. 1:22ff). Most of the Thessalonian Christians were Gentiles, but they had left their carnal culture when they obeyed the gospel. They *must not* go back!
9. The early churches were close-knit groups, as they were encouraged to be by their inspired teachers [e.g., 1Cor. 12:25,26]. Love for one another was repeatedly urged upon them as essential to God's favor (3:12). Closeness in their associations and warmth in their feelings for one another could easily erode into inappropriate practices never intended in the instructions they had received about living the Christian life. Love could quickly turn into lust; spiritual attraction could devolve into physical uncleanness. Even common social customs had to be observed within the concept of "sanctification." Thus, the kiss of greeting must be a "*holy* kiss" (5:26; Rom. 16:16).

10. There would be opportunities for misbehavior by men, perhaps especially by leaders in the congregation, toward other men's wives or other female members. Such conduct would "take advantage" of others and constitute sexual *fraud* of the worst kind. One plain fact should be enough to discourage such folly: "The Lord is the *avenger* of all such." David Lipscomb has some interesting observations about how God avenges sexual sins:

The law of God, wrought into the constitution of the human body, takes care that we do not escape without paying the penalty. If not at the moment, it is in the future, and with interest, in premature old age; in the torpor which succeeds the excesses of man's prime; in the sudden breakdown under any strain put on either physical or moral courage. They are avenged in the soul. Sensual indulgence extinguishes the capacity for feeling; the profligate would love but cannot; all that is inspiring, elevating, redeeming in the passions is lost to him; all that remains is the dull sense of that incalculable loss. This deadening is one of the most terrible consequences of immorality. They who do such things do not escape the avenging holiness of God. Even death, the refuge to which despair so often drives, holds out no hope to them. Men and women in the present age need to have impressed on them that God is an avenger of sexual wrongs both in this world and the next.

11. The church is composed of saved individuals who have been "called out" from the practice of sin [uncleanness] to engage in the practice of righteousness [holiness]. Separation [sanctification] from the world makes it totally inappropriate for the Lord's people to continue in the ways of the world.
12. Paul had declined to "make demands" on the Thessalonians as an apostle of Christ (2:6). He much preferred that *love* be the driving force underlying changes in their behavior (2:7). However, regarding something so serious and so dangerous as the sexual promiscuity of their previous environment, these converts must realize just how converted [changed] they must be. The commands about their sanctification were not from men, not even from Paul as a *wise* man. These were God's regulations, delivered to the church by the Holy Spirit Himself. They must not be ignored!

#### Verses 9-12--

- Perhaps the most distinguishing difference between the Gentile lifestyle and the way of life advocated by the apostles was the difference between "Gentile love" and the "love of the brethren" that received so much attention in gospel teaching. Paul did not need to tell the disciples any more about the *necessity* of brotherly love. That had been emphasized to them from their earliest contact with the gospel. He had earlier in this epistle already spoken of *his* love for them (2:7-12) and of his prayer that *their* love would increase and abound (3:12).
- Gentiles of that society characteristically practiced a "love" that was little more than an expression of lust and selfishness. It promoted the indulgence of the flesh and disregarded the positive values of a regulated family life. It also weakened the fabric of

Gentile culture as it grossly violated the principles of mutual respect upon which all sound personal relationships must rest. It infested the populace with debilitating diseases and generally weakened the physical strength and health of society.

3. Love of the brethren was centered in concepts that were totally foreign to the “love” so commonly practiced among the Gentiles. Paul described the qualities of brotherly love in his letter to the Corinthian church. It is love that prompts attention to the needs of others rather to one’s own desires; it assures that one will treat others in the way one would wish to be treated by them; it holds the best opinion possible about the value of others; and it endures [is patient] toward others despite circumstances and eventualities. [See 1Cor. 13:4-8.]
4. The church at Thessalonica had already compiled a good record of showing brotherly love to one another and to other disciples throughout Macedonia. We have no record of the *ways* in which their affection had been displayed, except that they had sounded out the word of the Lord to the whole of Greece. And no greater love can one have for another than to teach him the saving truth. However, it would be surprising if a historical record would not disclose numerous deeds of kindness and concern that had been done by these saints in behalf of their fellow Christians in Macedonia.
5. The need to build on past performance and to reach even higher levels of love had been urged on them in chapter three (verse 12). Now this goal is stated again: increase in love more and more. This exhortation probably is intended to incite them to expand their vision of brotherhood and brotherly responsibility even beyond the borders of their native land. Christians must never forget that each one of us is a small part of an extensive fellowship throughout the world, and as such we all have an obligation toward all other members of the fellowship, wherever they may be. When opportunity to serve arises, the call should be answered whenever possible.
6. There were several things toward which the saints should aspire:
  - a. To lead a quiet life. The KJV and the ASV both render the phrase, “...that ye study to be quiet.” “Study” [*philotimeomai*] literally is “to be fond of honor,” or, “to be ambitious, to make it one’s aim.” The NKJV gives, “aspire [strive].” Paul obviously thought that “quietness” was important to the successful Christian life. He has in mind, of course, the structure of everyday conduct that is focused and deliberate in identifying worthy personal goals and of determining how they can be met. The quiet life prevents extraneous and insignificant activities from disrupting the pursuit of men’s responsibilities;
  - b. To mind their business and work with their hands. From the beginning, God has given man work to do. Minding the garden of Eden was a blessing, not a burden. Work remained a blessing even after it was associated with the “sweat of the brow” (Gen. 3:17-20). The law of Christ is clear about the importance of honorable work for His followers (Eph. 4:28). It would have been hurtful to the church had some of

its members decided that their new liberty in Jesus included freedom from earning a living through honest labor. Idleness was widespread in the pagan world. Many of the residents of Athens “spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing” (Acts 17:21). Paul evidently had spoken to the Thessalonians about the sinfulness of idleness, for he speaks of a previous “commandment” which he had given to them during the time he had preached in their city (Acts 17). Apparently, the temptation to be idle was a continuing problem about which the disciples needed to be warned regularly;

- c. To mind their own business. There are some things that belong to others for which we are also obligated. “Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others” (Phil. 2:4). If a brother’s well-being is involved, we must do what we can to help him meet his needs. Selfishness is completely foreign to the character of Christ’s disciples. But there are other things that don’t call for involving anyone else. These matters are personal and private. “Assistance” in such things becomes *interference*. Sometimes the difference between assistance and interference is hard to determine, but busybodies and gossips are often responsible for confusion and resentment arising in a local church (1Tim. 5:13);
- d. To walk properly toward those outside. Christians must be “light” and “salt” as they associate with people of the world. They must draw men to Christ rather than drive them from the Savior. Paul rebuked Jews for their part in causing Gentiles to blaspheme the name of God (Rom. 2:24). No man “lives to himself” without bearing the responsibility for his influence on other people (Rom. 14:7);
- e. To lack nothing. “The gospel of prosperity,” which gives high priority to the accumulation of wealth as the accompaniment of a godly life, is nowhere promoted in the New Testament. Rather, “and having food and clothing, with these we shall be content” (1Tim. 6:8). It isn’t the lack of *material* assets that Paul is concerned about. He wants the Thessalonian Christians to be well-equipped in every way to have a positive impact upon those outside of Christ and to lead as many of them as possible to the Lord. “Lack nothing” needful for doing good.

#### Verses 13-18--

1. Paul often used the phrase, “I do not want you to be ignorant,” or, “I want you to know,” as a way of introducing a new topic or of calling attention to another main point in his discussion [e.g., Rom. 1:13; 11:25; 1Cor. 10:1; 11:3; Phil. 1:12]. So, here he turns to one of the main reasons he was writing this letter: to ease the minds of those who were troubled about certain issues related to the Lord’s return.
2. It was concerning those who had “fallen asleep” that questions had arisen. That expression had been used by Jesus about Jairus’ daughter (Luke 8:52) and about Lazarus (John 11:11). Death *is* very much like a sleep when we consider the temporary

- duration of both, and when we remember that the body one day will come forth from the grave just as the sleeping body arises from its bed. Still, the disciples knew that death is *not* sleep, and the facts surrounding its reality demand to be understood.
3. Whatever was bothering the Thessalonians must have been reported to Paul by Timothy when they were reunited in Corinth. We cannot know exactly what their questions were, but we can make an educated guess when we examine the answers Paul supplied in this passage.
  4. There were two possible sources of the saints' grief about their dead:
    - a. Some might have supposed that the concept of a bodily resurrection was beset with so many insoluble difficulties that the very idea was impossible. Of course, they had failed to understand that the very foundation on which their "new" religion rested was the hope of being raised as Christ had been raised (1Cor. 15:12-19). These disciples had decided that there could be no bodily resurrection for anyone;
    - b. Others had concluded that the resurrection was real, but its great promise could be realized fully only by those who were living at the time of Jesus' return. The dead would rise again, but only after a considerable time had passed following the living disciples being taken into heaven. This disadvantage, they thought, would persist throughout eternity.
  5. These misconceptions would have been very painful to disciples who:
    - a. Could not accept the reality of the resurrection. If the dead are not raised, not only were those already dead consigned to an eternal "sleep," but they too might die before Jesus came again. If that should happen, then their own expectations of being taken by Him to live in heaven would be totally destroyed;
    - b. Did not grasp the concept of the simultaneous raising of dead saints and the glorifying of the living. Those who had suffered the loss of loved ones and brethren were fearful that death would somehow penalize the dead and prevent their fullest enjoyment of the eternal reward. It isn't clear what factors contributed to such an erroneous notion of a long interval between advent and resurrection.
  6. Christians have a strong hope for a full reward whether they are dead or alive when the Redeemer comes for them. In a comforting promise, Jesus has assured faithful disciples, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:3). No faithful disciple has any cause to sorrow as others do who have no hope of going to a better place.
  7. It is not sorrow *as such* on the part of survivors that Paul discourages when saints die. The shedding of tears is natural and emotionally healthy. It is instead the excessive and despairing grief that unbelievers often display at the loss of relatives and friends. Some pagans of the Gentile world held a belief in life after death and in some kind of reward for the dead. Their confidence, however, was rooted in vague fantasies and often deserted them in their times of greatest need. What their faith could not supply to assuage their grief, they tried to manufacture with emotional outbursts of various



kinds. Historical records describe this outpouring of desperate sorrow:

Their grief at parting was not mitigated by the belief that the soul was now happy, or by the prospect of again being with them in a better world. It was on this account, in part, that the heathens indulged in expressions of such excessive grief. When their friends died, they hired men to play in a mournful manner on a pipe or trumpet, or women to howl and lament in a dismal manner. They beat their breasts; uttered loud shrieks; rent their garments; tore off their hair; cast dust on their heads; or sat down in ashes. It is not improbable that some among the Thessalonians, on the death of their pious friends, kept up those expressions of excessive sorrow. To prevent this, and to mitigate their sorrow, the apostle refers them to the bright hopes which Christianity had revealed, and points them to the future glorious reunion with the departed pious dead.

8. The “good news” of the gospel was that Jesus rose from the dead. *IF* one could believe that the true God had the power to accomplish that, he should have no trouble in embracing the resurrection of Jesus’ true disciples. That feat would require no more power than in carrying the living to heaven. It was all just a matter of *faith*, as everything is in the Christian religion. Paul seems to be saying that since Jesus is the head of *each* member of His body [the church], what happens to the Head must also happen to every member of the body.
9. The word of the Lord, which was the only source of *faith* in the resurrection (Rom. 10:17), declared its reality in no uncertain terms and demanded their full confidence in the declaration.
10. That same word also disarmed the contentions of those who questioned the possibility of a simultaneous resurrection of the dead and a glorification of the living at the coming of the Savior. The living will enjoy no advantage over the dead. They will not precede [*phthano*-- “to anticipate, to come sooner”] the dead to their reward.
11. The heaven-planned scenario of the Lord’s second coming is simple. The first stage involves the Lord’s coming and attaches *three awesome sounds* to that event:
  - a. The Lord will descend from heaven with a *shout*. This shout [*keleusma*-- “a call, summons, shout of command”] is of undetermined origin, although John 5:28 says that the dead will rise from the graves at the call of “*His*” voice. It is a cry of excitement, as of “sailors at the oar, soldiers rushing to a battle, a huntsman to his dogs.” Perhaps the Lord will be joined by the hosts of heaven in that final call to judgment;
  - b. Jesus will come with the *voice* of an archangel. Two angels are named in Scripture, Gabriel (Luke 1:19,26) and Michael, the archangel who contended with the devil about the body of Moses (Jude 9). The prefix “arch” identifies a “chief” angel, which further indicates some kind of oversight or hierarchy among the angels. Whether Michael is the *only* archangel and the one whose voice will be heard at the time of the end, we cannot know. Versions vary about whether the text intends to specify the voice of *the* archangel or the voice of *an* archangel;

- c. The trumpet of God will also be sounded. This trumpet will serve the same purpose as that of the trumpet that blasted out God's approach and announced the awesome events about occur at Mt. Sinai (Exo. 19:16,19), or of the silver trumpets fashioned and used by Israel to summon the people for different reasons (Num. 10: 2ff). Paul also spoke about this trumpet to the Corinthians in connection with the resurrection (1Cor. 15:52).
12. The second action will be the resurrection of dead saints. The dead in Christ will rise first. It is important to note that the apostle is *not* including *all* the dead, righteous and unrighteous, in this discussion. Nowhere in this passage is the fate of the unbelieving dead addressed. Church members at Thessalonica were not unduly concerned about that issue. Their minds were unsettled about what would happen on judgment day to fellow Christians. There is no reason to use this passage to manufacture *two resurrections*-- one of the righteous and one of the unrighteous, separated by an interval of a thousand years-- and offer those who had rejected the Christ while they lived another chance to accept Him and His salvation after they died. Jesus disallowed such a sequence of events when he declared, "... the hour is coming in which *all* who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth-- those who have done good...and those who have done evil" (John 5:28,29).
  13. Paul's point is that those *dead* "in Christ" will not suffer any disadvantage because they are not *living* "in Christ" when the Lord returns. They will rise from their graves first, i.e., before living Christians are glorified and taken up to meet their glorified Redeemer.
  14. [Only] then will those who are alive be caught up to meet the triumphant Lord in the air. Simultaneously, the raised saints will be transported along with them to that happy reunion. All will be "caught up" together, much like Philip was "caught away" by the Spirit (Acts 8:39) and Paul was "caught up" into the third heaven (2Cor. 12:2).
  15. Jesus had promised the faithful that "where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:3). At this great reunion of *all* the saved, living and dead, this precious promise will be fulfilled. "And thus we shall always be with the Lord," not where we meet Him in the clouds, but in the eternal "mansions" [places] He has so lovingly prepared for our everlasting enjoyment.
  16. It was with confidence that Paul could exhort those whose hearts had been troubled (John 14:1) about the details of the Lord's return, "Therefore comfort one another with these words." These comforting words were the words of the Lord Himself (verse 15), and they were true and dependable words. There was no more need for worry. Jesus had addressed everything that had bothered them, and all had been taken care of completely.

**17. Paul's words about the resurrection were comforting to the Thessalonians in several ways. In his discussion of those things that were bothering them, he confirmed a number of facts upon which their faith had been founded when they first heard the gospel. These truths were as firm now as ever:**

- 1. Jesus died on the cross but has been raised from the dead by the power of His Father;**
- 2. Jesus will come again to reward the faithful with the glorification of their physical bodies and with an eternal home in heaven;**
- 3. The saints who have died will be raised from their graves upon Jesus' return;**
- 4. Those who have died prior to the Lord's coming will not be in any disadvantageous situation;**
- 5. Both living and dead disciples will be caught up together to meet Christ in the air when He appears for His saints;**
- 6. All the redeemed, whether living or dead when Jesus comes again, will be *forever* with the Lord in heaven.**

**How comforting to new and tender converts these truths must have been!**

1. Christians should abound \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ and learn to \_\_\_\_\_ so as to \_\_\_\_\_ God.
2. God's will is for our \_\_\_\_\_; we must \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_\_.
3. We must \_\_\_\_\_ our \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ and not like those who do not \_\_\_\_\_.
4. The \_\_\_\_\_ is the \_\_\_\_\_ of wicked deeds, as Paul had \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
5. God called us to \_\_\_\_\_, not to \_\_\_\_\_.
6. Christians should seek a \_\_\_\_\_ life, mind their own \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_ with their own \_\_\_\_\_.
7. Some were \_\_\_\_\_ about those who had \_\_\_\_\_ and were \_\_\_\_\_ like those with no \_\_\_\_\_.
8. The resurrection of \_\_\_\_\_ is connected to the resurrection of those who \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_.
9. Those who are \_\_\_\_\_ at Jesus' return will not \_\_\_\_\_ those who are \_\_\_\_\_.
10. Three sounds will accompany the Lord's return:  
a. \_\_\_\_\_ b. \_\_\_\_\_ c. \_\_\_\_\_
11. All saints will be \_\_\_\_\_ up together to meet the \_\_\_\_\_ in the \_\_\_\_\_; all will be \_\_\_\_\_ with the \_\_\_\_\_.
12. "Therefore \_\_\_\_\_ one another with \_\_\_\_\_."

Chapter Five

Verses 1-3-- One more question remained with the saints about the Lord's second coming.

In chapter four, Paul addressed their uncertainties and calmed their fears about the events that will take place on that singular day and about what will happen to both living and dead disciples at that time. However, the burning issue of *when* Jesus will come back apparently had surfaced among the Thessalonians, as it usually does in any discussion of the subject. The apostle will now deal with their concerns about that aspect of the topic, but not in the same way as he had done about their other questions.

1. Brethren were asking, "During what time, or at what season, will Christ return? Must we wait long to receive our reward for faithfulness, or can we expect it all to be over in just a short while?"
2. "Times" and "seasons" likely refer to "long periods" [times] and to "particular events during those times" [seasons]. Daniel spoke of God's control of the world's affairs as, He "changes the times and the seasons" (Dan. 2:21). Jesus counseled the apostles that God would unfold His plan on His own schedule and urged them to be patient. "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority" (Acts 1:7).
3. There was no *need* for the disciples to know when Jesus would return, even if that information were available to them. Identifying the time with any exactness could serve no useful purpose and might instead even prove hurtful to their salvation. If they were told that the day would be soon, panic and confusion might control their lives instead of the quietness he had already urged upon them (4:11). On the other hand, if the time were set far off in the future, they might be inclined to postpone or neglect many of their Christians responsibilities, thinking that there would be ample opportunity to tend to business before time ran out.
4. Of course, Paul didn't have the information that some wanted from him. Jesus had stated clearly, "But of that day and hour no one knows, no, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only" (Matt. 24:36). He had added, "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming" (Matt. 24:42). Apparently, nothing had changed since Christ put a damper on any speculation about His second advent.
5. The Thessalonians had been told what Jesus had said and therefore "knew perfectly" [completely] the answer to their own questions. They knew as much as anyone else about *when* the Lord would come because nobody knew *anything*.
6. Paul addresses Christ's return within the context of "the day of the Lord." He wanted

his readers to understand that a number of things will occur in connection with the Lord's coming. He had already identified some of those events in his discussion of the second advent in chapter four, verses 15-17. It was not only that Jesus will come again but also when He comes, things significant to the eternal destiny of all men will transpire.

7. Jesus likened His own unexpected and sudden return to the coming of a thief in the night and urged preparedness on the part of His followers (Matt. 24:43).
8. From the time Jesus first foretold His return to judge the world, His warnings about the need for readiness have largely been ignored. Men have continued in their "eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage" (Matt. 24:37) with little thought that time is limited for attending to eternal things. This same attitude was popular among the people of Thessalonica. They supposed that their future was to be "peace and safety," not considering that the gospel preached by Paul in their city was the *only* thing that could provide the comfort they anticipated would come from elsewhere.
9. These deluded people will experience destruction, not peace and safety, when Jesus makes His appearance. And like the pains of childbirth, the painful events of the last day will engulf them suddenly and without prior warning. Those who have not already made ample preparations for the end of time will not escape the awful consequences of their disbelief and neglect of duty. Good intentions and deferred obedience will be no excuse for the lack of diligence.

Verses 4-6--

1. Like the Ephesian Christians, the saints at Thessalonica had once been "darkness" but now were "children of light" (Eph. 5:8). "Darkness" is ignorance of the truth; "light" is the knowledge of God's will. Paul's commission from the Lord as an apostle to the Gentiles was, "to open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me" (Acts 26:18). Paul had done his work well. These disciples were no longer in darkness; they were walking in the light of truth about the second coming and about many other things that they had not known before they met Paul.
2. Paul introduces an analogy to stress the importance of being prepared for the Lord's return. Just as there are conditions within which people are more likely to be broken in upon by thieves than under other conditions, even so the "Day" [of the Lord] will also bring grief to unsuspecting persons under conditions that favor surprise:
  - a. Conditions favoring the theft of material wealth are: (1) Night, (2) darkness, (3) unpreparedness and, (4) sleeping or drunken homeowners;
  - b. Conditions favoring the theft of spiritual wealth are: (1) Night, (2) darkness [ignor-

ance], (3) unpreparedness and, (4) sleeping souls [unconcerned and disobedient] (1Cor. 11:30) or “drunken” lifestyles.

3. It may be that Paul simply uses two terms in tandem instead of one in order to place more emphasis on our need for knowledge and enlightenment [“light/day”] and on the danger in relying on ignorance and superstition [“darkness/night”].
4. However, he seems to differentiate between “night” and “darkness,” and between “day” and “light.” Could he be saying that people don’t necessarily have to try to function in darkness just because it’s nighttime? Even when night’s darkness envelops us, we can banish it by lighting a light. And even shadows in the daytime can be erased by the addition of more light. Using these ideas, we might understand Paul to say that Christians are blessed with the truth for two reasons: (1) they live in a spiritual environment where truth [day] is highly valued and pursued (John 8:32), and, (2) they can study as individuals and apply what they learn [light] to their understanding of spiritual concepts (2Tim. 2:15). Contrarily, people remain ignorant of the truth because of (1) a spiritual environment either apathetic or hostile to truth [night], and, (2) an unwillingness to study and learn the truth for themselves [darkness]. In this context, truth flourishes in Christians because of both group and individual efforts to promote it, and ignorance and error thrive when neither individuals nor their associates place any importance on solving the issues of life with the word of God.
5. Christians are “sons” of light and day because they have developed the *nature* of respecting truth over error, as James and John were “Sons of thunder” because of their fiery temperaments. Sinners are “of” the night and darkness through a lack of dedication to the truth.
6. Thieves can succeed in light as well as in darkness if the householder is asleep. Sleep during the day may be only a *temporary* interruption of watchfulness, but its consequences are as damaging as when a theft occurs in the night. Disciples will lose their souls despite living in a spiritually healthy environment if they are “asleep” individually by neglecting their duties to the Lord when He returns to call them into account.

#### Verses 7-11--

1. Paul introduces another factor that makes it easy for a thief to victimize a householder. In addition to falling asleep, the homeowner may be drunk during the night. [Drunkenness during the daytime was considered disgraceful. See Acts 2:13,15.] If so, his ability to resist the thief is as impaired as if he were asleep. This conduct likely is mentioned because of the dissolute lifestyles maintained by the Gentile populations of Thessalonica and other cities. In stressing the need for being ready for the day of the Lord, Paul takes the opportunity to insert a brief commentary on the inappropriateness of drunkenness in the lives of Christians. Sins of the flesh [drunkenness] and “sleep” [disobedience] can be equally obstructive to the pursuit of truth

and righteousness. Both are practiced “at night,” because both result from ignorance or disrespect of God’s wishes for the conduct of His people.

2. Those who want their lives to be governed by truth and goodness must be sober [both serious in attitude toward truth and free from physical drunkenness]. They must also arm themselves with two important defenses against Satan’s efforts to overcome them with error and discouragement about such matters as Christ’s second coming. Both items for defense were familiar to Paul’s audience through their observation of Roman soldiers in their midst.
  - a. The breastplate of faith and love. The breastplate, of course, provided a covering for the vital organs within the trunk of the body. Its use was essential to a successful defense against the weapons of an enemy. In part, the saint’s breastplate consists of his *faith* in the truth and power of God’s word to prevail against all attacks by the devil and his angels. The other part is *love* for the Father and the Son and a desire to please them that far exceeds the desire to gratify self or others who would lure us into sinful behavior. The inner man (2Cor. 4:16) from which comes our life-determining decisions will be well protected from spiritual harm if we are careful to wear our breastplate of faith and love;
  - b. The helmet of the hope of salvation. The protection offered to a soldier by his helmet was just as vital as his breastplate. The head is vulnerable to serious injury in close combat and must be kept from harm, for a wound to the head would terminate the participation of any part of the body in battle against a foe. It was the *hope* for favorable treatment and eternal reward when Jesus returns that motivated the Thessalonians to serve their “new” God. Paul’s teaching about the second coming in the previous chapter was the source of great *hope* for their future;
  - c. A more complete listing of the “Christian armor” appears in Ephesians 6:13-17. Each item is important to the Christian soldier (2Tim. 2:3,4), but none more important than his breastplate of faith and love and his helmet of hope.
3. Going to sleep at our post of duty is fatal to our preparation for the last day. Shallowness in our knowledge of the truth or failing to apply what we learn to the troubling issues of our lives will surely lead to *wrath*, not to *salvation*. Coming short of heaven is contrary to what God wants for us. He has done everything needful for our salvation, including the sacrificial death of His Son. If we fail, we have only ourselves to blame.
4. The “sleep” in verse ten is not the same as the “sleep” in verses six and seven. That was spiritual sleep; this [verse 10] is a physical sleep [death] such as Paul dealt with in chapter four. It is God’s purpose that *all* saints, whether living [awake] or dead [a-sleep] when Jesus returns, be prepared for that event. All who have lived *in Christ* (2Cor. 5:17) will live *with Christ* as the happy outcome of His death for us.



5. “Therefore, comfort each other” was something the Thessalonians could do about the sacrifices they were making to live faithfully day by day as new converts. Staying awake and active in their spiritual obligations wasn’t always easy or pleasant. But was it worth it? Absolutely! The promises related to Jesus’ advent were ample proof of that! Remind one another constantly of those promises!

Verses 12-14--

In addition to their concerns about the Lord’s return, there seem to be a few other matters that had been reported to Paul by Timothy that the apostle considered worth noticing before closing his letter to the church. Or, it may be that these were just things he knew might later present problems to their spirituality if they were neglected. Either way, they were truths that offered strength to the Thessalonians in the first century, as they still do to us in this modern age.

1. First, there are behaviors toward leadership that are crucial to the peace of a church:
  - a. Recognize [*eidēnai*-- “to have regard for one, cherish, pay attention to”] the elders of the congregation. “Recognize” is “know” in the KJV and ASV; “respect” in the RSV; “appreciate” in the Confraternity. These are men who “labor among you” (1Pe. 5:1), who are “over you in the Lord” (1Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13:17), and who “admonish” you. Paul had participated on his first preaching trip in the appointment of elders in “every church” as a means of “strengthening the disciples” (Acts 14:22, 23). He also charged Titus to appoint elders in every city as a part of “setting in order” what was “lacking” in the churches (Titus 1:5). He regarded the eldership as very important to the success of every local church.
    - (1) Elders can be effective as leaders in a congregation only to the extent that they enjoy the respect and support of those they lead. Members are commanded to “obey” those who rule over them and to be “submissive” (Heb. 13:17). Christ’s apostles rule over Christians in all matters of faith through their written word (Heb. 13:7), but elders rule [decide] all matters of opinion for their flock, including the sensitive issues of fellowship that focus on judgments about whether individual members are obedient in matters of faith. The ability of the church at Thessalonica to “be at peace” among themselves was no doubt connected to his command to “respect” and “obey” the elders.
    - (2) Elders must be engaged in actively “laboring among” their local membership. Their work involves administrative and judicial responsibilities performed *for* the church that are important, but perhaps their most valuable contribution to the health of the congregation, and to the well-being of the members individually, is in the work they do *among* the membership. While “among” the sheep [collectively] as *shepherds*, they oversee [see over] each sheep

[individually] as *overseers* to determine the spiritual needs of each one. Then they “feed” the sheep as *shepherds* by supplying their needs to the fullest extent possible (Acts 20:28--KJV, ASV, RSV);

- (3) Another vital work of elders deserving of the respect of members is admonition. This word, *noutheteo*, means, “to put in mind,” and is related to both instruction and warning [Vine]. In fact, the warnings given by elders to wayward members should be based on sound and patient instruction from the word of God. Members who are objects of admonition must be submissive to it, understanding that admonition is a *duty* of elders as they “watch out for your souls” (Heb. 13:17).
- b. Elders are to be esteemed “very highly” in love for their work’s sake. Perhaps the personalities of some elders are more appealing than those of others, but *all elders* who do the *work of elders* deserve our love and respect in return for the vital labor that they perform in our behalf!
2. Second, there are behaviors that each member must exhibit toward other members who have special needs.
- a. Warn those who are unruly. “Unruly” [*ataktos*] is “disorderly” in the ASV. It signifies “not keeping order.” It was a military term denoting “not keeping rank, insubordinate.” All soldiers in the Lord’s army are required to march to the same drumbeat of God’s ordinances. Those who choose to “march to another drummer” and who fall out of rank are “unruly” and are subject to the disciplinary measures of the local congregation (2Thes. 3:11,14).
- b. Comfort [“encourage”--ASV] the fainthearted. Our fellow Christians sometime suffer personal reverses in their lives that can easily discourage them in their quest for heaven. When tragedy happens, some people are overwhelmed by the feeling of, “Why me?” Our task is the same one Paul assumed, “[God] who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2Cor. 1:4).
- c. Uphold [support] the weak. Numerous obstacles get in the way of our dedication. Many times we can help to remove those hindrances from the rough paths over which others are struggling. Let us never forget that we are all members of the same body of Christ. Strength in each member makes the body strong; weakness in individual members weakens the whole body. “And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it” (1Cor. 12:26).
- d. Be patient with all. When some members become unruly, fainthearted, or weak, other members may become impatient with them and demand instant reformation. But that may be an unreasonable expectation within the circumstances of their disabilities. Time and opportunity to improve may be the key factors necessary for recovering those who have slipped. Paul’s inspired advice is critical: “And a ser-

vant of the Lord must not quarrel, but be gentle to all, able to teach, *patient*, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses..." (2Tim. 2:24-26).

3. Third, there are behaviors that reflect Christ's love for all men.
  - a. See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone. To the Romans Paul said, "Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of 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. If he thirsts, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head" (Rom. 12:17-21). Displaying the spirit of Christ (1Pet. 2:23) in a good deed may enable us to bring to Christ someone who otherwise would be forever turned away by our bad conduct.
  - b. Always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all. The apostle probably is speaking here primarily of spiritual interests. "Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others" (Phil. 2:4). In matters of the spirit, what is best for others is also best for ourselves. However, we must be careful that we not defer to what someone else *wants*, and which may not really be *good* for him spiritually. Even in material things, we should try to be sensitive to what will benefit other people and try to accommodate those needs. Many have been won to the Lord through deeds of kindness by Christians.

#### Verses 17-22--

Paul concludes this instructional portion of his letter to the church at Thessalonica with a remarkable list of *seven* short but profoundly inclusive commands. Scattered among the few words used to give these mandates are "always," "without ceasing," "everything," "all," and "every," showing the universality of their application.

1. Rejoice always. Paul himself seems to have been the foremost practitioner of this virtue. In a Roman prison, following a severe beating with many stripes, he and Silas were inclined to pray and sing hymns to their God. Other prisoners listened to them and were impressed (Acts 16:23-25). To the Philippians he gave the divine advice, "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!" (Phil. 4:4). Philip Pendleton comments on the need for rejoicing among the Thessalonians:

A short time previous to Paul's letter the Thessalonian Christians had all been pagans, and as such, under similar conditions of distress and persecutions, would have been apt to seek escape from their troubles by suicide; but now they are bidden to make their sufferings for Christ a source of new joy, as Jesus had commanded (Matt. 5:10-12), and as Paul who practiced this teaching, had so often enjoined...Confidence in the good providence of God made such joy possible--Rom. 8:28.

2. Pray without ceasing. "Prayer changes things." That must be a foundational conviction of the Christian's relationship to his God. Jesus set the bar high for His disciples.

Perhaps His most distinguishing characteristics were His close relationship to His Father and the expression of that relationship through prayer. His petitions were fervent and frequent. Even His divine nature felt a deep need for prayer. Those same distinctions were also seen in Paul. In his letters to churches and individuals he often mentioned his prayers in their behalf and urged them to pray for others (e.g., 1Tim. 2:8). “Pray without ceasing” is a large order to fill, but it can be done. Obviously, we aren’t required to fill every moment with active prayer to the exclusion of all else, but “this not only means to observe habitual seasons of prayer, and to cultivate a disposition to pray, but to be ever in a prayerful spirit, to have constantly a subconsciousness of the presence of God.” Unceasing prayerfulness will keep the Christian away from places and out of things that would be inconsistent with prayer to God.

3. In everything give thanks. Even worldly people have much to be thankful for. God showers innumerable blessings on the good and evil alike (Matt. 5:45). Christians can be thankful for so much more. In addition to the common favors, we enjoy the advantages of *every* spiritual blessing in Christ (Eph. 1:3). Many of our blessings can easily be identified as such, but if we believe strongly in God’s providence, we must also be convinced that many others go undetected and sometimes may even be considered as contrary to our well-being. All things are in God’s hands, and He has assured us of His concern for us in this world (1Pet. 5:7). Trust Him and thank Him that He sees “the big picture” when we can’t. Have confidence that He will fit everything together so as to accomplish our salvation in heaven (Rom. 8:28).
4. Do not quench the Spirit. “Quench” is to “extinguish, put an end to” [Webster]. Of course, it isn’t the *Spirit* that may be quenched by disciples, but the *work* or *positive effects* of the Spirit’s work. There were two ways in which the Holy Spirit was at work among the Thessalonians:
  - a. He provided powers of spiritual [miraculous] gifts to be used in the activity of the church. Nine such gifts are listed in 1Corinthians 12:8-10. We are not told of how many or what kind of gifts were exercised at Thessalonica. Some at Corinth seemed to diminish the effectiveness of their gifts by misconduct in their use (1Cor. 12:26-40). If bad human behavior disallowed the full benefit intended in the distribution of the gifts among the saints, it would in effect “quench the Spirit”;
  - b. He also provided for the strength and edification of the church members through the word He revealed through divine means (Acts 20:32). Upon hearing the gospel for the first time, the Thessalonians had “welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God,” and it had “worked effectively” in them (2:13). Perhaps some had been influenced to question certain of the truths they had earlier embraced, or maybe Paul is simply warning against such an eventuality. But resisting or denying the life-altering power of God’s word is a sure road to “quenching the Spirit” in individuals and congregations. A respected commentator has

some profitable thoughts on this matter:

Fire may be put out by pouring on water; or by covering it with any incombustible substance; or by neglecting to supply fuel. If it is to be made to burn, it must be nourished with proper care and attention. The Holy Spirit, in his influences on the soul, is here compared with fire that might be made to burn more intensely, or that might be extinguished. In a similar manner the apostle gives this direction to Timothy, "...stir up...kindle up, cause to burn, the gift of God," 2Tim.1:6. Anything that will tend to damp the ardour of piety in the soul; to chill our feelings; to render us cold and lifeless in the service of God, may be regarded as "quenching the Spirit." Neglect of cultivating the Christian graces, or of prayer, of the Bible, of the sanctuary, of a careful watchfulness over the heart will do it. Worldliness, vanity, levity, ambition, pride, the love of dress, or indulgence in an improper train of thought, will do it. It is a great rule in religion that all piety which there is in the soul is the fair result of culture. A man has no more religion than he intends to have; he has no graces of the Spirit which he does not seek; he has no deadness to the world which is not the object of his sincere desire, and which he does not aim to have. Anyone, if he will, may make elevated attainments in the divine life; or he may make his religion merely a religion of form, and know little of its power and its consolations.

5. **Do not despise prophecies.** Prophecies were the divinely-inspired messages received from God [Holy Spirit] and delivered to men for their learning and obedience. Prophecy was one of nine spiritual gifts listed in 1Corinthians 12. Prophets were widely present in New Testament churches, and much of Christian activity was based on the guidance of prophets endowed with inspiration (Eph. 2:20). It seems unthinkable that any would dare to "despise" [*exoutheneo*-- "to regard as nothing, to treat with contempt"] any teaching or admonition that came by the Spirit's revelation through a prophet, but apparently some were doing that or might do that if not properly cautioned. Peter's warning is clear: "...no prophecy of Scripture [or spoken-RG] is of any private interpretation [origin], for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2Pet. 1:20,21).
6. **Test all things; hold fast what is good.** Two kinds of things needed to be tested:
  - a. **Claims of inspiration.** Before God's various revelations through the prophets were written down, it was sometimes difficult to separate the genuine from the spurious. It was extremely important that every claim to authority be tested for authenticity (1John 4:1). One test was in witnessing the miracles given to preachers to validate their message (Mark 16:20). Another was consistency with known truth (1Cor. 14:37); still another was fulfillment, if prophecy involved future events (1Thes. 3:4);
  - b. **Requirements imposed on the disciples.** Many would bring various doctrines and mandates of conduct for new converts to embrace. However, the disciples should entertain nothing that did not conform to the teaching already received by apostolic authority (Gal. 1:6-9). They must reject and turn away from the doctrines of men.
7. **Abstain from every form [all appearance-- KJV] of evil.** Inexperienced Christians can easily understand the need to keep away from things that are inherently evil, for,

“The wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). But what about the “appearance” [*eidōs*-- “an appearance or external form”] of evil? Sin takes on many forms in our modern world. The disciple must take care to recognize sin in whatever form it may appear. Also, there may be circumstances or situations in which things not wrong in themselves may be mistaken for [appear to be] sin by onlookers. Paul’s own conduct in refusing material support lest his motives be misconstrued is a good example of trying to guard against the danger of good things appearing to be bad (1Cor. 9:12). Influence can be destroyed and reputations ruined by the bad judgment of otherwise innocent Christians.

Verses 23-28--

1. In view of the responsibilities just listed, in addition to those identified in chapter four, verses 1-12, the Thessalonians could see that they still had work to do to become totally transformed from what they *had been* into what they *should be* as Christians. The process was well underway, but they were not yet “completely sanctified” [set apart] from their old life. The “new creature” (2Cor. 5:17) had a lot of growing to do!
2. With God’s help, complete sanctification was possible. Not only must they display sanctification on a high level but also their *entire beings* must participate in attaining separation from the world and worldly things.
3. Paul’s prayer is that the spirit, soul, and body of each Christian be preserved “blameless” until the coming of the Lord. That would assure him the eternal salvation he had hoped for since he had first obeyed the gospel (1:3,10).
  - a. It is difficult to understand exactly what was meant in assigning *three* components to the nature or composition of each disciple. Is Paul to be understood to mean that in each man there are *three integral parts*: spirit, soul, and body, or is something less intended?
  - b. This is an intricate question to answer. Consider these thoughts:
    - (1) Only here and in Hebrews 4:12 are the soul and the spirit mentioned together but distinct from each other. Although both terms often appear separately in Scripture, both nearly always seem to refer to man’s spiritual being as distinguished from his physical body;
    - (2) In Moses’ account of man’s creation, a third element of man’s nature was introduced. Man’s body was formed lifeless from the dust, God breathed into that body “the breath of life,” and man became “a living being” (Gen. 2:7). This “breath of life” was a nature shared with the animal creation (Gen. 6:17);
    - (3) Man was also made in “the image of God” (Gen. 1:26,27), which specified his immortal spiritual nature. This nature is peculiar to man and God and is not shared with the beasts of the earth;
    - (4) Exactly how these three natures interact is not entirely clear. The roles of body

and spirit are easily seen. The body is altogether physical, functions in the physical world, and is subject to the phenomena of the physical world. The spirit is altogether spiritual and functions in the spiritual world. It is immortal and eternal in its essence. The body is subject to the spirit and is employed by the spirit to execute the functions associated with service to God;

- (5) The role of the soul, when viewed as different from the spirit, is harder to describe. Some make the soul the “life principle” that enables the physical members of the body to function. This, they say, identifies it with the human brain. But others understand it as some other force that gives connection between the spirit and the body;
  - (6) Greek philosophers are credited with popularizing this concept of *three natures*. Scholars are divided over whether Paul simply adopted their terminology without intending to endorse a difference between the soul and the spirit or meant to be understood literally;
  - (7) It is possible that he used two terms, both of which refer to the spiritual nature of man as opposed to his bodily nature, in an effort to stress the governing role of the spirit in man’s efforts to be wholly sanctified;
  - (8) E.G. Sewell, admitting to the difficulties of commenting on this verse, said, “This is as good an exposition as we know on the subject; and, whether right or wrong, it will affect no man’s salvation either to receive or reject the interpretation.”
4. God will be faithful to make their sanctification *possible*, but their own unreserved commitment will also be required to make it actual.
  5. A heartfelt prayer for him and a warm and holy greeting for “all the brethren” were other matters needing their attention.
  6. This letter should be read to “all” the holy brethren. The meaning is, make certain that it is read by more than just the leadership or some other limited group of members at Thessalonica. Its full effectiveness would be realized when *every* disciples saw with his eyes or heard with his ears the very words that the hand of an inspired apostle of Christ had written.
  7. Paul always ends his epistles with a prayer in behalf of his brethren, usually a prayer that the grace of God and/or His Son be with them. This short and simple expression also displays the apostle’s deep trust in God’s wisdom and concern for His people. His grace [favor] will “fill in the blanks” and supply everything they need without having to rely on a fallible man trying to specify what those needs are.

1. Paul needed not to write concerning \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
2. The \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_ will come as a \_\_\_\_\_ in the \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Instead of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ will come upon the unprepared. They will not \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Christians are sons of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, not of \_\_\_\_\_ nor \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Those who \_\_\_\_\_, do so at \_\_\_\_\_; those who get \_\_\_\_\_, do so at \_\_\_\_\_.
6. Christian soldiers must wear what protection from Satan's weapons?
  - a.
  - b.
7. God's people are destined for \_\_\_\_\_ through \_\_\_\_\_, not for \_\_\_\_\_.
8. What is meant by "recognize" those who labor among you?
  - a. Who should be recognized?
  - b. How are they to be recognized?
  - c. What condition in the church likely will occur if they are recognized?
9. \_\_\_\_\_ the \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ the \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ the \_\_\_\_\_, be \_\_\_\_\_ with all.
10. Paul concludes with *ten* commands to be obeyed (15-22). What are they?
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  - d.
  - e.
  - f.
  - g.
  - h.
  - i.
  - j.



# Second Thessalonians

## INTRODUCTION TO

## SECOND THESSALONIANS

***The History:*** Acts 17 reveals the limited details of Paul's preaching at Thessalonica and the establishment of a church in that city. Following a disturbance by Jewish zealots, Paul went to Berea. Jews from Thessalonica pursued him there and stirred up the people as they had done earlier. Athens was the apostle's next destination, where physical opposition seems to have been at a minimum. While in Athens, Paul became concerned about the welfare of the Thessalonians, whom he had left hurriedly. He sent Timothy to gather information and bring it to him. They were reunited at Corinth, and the First Thessalonian letter was written in response to Timothy's report. In that letter, Paul addressed several present or potential problems in the new church, including the particularly sensitive issue of several misunderstandings about the second coming of the Lord. Additional troubling facts were uncovered and reported to Paul either by the bearer of the first epistle to Thessalonica or by some other source. It was important for Paul to write this second letter without delay and to try his hand again at some needed clarification and correction.

***The Letter:*** Much of the first epistle had been devoted to comforting the minds of some of the brethren about Christ's return. Some doubted the very possibility of that event, concluding that certain details, as they construed them, were beyond any solution, even for God. Others accepted the reality of the Lord's advent, but they were convinced that its occurrence would result in severe disadvantages for Christians already dead when Christ came. Paul dealt with those issues adequately [as he supposed] in his first letter but soon learned that the problems not only had not been

solved but in some respects had grown to be more serious than ever. It was urgent that he respond promptly and firmly to protect the faith of these new converts about fundamental truths of the gospel. It was also important that their confidence in him as an inspired and dependable preacher of that gospel not be diminished.

***The Problems:*** The basic problem faced by the Thessalonians was one of *misunderstanding*. Even while he was personally present among them, the apostle had spoken to them of the things about which they now were confused (2:5). We can't believe that Paul was unclear in his teaching about such basic matters, but, nevertheless, several factors had contributed to their subsequent *misconceptions* and possible consequent *misbehavior*.

1. Some members were entertaining serious erroneous perceptions of the Lord's return.
  - a. Several of Paul's statements in the first letter had been misconstrued to teach things he never intended:
    - (1) Paul himself would be living when the Lord came-- "We who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord..." (1Thes. 4:15);
    - (2) The saints who read his letter would also survive until "this Day" should "overtake" them (1Thes. 5:4);
    - (3) Christians would not "sleep" [in physical death] "as others do," but must "watch and be sober" (1Thes. 5:6).
  - b. Apparently, false teachers had claimed revelations in which the day of judgment was said to be fast approaching (2Thes. 2:2).
  - c. It also appears that a forged document had been circulated that purported to be from Paul's hand and that stressed the imminent return of Jesus (2Thes. 2:2).
2. It is supposed by some that certain members had stopped working and caring for their personal property because they thought that such things were no longer of much importance in a world soon to be destroyed. Spiritual preparations, they had decided, must take precedence over physical responsibilities if the saints were to be ready for the last day (2Thes. 3:11).
3. Misconduct was being tolerated in the church, apparently because doubts about Paul's integrity as a prophet [of the second coming] had led to other doubts about his authority to determine a lifestyle for the Thessalonian Christians (2Thes. 3:6,14).
4. Growing weary in doing good was always a threat to the stability of disciples waiting for the second advent of Jesus (2Thes. 3:13). Their

*faith* and *patience* were still things to boast about in the Lord (2Thes. 1:4), but patience could easily turn into impatience and erode their faith.

**The Time and Place:** The purpose for which this letter was written to the young saints at Thessalonica is strong evidence for Second Thessalonians having been written from the same place and soon after the first epistle was sent to the church. Time was of the essence to correct serious misconceptions among the members that could have been damaging to their faith. The perception that things said and done by Paul had contributed to the confusion of new converts was even more reason for him to act quickly. Therefore, most scholars agree that the second letter was sent from Corinth within a few months of the first, sometime in A.D. 51 or 52.

**The Overview:**

**AN OUTLINE OF SECOND THESSALONIANS**

- I. Paul's Encouragement in Persecution..... 1:1-12
  - A. Thanksgiving for Their Growth..... 1:1-4
  - B. Encouragement in Their Persecution..... 1:5-10
  - C. Prayer for God's Blessing..... 1:11,12
  
- II. Paul's Explanation of the Day of the Lord..... 2:1-17
  - A. The Events Preceding the Day of the Lord..... 2:1-12
  - B. The Comfort of the Believer on the Day of the Lord..... 2:13-17
  
- III. Paul's Exhortation to the Church..... 3:1-18
  - A. Wait Patiently for Christ..... 3:1-5
  - B. Withdraw from the Disorderly..... 3:6-15
  - C. Conclusion..... 3:16-18

[From: Nelson's Bible Maps and Charts]

## SECOND THESSALONIANS

### Chapter One

#### Verses 1,2-- GREETING

1. Paul begins this letter with his customary greeting. Invariably [with the exception of Hebrews--if, indeed, he *is* the author of Hebrews], he opens his epistles with three elements: (1) his own name and those of whoever else may be joined with him in the writing of the letter; (2) the church[es] or person[s] to whom the letter is addressed; (3) his prayer that the grace and peace of the Father and the Son be extended to his readers. Sometimes, other brief bits of information are inserted into his greeting, sometimes not.
2. Paul's consistency of address in his letters was perhaps one of the "seals of authenticity" used by the apostle to lend authority to his messages.
3. He includes Timothy and Silvanus [Silas] in his greeting to the Thessalonians. Their names had been included at the beginning of the First Thessalonian letter, and their inclusion in *both* epistles leads many to deduct that the second epistle was written soon after the first. This argument, of course, assumes that the three men were not usually together in the same place for very long at a time.

#### Verses 3,4-- ENCOURAGEMENT AND RECOGNITION

1. It seems clear that Paul had received additional information about the faith and love of the Christians at Thessalonica since he had sent the first letter to them. In it, he had spoken of sending Timothy to them to "encourage" them in their faith (1Thes. 3:2). He had also prayed that their love might "increase" and "abound" (1Thes. 3:12). As he opens this second letter, he can be confident that *both* goals were being accomplished. Their faith was "growing exceedingly," and their love was "abounding toward each other."
2. The young Christians at Thessalonica had begun their new life in the Lord by having to suffer persecutions from their countrymen (1Thes. 2:14). We are not told the nature of their afflictions, but they were similar to the things suffered by disciples among the Jews when they had chosen to join themselves to the Messiah.
3. Persecutions were continuing for the Thessalonians, and they were continuing to endure them without faltering. A strong faith in God's promises to give them an ultimate victory over their adversaries in the judgment day, if not before, had produced

the patience needed to “keep on keeping on” in the worst of situations.

4. Even though the faithfulness of these new Christians was so well known that there had been no need for Paul to “say anything” to others about it (1Thes. 1:8), he evidently could not refrain from singing their praises to others churches anyhow. Knowing that a dear and respected friend and apostle of the Lord was aware of their efforts to be steadfast, and was “boasting” to other saints about it, must have been greatly encouraging to these new converts. Even more mature Christians, who knew by experience how difficult it was to remain firm in their faith when attacked by so many strong weapons of unbelief, would find encouragement in Paul’s words.

#### Verses 5,6-- THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD’S JUDGMENT

1. The *endurance* of these disciples through persecutions and tribulations [verse 4] served as “manifest evidence” that the righteousness of God requires a judgment by which the final disposition of all things might be accomplished in *fairness* to all men. “Manifest evidence” is “manifest token” [*endeigma*-- “a plain token, a proof”] in the ASV and KJV.
2. It was proof [corroboration] to God that His plans for terminating the physical world were indeed righteous and just for every creature. Those plans had been proclaimed to the Thessalonians in the first letter. All faithful disciples, living or dead, would be “caught up together” and “always be with the Lord” (1Thes. 4:17). But on the other hand, unbelievers who had rejected the gospel would not escape the “wrath” for which they had been appointed (1Thes. 5:3,9).
3. It would not be just [fair] for saints who had suffered and endured for the sake of the truth to go unrewarded for their righteous deeds. Nor would it be just [fair] for sinners who had spurned God’s provisions for their salvation to go unpunished for their gross rebellion against the Savior who had given His life’s blood on the cross on their behalf. Neither would it be righteous and just on God’s part to ignore His own proclamations concerning reward and punishment [e.g., Acts 17:31].
4. It was important that persecuted Christians at Thessalonica be assured that the Lord would do exactly what He had pledged. The fact that their troubles had not ended did not mean that Jehovah had forgotten what He had promised them in return for their loyalty. A fair judgment might not be immediately coming, but it was surely coming!
5. Their uninterrupted devotion to the Lord would be further “manifest evidence” to God that they were *worthy* of His kingdom. It was only fair that they should inherit the heavenly kingdom prepared for them (Matt. 25:34), since they had been willing to suffer for it while on earth.
6. Righteous judgment will be extended to the bad as well as to the good. It is entirely right for the Great Judge to deal with wicked men on the same terms as with the pious. *All* men will be measured against the standard for salvation plainly declared in

the gospel. “The wages of sin is death” and “the free gift of God is eternal life” (Rom. 6:23). Men who choose to “repay” God for His kindness with sin and rebellion against His will also will be “repaid” appropriately by God. It is only *fair* that those who visit tribulation on others should themselves be visited with tribulation.

#### Verses 7-10-- THE MANIFESTATIONS OF GOD’S RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT

1. The Thessalonians had been confused and deceived about various details of the Lord’s coming again. Some false teachers were telling them that the great event was imminent or that it had already taken place (2:1). And, possibly, others were saying that there was no need to continue giving attention to daily work and other routine obligations because of the limited time that the earth and earthly things would remain (3:11-13). Paul certainly did not wish to contribute to any additional misapprehensions about the second advent of Jesus. These errors should be corrected at once!
2. The Lord *would* return, but not so soon as they had been led to believe. Their persecutions would end, but not immediately. Their circumstances would improve, but there would be some more waiting before any of that happened.
3. Relief would come to the “troubled” Thessalonian disciples at the same time that Paul and other faithful preachers would receive “rest” from the problems they faced for teaching the truths of the gospel. That time would coincide with the Lord’s return, which he asserts in the next chapter (2:3-12), would not happen any time soon.
4. The righteousness of God’s dealings with unrighteous people will be *manifested*:
  - a. In the employment of Jesus, whom the unrighteous had rejected and killed, as the Father’s agent by whom to conduct the righteous proceedings of the judgment [See Acts 17:31];
  - b. In the proclamation of God’s power to overcome unrighteous attempts to defeat His purposes. The power of wicked men had sent Jesus to the grave, but God’s power had raised the Son and had received Him into heaven. The settled purpose of the resurrection will be vindicated when Jesus appears from *heaven* rather than from the *grave* to judge the world. God had done what He had said He would do;
  - c. In the participation of “mighty” angels in the awesome events of the last day. Angels had played significant roles in Jesus’ work to make salvation possible:
    - (1) Angels had attended His birth in Bethlehem (Luke 2:8-14);
    - (2) Angels ministered to Him following His severe temptations (Matt. 4:11);
    - (3) An angel strengthened Him during His ordeal in Gethsemane (Luke 22:43);
    - (4) Angels were present when He ascended into heaven (Acts 1:10).

It will be fitting for angels to lend their presence to the advent scene and to proclaim the success of the Lord’s work [and theirs] in *providing* salvation for the lost. And how *appropriate* it will be for those who provided salvation’s blessings to take part in judging those who refuse to accept those blessings;

- d. In the “flaming fire” that accompanies the Lord’s judgment on ungodly men. All sinners have been duly warned that “...our God is a consuming fire” toward those who refuse to “serve God with reverence and godly fear” (Heb. 12:29). Such men who have ignored the Lord’s admonitions can only expect the judgment day to bring them “fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries” (Heb. 10:27). Fire is God’s symbol of vengeance.
- (1) God’s vengeance [*ekdikesis*-- lit., “that which proceeds out of justice”] is unlike man’s. As Vine observes, it is “not out of a sense of injury or merely out of a feeling of indignation...[it is] free from any element of self-gratification or vindictiveness.” Vengeance is rather God’s *necessary* response to His own innate fairness, which requires the Father to avenge wrongs done to His family.
  - (2) Retribution will be directed toward two classes of individuals:
    - (a) Those who “do not know” God. “Do not know” is from *me eidosin*, which also is said of the “Gentiles” in 1Thes. 4:5. Physical Gentiles, who once had the knowledge of God in their hearts, long ago had exchanged that knowledge for the worship of images, which prompted Jehovah to “give them over to a debased mind” (Rom. 1:21-28). Paul, shortly before writing this letter to Thessalonica, had reasoned with the Athenians about the God who was entirely different from the gods they worshiped (Acts 17:24,29). Men worshiped idols in spite of the obvious *invisible attributes* of the true God, His eternal power and Godhead, and they were “without excuse” for their ignorance (Rom. 1:20). It was fair, in the light of their opportunities to know better, that the true God from whom they had withheld their devotions should exercise His vengeance on them;
    - (b) Those who do not obey the gospel. This anathema probably was aimed mostly at unbelieving Jews who prided themselves on their “knowledge” of God. Knowledge, however, had been compromised by their commitment to human traditions, and their hybrid religion had obscured their perception of the real Jehovah and had prevented their obedience to His gospel (Matt. 23:13). It was fair, considering their deliberate choice *not* to accept their Messiah’s gracious invitation to eternal life, that their choice should stand at the Lord’s return and they should receive eternal death instead;
- e. In the nature of the punishment to be inflicted on the unrighteous.
- (1) Everlasting destruction. This is not annihilation of the soul, but destruction [*olethros*-- “ruin, destruction”] of both soul and body. The “ruin” of the sinner will subject him to pain, sorrow, shame, and despair throughout eternity. On the other hand, the “redemption” of the Christian will forever relieve him of everything that adversely affects his body and soul in this life. Both eventualities are never-ending (Matt. 25:46).
  - (2) Banishment from the presence of the Lord and His glory. As the body apart

from the spirit is dead physically (James 2:26), so man apart from God is dead spiritually. The unremitting pain and suffering of the lost in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone will be the terrible consequence for rejecting the Lord. But the anguish of suffering in loneliness and desolation, and without any prospect of the situation ever getting any better, will only add immensely to the desperation of men doomed to “everlasting destruction.”

f. In the glorification of Jesus in that Day. When Jesus was left to be treated by wicked men as they chose, He died a cruel and shameful death on a criminal’s cross. Even in His death, those same evildoers sought to have His tomb guarded lest He should benefit from complicity with His disciples in the unlawful act of body-stealing (Matt.27:62-66). Every action of His adversaries sought to heap shame and disgrace upon His reputation.

- (1) At His return, Jesus at last will receive the glory and honor He should have enjoyed while on earth. Every knee will bow before Him and every tongue will confess His rightful relationship to His Father. None will dare to deny what so many dared when He lived among them (Rom. 14:11; Phil. 2:10,11).
- (2) Many things will join together to glorify the Person of Jesus Christ when He comes to judge mankind. Two groups of people will react with powerful testimony about the Lord’s righteous treatment of all men:
  - (a) The unsaved. The vindication of saints will speak volumes about the justice of punishment for sinners. It is only fair that those who have endured ill treatment in order to glorify Jesus in this life should be glorified by Jesus in the life to come. It is also fair that Christ’s glory should be withheld from those who withheld it from Him when they had the opportunity to exalt His name. Every blessing conferred on saints will cry out to sinners about the *fatal mistake* they made when they chose to reject their Savior. At last, the lost will understand why Christ’s disciples had been so loyal and persevering in spite of the obstacles thrown in their way;
  - (b) The saved. The immeasurable love of Jesus for His disciples is beyond comprehension but not beyond appreciation. His appearance from heaven will cause believers to admire [*thaumazo*-- “wonder at, to marvel”] Him more than ever. Not only did He give hope to hopeless people in this present world but also in the world to come He will keep every promise that gave them their hope. Great will be the admiration of the saints for their Savior, as expressed by Philip P. Bliss in his hymn:

“Man of sorrows,’ what a name for the Son of God who came  
Ruined sinners to reclaim! Hallelujah! what a Savior!  
When He comes, our glorious King, all His ransomed home to bring,  
Then anew this song we’ll sing, Hallelujah! what a Savior.”



- g. **In the vindication of the gospel.** Paul and others told the world that the gospel is God's [only] power to save (Rom. 1:16,17, etc.). Some believed that was true, many more did not. Upon the Lord's return, all doubt about the power of the gospel to save will be removed. The Thessalonians, who had welcomed Paul's message as the word of God and not as the word of men (1Thes.1:13), will rejoice in the wise decision they made.

#### Verses 11, 12-- THE REALIZATION OF THEIR REWARD

1. The marvelous blessings of the second coming described by the apostle in the previous verses belonged to Christians only in prospect. Their actual enjoyment of those promises was still in the future and was dependent on their continued faithfulness until they died or until the return of Jesus, whichever came first. None were "worthy" of sharing in God's "calling" until they had made their calling and election "sure" by proving themselves faithful until the very end (2Pe. 1:10,11).
2. Two things would be "fulfilled" [*pleroo*-- "to complete"] by the perseverance of the disciples:
  - a. **The good pleasure of God's goodness.** It *pleased* God that lost men should be saved by accepting a gospel thought by the world to be "foolish" (1Cor. 1:21). Perhaps the most unbelievable aspect of the gospel is the concept that God could be so *good* to rebellious men as to give His only Son in death so that those who had murdered Him might not have to suffer for their wicked deed throughout eternity! It is incomprehensible to many that the Lord could be "longsuffering toward us, not willing that *any* should perish but that *all* should come to repentance" (2Pe. 3:9). The Father's intense desire to do good to His creatures will be fully realized in the redemption of the saved at the second coming of Jesus;
  - b. **The work of faith by God's faithful people.** The "work of faith" by the Thessalonians had not gone unnoticed by Paul (1Thes. 1:3), and he had highly commended them for their accomplishments in the Lord's cause. However, their labor of love for Christ would bring more than just a compliment from other men. The reward of eternal life is in store for those who "do not grow weary while doing good." "In *due season*" [at Christ's return] they will reap their prize if they do not lose heart (Gal. 6:9). God's great pleasure will be finally to *bestow* the blessing He has for so long *promised* to His faithful children (Matt. 25:34).
3. Only the "glory of His power" (verse 9) could accomplish what Paul prayed for. But the same power that took Jesus from the grave and carried Him to heaven; the same power that one day will send Him again to judge those who put Him in the tomb, can also answer Paul's prayer completely. "The things that are impossible with men are possible with God" (Luke 18:27).
4. The "name" of Jesus as "Lord" [Ruler over all things] will be firmly established in the

**minds of all when the awesome events described by Paul in this chapter have taken place. The grace of Father and Son will assure that both Jesus Christ and His saints are appropriately glorified when the heavenly plan in operation from eternity past (Eph. 3:11) is carried out in its every detail at the last Day.**

1. The \_\_\_\_\_ of the Thessalonians grew \_\_\_\_\_, and their \_\_\_\_\_ toward each other.
2. They kept their \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ in all the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ that they \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Their endurance was \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_ of God.
4. It was a \_\_\_\_\_ thing for God to \_\_\_\_\_ with \_\_\_\_\_ those who were \_\_\_\_\_ the Thessalonian Christians.
5. The Lord will be \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_\_ with His \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_ fire.
6. Vengeance will be taken on those who \_\_\_\_\_ God and who have not \_\_\_\_\_ the \_\_\_\_\_.
7. Lost men will be punished with \_\_\_\_\_ from the \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_ and from His \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Jesus will be \_\_\_\_\_ in His \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ among those who \_\_\_\_\_.
9. Paul prayed that God would fulfill what two things through His power?
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_
10. The \_\_\_\_\_ of Christ will be glorified in His \_\_\_\_\_ and they will be \_\_\_\_\_ in Him.

Chapter Two

In the first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul gave only brief attention to the timing of the second coming of Jesus, but his principal interest was in calming the concerns of those who feared that dead saints might be disadvantaged in the resurrection. The first chapter of this epistle was devoted to encouraging the saints to persevere in their faith and duty by assuring them that their devotion would be vindicated and rewarded at Christ's advent. Human experience and moral sensitivity both demand a fair judgment of all righteous and unrighteous persons. Now, the apostle turns to exposing the errors of time-setting that may have hindered some of the Thessalonians from performing their important personal and religious duties.

Verses 1-3a-- WARNINGS ABOUT DECEIT

1. There was great comfort in knowing that the Lord's final judgment will be fair to all parties. The wicked whose wickedness has gone unpunished in this world will not escape retribution in the world to come. The good deeds of the righteous will be duly rewarded by a Savior who keeps His promises (Matt. 10:42).
2. Much of the comfort afforded by the *truths* concerning the Lord's return had been diminished by the *errors* circulated among the Thessalonians about the timing of the event. Some had been "shaken in mind" and "troubled" by false information contrary to teaching Paul had previously done about when Christ would come again (verse 5).
3. The error that appears to have caused the greatest concern was that the day of Christ "had/has come" [NKJV, RSV]. The Greek word *enistami* properly means, "to be upon, impend, threaten" [Thayer]. While it is possible that some feared that the advent of Jesus had already happened without their personal knowledge or involvement in its occurrence, it is more likely that many others were convinced of the "soon" return of the Lord. They feared that the lack of time to prepare might pose a threat to their own well-being in the final judgment.
4. Paul raises three possibilities about *why* some had been deceived in this matter:
  - a. Someone might have claimed to possess a "spirit" [spiritual gift] by which a revelation had been received about when Christ would return. At this time, spiritual revelations were common in the early church (1Cor. 14:29-32). The churches also had gifts to discern whether "revelations" were authentic (1Cor. 12:10), but this young church at Thessalonica may not yet have had such a capability, or it might have foolishly ignored warnings about a spurious message;

- b. Someone perhaps had cited Paul's own word[s] in the first letter to the church and had misquoted, misapplied, or misinterpreted his teaching to support the troublesome error about the Lord's advent;
  - c. Someone possibly had forged a document that promoted the false teaching and had presented it to the congregation as a letter from Paul or perhaps from another of the apostles ["us"].
5. Whatever may have been the source of the problem, the disciples must not allow themselves to be deceived for any reason. The consequences of false time-setting were much too serious for the church to allow erroneous teaching to go unchallenged.

#### Verses 3b-5-- THE "FALLING AWAY"

1. Jesus had admonished his followers, "But of that day and hour no one knows, no, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only" (Matt. 25:36). Even though Paul had discussed details of the Lord's return with the members at Thessalonica (verse 5), it is not likely that he had specific information about *when* the event would take place.
2. Paul *did*, however, know *some* things about circumstances that would have a bearing on how soon Jesus would reappear from heaven. These things he had "told them" during his stay with them some months earlier. He now seems surprised that they had allowed what *somebody else* had told them to cause them to forget what *he* had said.
3. Although the "day and the hour" were still unrevealed, God had shared certain other details with His apostle. The events portrayed in this information made it impossible for Christ's return to occur nearly as "soon" as some were proclaiming. In fact, a considerable period of time must transpire to allow the development of a number of portentous historical events.
4. All these occurrences would be elements of a "falling away" that would come "first," i.e., before Christ returns for the final judgment. Although we read in the New Testament of individuals falling away from the Lord [e.g., Hymanaeus and Alexander, 1Tim. 1:20], and sometimes entire congregations [e.g., Ephesus, Rev. 2:5], this appears to be a general apostasy that would present a grave danger to the entire church:
  - a. *The* "man of sin" would be revealed;
  - b. *The* "son of perdition" would oppose God and exalt himself above God;
  - c. He would attempt to usurp God's place in His temple [church].
5. This ominous forecast of things to come for the body of Christ has given rise to innumerable interpretations and applications since the apostle first spoke and wrote of them. Many explanations have been fanciful and patently false, but others seem to coincide with factual and uncontested information afforded us by reputable church historians.
6. The fundamental premise advanced by Paul was that there would be a falling away from the patterns of doctrine and practice established by him for the church at Thes-

- salonica and for churches in other locations. Even a casual examination of current conditions in the modern religious community will clearly reveal great differences between the simplicity of first-century Christianity and the complex, free-wheeling practices of religions professing to be “Christian” in the twenty-first century. It is more than obvious that a drastic departure from what *was* to what *is* has taken place, and there is substantial reason to believe that this is what Paul was warning about when he wrote to the inexperienced disciples at Thessalonica.
7. While it would be presumptuous to insist on any interpretation of these verses beyond the few stated facts in number 4 [above], the student of scripture and church history should not be overly reluctant to reach definite conclusions drawn from obvious correlations between the prophecy of God’s word and cold facts of the historical record.
  8. There are two interpretations of Paul’s warning that seem to merit our attention:
    - a. The apostle was not speaking of any specific or particular departure from pristine Christianity. He intended basically to warn against any activity that might be introduced into the practice of churches that would in any way change the order of things legislated in the apostles’ teaching to the churches. Neither did he intend to focus his attention on any certain period of history when hurtful innovations might be introduced. His admonition was: anything at any time that was different from what inspiration ordered for Christians was wrong and must be avoided at all costs. This application of Paul’s warning includes changes all the way from the first century to those being introduced into religious activity in our own time. Whether or not we accept this interpretation of these verses, few would deny the wisdom of the principles it advances:
      - (1) The “man of sin” is any man or association of men who would alter the divine order of things in the church as revealed to us in the New Testament;
      - (2) Any “son of perdition” who replaces God’s ways with his own ideas in effect opposes God and exalts himself into the role of authority reserved only for the Almighty; [See Colossians 2:20-23.]
      - (3) Worship [respect, honor, devotion] in God’s “temple” [the church-- 2Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21] is actually being given to innovators rather than to Jehovah when men adopt their own unauthorized additions or subtractions;
    - b. Paul had in view specific historical occurrences within particular periods of historical time. He referenced a religious mindset that already was “at work” (verse 7) among professed disciples, and that attitude would strengthen, develop into an identifiable religious movement, and cause great destruction in the church. All of this would happen over a period of time following his warning to the Thessalonians. Numerous theories have been advanced by learned men about the particular movement that was in Paul’s mind:
      - (1) The defection of the Jewish nation from its allegiance to Rome and the subsequent destruction of Israel and Jerusalem;

- (2) The coming of the Antichrist (1John 4:3) with a host of attributes and identities by which men could recognize him;
- (3) The gnostic heresy, in its formative stages when Paul wrote to the Colossian church, and which later ran rampant in many places and did great harm to the faith and fidelity of many saints;
- (4) Certain events of intrigue and betrayal within the Roman empire that exposed the wickedness and duplicity of the persons involved;
- (5) Widespread abandonment of the gospel by Jewish converts who returned to Moses' law, despite efforts of Paul and others to prevent their departure; [See the book of Hebrews.]
- (6) Most church historians and Biblical scholars concur in the view that these words of Paul are directed toward departures that would in the future evolve into the Roman Catholic church with its attendant papacy. Adam Clarke joins with other writers in asserting the strength of this interpretation:

And it must be owned that this is the genuine meaning of the apostle; that this only is consistent with the context; that every other interpretation is forced and unnatural; that this is liable to no material objection; that it coincides perfectly with Daniel; that it is agreeable to the tradition of the primitive Church; and that it has been fulfilled in all its particulars; which cannot be said of any other interpretation whatever. Such a prophecy as this is an illustrious proof of Divine revelation, and an excellent antidote to the poison of popery.

9. We cannot know how many additional details of the great falling away Paul had previously shared with the church members at Thessalonica, but he reminds them that familiarity with "these things" should have prevented their minds from being troubled about an imminent second coming.

**Verses 6-9-- REVELATION OF THE "LAWLESS ONE"**

1. Other facts concerning this departure from the apostolic order were added by Paul:
  - a. The "mystery" of lawlessness was already "working" in the churches;
  - b. Its rapid development was restrained by the influence of something or someone;
  - c. Upon the removal of the restrainer, the man of sin would be "revealed" in his own time, and his introduction of unauthorized laws and practices would be accelerated;
  - d. The "lawless one" would operate as Satan's agent and utilize Satan's devices;
  - e. Deception would be the devil's most effective weapon used to destroy souls;
  - f. The lawless one and his war against God would ultimately be consumed by the "mouth" of the Lord and by the "brightness" of Christ's coming.
2. Perverse attitudes toward God's authority and man's submissiveness were already rearing their ugly heads before the final words of the New Testament were written. Paul warned the Ephesian elders:

Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His

own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. (Acts 20:28-30)

**John called attention to the same dangers about which Paul warned:**

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. (1John 4:1)

**Actual examples can be cited of departures from the apostles' doctrine, even while the apostles were still alive and teaching among the churches:**

But shun profane and vain babblings, for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some. (2Timothy 2:16-18)

These early attitudes of disobedience were at this time a "mystery" [hidden] which largely lurked only within the deep recesses of men's hearts. But it would not be long before they would be revealed openly. There would be serious breaches of commitments made by many converts to be faithful to Jesus despite obstacles in their path.

3. Paul chooses not to identify either the restrainer or the man of sin whose potential was being hindered. Since he had told the Thessalonians about "these things" (verse 5), the specific identities in question were likely known to them. It is also likely that the apostle considered it best not to put this information in writing in order to safeguard the disciples from reprisal by their religious and civil adversaries.
4. The restrainer would at some point be "taken out of the way," and when that was done the son of perdition would have the opportunity to expand his sphere of influence much more rapidly. [The NKJV capitalizes "He" who restrains, as if the pronoun refers to God. Other versions more correctly use "he," also cited in NKJV footnote.]
5. Scholars of Scripture and church history largely agree that the identities of these two unnamed forces in the "mystery of lawlessness" begin to emerge when Paul's prophecies to the Thessalonians (2:3-10), to Timothy (1Tim. 4:1-5), and to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:30,31) are applied to the spurious attitudes and practices that emerged on the pages of the New Testament. Also, tracing the introduction and the development of changes made in the churches following the close of apostolic revelation, will enable students to identify the "falling away," the "man of sin," and "he who now restrains" with almost absolute certainty:
  - (1) The falling away from the faith was driven by rebellious attitudes first exhibited by certain disciples soon after the establishment of the various local churches. The apostasy began with seemingly innocuous additions to or subtractions from the divine plan, but the passing of time witnessed much more radical and far-reaching changes being made. Eventually, so many alterations had been made in the pattern left by the apostles that it was impossible to identify the corrupted church as the institution built by Christ and directed in its activities by the Spirit of God.



It is impossible to determine at what precise point the church of Christ lost its original identity and took on the character of what came to be recognized as the “Holy Roman Catholic Church.” But somewhere along the path of human alterations in its organization, worship, and work, that is exactly what took place. Some historians look to the time when the various religious segments professing a connection with the early church acquiesced to the Roman bishop’s claim to be the universal head of *all* the church. Others designate some other much earlier time;

- (2) The man of sin was not the originator of the falling away from the faith, but he was clearly its prime product. The papacy evolved from a long series of events in which the organization of the local church was perverted by ambitious men until a few emerged with far greater influence and power than those who had been their peers. Ultimately, with the support of unauthorized organizations [e.g., numerous councils], the few became fewer until one man assumed the role of universal bishop over every soul aspiring to membership in the body of Christ. One of the dates often suggested for this event is 606 A.D. when Boniface III declared his own pre-eminence over everyone and everything in the church. Some scholars cite the same action that had been taken by Gregory I [“the Great”] a few years earlier.

Paul’s reference to “the man of sin” probably was not confined to a particular man or to a specific pope but to the entire number of ambitious men who aspired to exercise undue control over their fellow Christians and whose actions resulted in a long line of popes who, in fact, eventually exacted obedience from the entire corporate body of the Catholic church;

- (3) The restraining force that was then hindering the rapid spread of corrupted power in the early church was the Roman empire and its arrogant rulers. James Mac-knight observes:

The restraining here refers to the mystery of iniquity, as the restraining mentioned ver. 6 refers to the man of sin. The man of sin was restrained from revealing himself in the temple of God as a god; and the mystery of iniquity was restrained in its working by something which the apostle had mentioned to the Thessalonians in his sermons and conversations, but which he did not choose to express in writing. The [church] fathers indeed...generally understood this restraining power to be the Roman emperors and empire, as is plain from Turtullian, Apolog. p.31, where he says, “We Christians are under a particular necessity of praying for the emperors, and for the continued state of the empire, because we know that dreadful power which hangs over the whole world, and the conclusion of the age which threatens the most horrible evils, is retarded by the continuance of the time appointed for the Roman empire. This is what we would not experience. And while we pray that it may be deferred, we hereby show our good-will to the perpetuity of the Roman state”...For the power of the emperors, and of the magistrates under them, first in the heathen state of the empire, and afterwards when the empire became Christian, was that which restrained the man of sin, or corrupt clergy, from exalting themselves above all that is called a god, or an object of worship civil and religious.

As unwelcome as were the persecutions of the early church by elements of civil

government, they served a worthwhile purpose. The arrogant and high-handed behavior of church leaders that eventually led to the almost total corruption of God's plan for His church could not be expressed fully so long as it was forced to compete with the power-hungry ambitions of state officials. Perhaps the *delay* in implementing unauthorized practices allowed the *survival* of some basic concepts of truth through the dark ages of fraudulent religion. That in turn ultimately promoted the springing forth of valiant efforts to reform, and then finally to restore, New Testament Christianity to a spiritually deprived world.

6. Church history records a proliferation of false doctrines and practices following the "conversion" of emperor Constantine [c. 312 A.D.] and the removal of the seat of government to Byzantium [Constantinople], which distanced the Roman bishops further from the restraints of civil authority. The churches began to receive much more favorable treatment at the hands of civil authorities, and their leaders began to be much more comfortable in introducing into the churches whatever they wished. MacKnight adds this comment:

But after the heathen magistrates were taken out of the way by the conversion of Constantine, and after he and his successors called the Christian bishops to meet in general councils, and enforced their assumption of divine authority by the civil power, then did they in these councils arrogate to themselves the right of establishing what articles of faith and discipline they thought proper, and of anathematizing all who rejected their decrees; a claim which, in after times, the bishops of Rome transferred from general councils to themselves. It was in this period that the worship of saints, and angels, and images, was introduced; celibacy was praised as the highest piety; meats of certain kinds were prohibited; and a variety of superstitious modifications of the body were enjoined, by the decrees of councils, in express opposition to the laws of God. In this period likewise, idolatry and superstition were recommended to the people by false miracles, and every deceit which wickedness could suggest; such as the miraculous cures which pretended to be performed by the bones and other relics of the martyrs, in order to induce the ignorant vulgar to worship them as mediators: the feigned visions of angels who they said had appeared to this or that hermit, to recommend celibacy, fastings, mortification of the body, and living in solitude: the apparition of souls from purgatory, who begged that certain superstitions might be practiced, for delivering them from that confinement.

7. The "coming" [flourishing] of the man of sin would be accompanied by the "working of Satan." Knowledgeable people are *not ignorant* of the devil's devices (2Cor. 2:11), but the ignorance of the general population about the Scriptures and their deference to the "clergy" were fertile ground for numerous unauthorized changes being introduced into the organization, work, and worship of the churches during the time of falling away.
8. Space will not permit descriptions of the deceitful practices employed by the Roman hierarchy in its efforts to dominate the lives and thinking of common people during the dark days of religious ignorance and superstition. Consulting reputable church histories will provide the student with ample evidence of the desperate situation in

which people would find themselves because of the “coming of the *lawless one*” with his power, signs, and lying wonders. The power of inquisition and excommunication controlled the physical bodies of the masses; the signs and lying wonders dominated their spiritual minds and wills.

9. Amid his discussion of the ominous threat posed by the man of sin, Paul injects the fact that all will not be lost to his devastating work among the saints. The Lord ultimately will “consume” him with His words and “destroy” him with the brightness of His coming. There are several possible meanings in this promise:
  - a. Paul had reference to the power of God’s word over the power of the devil’s devices. No disciple must necessarily fall victim to Satan’s devices. Holding to the apostles’ doctrine is a sufficient defense for the Christian against every weapon of evil (Eph. 6:14-17). This assurance would greatly encourage any disciples at Thessalonica who might otherwise become depressed about the awful developments that lay ahead;
  - b. Also, there may be some allusion here to a renewed appeal to the gospel that would be seen during future times of reformation and restoration. The errors of innovation can never stand against the investigation of the truth (John 8:32). Their power is “consumed” to the extent people insist on giving their loyalties to things taught by the apostles rather than to things advanced by lawless and unscrupulous deceivers;
  - c. Paul probably intended to make a difference between “consume” [*analisko*-- to use up, spend up...] and “destroy” [*apollumi*-- “to destroy utterly”]. This action by the Lord will not gradually or slowly expose the unacceptability of Satan’s deceptive doctrines. Instead, He will act swiftly and conclusively to make an unequivocal end to *everything* for which the devil stands.
  - d. The “brightness” of the Lord’s coming is in sharp contrast with the darkness of Satan’s coming to deceive the hearts of men (John 12:46). The devil deals in lies [lying wonders]; Jesus always speaks the truth (John 18:37). Depending on lies will condemn those who are deceived (Rev. 21:8; Luke 6:39); trusting in truth will save souls and bring eternal joy to believers (1Pe. 1:22).
10. J. W. McGarvey and Philip Pendleton offer a good summary of Paul’s thoughts about the rise of the man of sin, his deceptions, and the power that restrained him for a time. Their remarks can be found in an addendum at the end this chapter.

#### Verses 10-12-- A FATAL FLAW

1. It probably was shocking to many of the disciples at Thessalonica to be told about a great falling away from the truth. It must have seemed hard to believe that something so drastic could happen to the precious cause of Christ they had but recently espoused. Probably many of them wondered at the *reason* for such an eventuality.
2. The reason would not come from without. Paul spoke of a “falling away,” which indicates a departure of those who were *within* the church. He warned the Ephesian

elders that men would rise up “from among yourselves” and speak “perverse things” to draw away men after them (Acts 20:30).

3. Why would those “among” the disciples try to lead others away from the apostles’ teaching? Paul declares that there was a *fatal flaw* in their moral character. They had never received the “love of the truth” that they might be saved. Some things are easier to love about the truth than others. For instance, all of God’s works are done in truth (Psa. 33:4) and salvation is inseparably joined to the truth (Psa. 69:13). Those concepts are easy to “love.” But God’s commandments are also truth (Psa. 119:151), and many find it hard to love being told what to do and what not to do. The apostle John wrote of some who “went out from” the faithful disciples because they really were “not of us” (1John 2:19). They lacked a dedication to the truth that would not only love *taking blessings from God* but also would love *giving obedience to God* by complying with His laws.
4. It is relatively easy for people who have no real love of the truth to be attracted to things that are *not* true. All truth must be determined by God’s revelation; His word is truth (John 17:17). Oftentimes, man’s wisdom is more appealing than God’s. Paul told the young preacher Timothy why men will abandon truth for error: “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside unto fables” (2Tim. 4:3,4).
5. Regardless of error’s attractiveness, the Lord’s judgment is that those who love the truth will be *saved*, and those who don’t will *perish*!
6. God would allow men who are devoid of a love for truth every opportunity to be deceived by “*the lie*” [NKJV]. Perhaps the definite article *the* refers to the great working of error Paul has just discussed. Its influence on worldly-minded people would be overwhelming and would give rise to the man of sin and a general falling away from New Testament truth. Most other versions speak of “*a lie*” or “*what is false*,” comprehending all error and not just untruth attached to a departing from the faith.
7. Paul possibly attributes men’s deception in religion to “strong delusions” that are *allowed* by God *to be sent* rather than those that are *sent directly* by God to deceive those weak in faith. God desires that *none* should perish but that *all* should be saved (2Pet. 3:9). His interest is in man’s believing the truth, not in man’s being deceived by error. However, He will not prevent Satan from sending powerful deceptions nor prevent men with too little love for the truth from being deceived and destroyed.

#### Verses 13,14-- A PRESCRIPTION FOR SALVATION

1. In the first Thessalonian letter, Paul had declared, “For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1Thes. 5:9). He is yet of the same opinion about these brethren. They had not been deceived by the lies of

the devil. They still believed and loved the truth of the gospel, and for that the apostle was grateful to God.

2. God “from the beginning” had chosen these disciples to be sanctified [See 1Thes. 4:3.] through their belief of the truth:
  - a. “The beginning” may refer to their initial contact with Paul’s preaching and their first obedient response to the gospel’s demands;
  - b. “The beginning” may point back to eternity when God first formulated His plan to save the lost (Eph. 3:11). If so, this would be their *election to salvation*, not as *individuals* but as a *class* of men who: (1) believed the truth and, (2) were sanctified [set apart] by the Spirit’s instructions in the gospel.
3. To the Romans Paul said, “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son...moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called He justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified” (Rom. 8:29,30). This calling of the Thessalonians came not by means of some miracle or unusual sign but through their hearing and believing the gospel of Christ. And so it is with *every* sinner who comes in submission to the Lord.

#### Verses 15-17-- STANDING FAST IN THE TRADITIONS

1. A tradition [*paradosis*-- “a handing down or on”] may be of either human or divine origin. The Scriptures everywhere warn about the dangers of following human traditions (Matt. 15:6; Co. 2:8; 1Pet. 1:18). Traditions [commandments] which had been handed down from God through His apostles, on the other hand, were trustworthy precepts by which to be saved.
2. By standing fast and holding to the traditions previously taught by inspired teachers, the Thessalonians would be able to avoid becoming any part of a falling away from the Lord’s truth. Those traditions had been handed down to them first in Paul’s personal words during his initial visit to Thessalonica and then in his earlier epistle [First Thessalonians].
3. Paul was grateful for the comfort and hope God had given him about the future security of the Thessalonian church. He could feel good about its prospects for continued usefulness in the Lord’s service. It was only fitting that he should pray that their hearts might be comforted by his own words of encouragement to them and that their worth to the cause of Jesus might be established [*sterizo*-- “to fix, make fast, to set”] through the good works for which they were already known far and wide (1Thes. 1:3).

1. The Thessalonians should not be \_\_\_\_\_ in mind or \_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ about Christ's coming.
2. The \_\_\_\_\_ would not come before a \_\_\_\_\_ came first.
3. The man who would be "revealed" out of this apostasy was called by three names:  
a. \_\_\_\_\_ b. \_\_\_\_\_ c. \_\_\_\_\_
4. He would sit as \_\_\_\_\_ in the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ and show himself to be \_\_\_\_\_.
5. The apostasy was being \_\_\_\_\_ by something to be \_\_\_\_\_ in his own \_\_\_\_\_.
6. The \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ was already at \_\_\_\_\_, and he who was \_\_\_\_\_ would be \_\_\_\_\_ out of the \_\_\_\_\_.
7. The \_\_\_\_\_ would \_\_\_\_\_ the \_\_\_\_\_ one with the \_\_\_\_\_ of his \_\_\_\_\_.
8. The \_\_\_\_\_ of the Lord's \_\_\_\_\_ would \_\_\_\_\_ the man of sin.
9. The working of \_\_\_\_\_ would be by \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.
10. Many will \_\_\_\_\_ because they have no \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_ that they might be \_\_\_\_\_.
11. Strong \_\_\_\_\_ will cause people to \_\_\_\_\_ a \_\_\_\_\_.
12. Having pleasure in \_\_\_\_\_ will cause people to be \_\_\_\_\_.
13. God \_\_\_\_\_ people for \_\_\_\_\_ through \_\_\_\_\_ by (of) the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of (in) the \_\_\_\_\_.
14. Men are called to \_\_\_\_\_ by the \_\_\_\_\_ to obtain the \_\_\_\_\_ of our \_\_\_\_\_ Jesus Christ.
15. Disciples should \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ the \_\_\_\_\_ delivered by \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ of the apostles.

Addendum on the Man of Sin and the Falling Away [McGarvey & Pendleton]

In short, while we will not attempt to say that the final form of antichrist, Papal or otherwise, may not exceed in wickedness all that we have yet seen (for prophecies are certainly iterative), yet we are constrained to contend that if no other form appears, the Papacy has already fulfilled the prophecy, for it agrees in all the points, as follows: 1. It has one official man at its head, and the arrogance of its claims are centered on him. 2. That man came with and out of an apostasy which Paul elsewhere describes (1Tim. 4:1-3; 2Tim. 3:1-9). Can that apostasy exist for all these centuries, and antichrist be still unborn of it? 3. The spiritual pride and lawlessness which worked and would have produced antichrist in Paul's day, was curbed by the person of the Caesar whose superior spiritual pride and lawlessness restrained that of the church by contempt and persecution. 4. When, notwithstanding the overshadowing emperor, the bishops of Rome began to assert themselves *spiritually*, they were still checked and restrained from revealing themselves as *earthly potentates* by the temporal power of the empire, just as the language of verses 6 and 7 so carefully distinguishes. 5. When the power of the Roman Empire was taken away, the pope appeared, and has since been unceasingly in evidence. Paul's readers could easily see how the emperor and the empire would check the antichrist; but Paul could not openly write that emperor and empire were to fall, for, had he done so, the Romans would have appealed to his words as affronting a just cause for persecuting the church. So thought Tertullian (A.D. 150-240), Cyril of Jerusalem (315-386), Ambrose (340-397), Jerome (342-420), Chrysostom (347-407), Augustine (354-430), etc. 6. The pope is careful to keep up his line of succession, so as to establish his identity and claims; and arising out of the fall of Rome and the apostasy of the church, which accompanied that event, he has continued for centuries with little change, and certainly none for the better. 7. He exalts himself against God and Christ, calling himself the vicar, or infallible substitute for Christ, and permitting and encouraging his followers to speak of him thus: "Our Lord God the Pope, another God upon earth...doeth whatsoever he listeth, even things unlawful, and is more than God." Under these titles he presumes to set aside divine laws in favor of his own. Thus as a substitute person he makes substitute laws and arrogates to himself divine power, as did Pope Clement VI. when he commanded the angels to admit certain souls to paradise. 8. He sits in the temple of God, *i.e.*, he has his sphere of dominion in the church, and the temple or church which he occupies is still a temple erected to God, albeit the Spirit and presence of God may have long since departed from it. 9. He proves his supreme claims by fraudulent miracles, signs and wonders; of which cures effected by relics and shrines and pictures; prayers, made effectual by blessed beads; indulgences; souls prayed out of purgatory for money; absolution, and transubstantiation are fair samples. [Standard Bible Commentary]

Chapter Three

In chapter two, Paul addressed the concerns of the Thessalonians about the *time* when the Lord would come again. Some were teaching that the event had already taken place or was very soon to occur. Several hurtful problems had arisen from that idea, so Paul made it clear that a time-consuming apostasy would take place before Jesus returns. He wanted to calm the anxieties of the disciples and to impress the importance of perseverance even under the most unfavorable conditions. He spoke of a “man of sin” who, rising to lead the apostasy, would fill the role of deceiver of God’s people and usurper of God’s place in the church. He would ultimately be destroyed by Jesus’ power at the second coming.

Having dealt with the main reason for writing this letter, the apostle turns to some closing remarks and a few other problems that called for his attention.

Verses 1-5-- PRAYERS ON BOTH SIDES

1. Paul doubtless enjoyed the prayers of many Christians, for he often asked his brethren to pray for him. His requests usually focused on his work as a preacher of the gospel and on his desire to do that work as successfully as possible.
2. Prayers by the Thessalonians should seek three things in particular from the Lord:
  - a. God’s word should have free course among its hearers. This was frequently not the case. Many people opposed the truth for various reasons, and they placed many obstacles in Paul’s way, ranging from slander to physical violence. The apostle always felt the need of the Lord’s help in meeting these tactics of Satan;
  - b. The message of the gospel might be glorified in a favorable reception by those who heard it preached. Sometimes the gospel evoked joy in listeners (Acts 8:8); other times it moved people to mock the teacher (Act 17:32). It was not uncommon for some listeners to be so incensed at the message as to seek to do harm to the messenger (Acts 22:22,23);
  - c. Paul might be delivered from the evil designs of:
    - (1) Unreasonable [*atopos*-- “out of place”] men. Not everyone who opposes gospel preaching is aware of the true nature of his opposition. Jesus warned His apostles, “They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service” (John 16:2). However, the absence of evil motives doesn’t lessen the evil effects of opposing the truth;
    - (2) Wicked [*poneros*-- expresses the “active form of evil”] men who *knowingly* try



to hinder works of righteousness because of personal reasons. These adversaries are especially dangerous to the cause of Christ because their hearts are not likely to be changed nor their efforts diverted to better purposes.

3. Paul knew from bitter experience that “not all men have faith.” He had suffered the consequences of that obvious truth many times. A long list of his experiences at the hands of those who sought to smother the effectiveness of his labors can be found in 2Cor. 11:23-28. Opposition and persecution were to be expected by anyone who dared to proclaim a message drastically different from the traditions of the Jews and the human wisdom of the Gentiles.
4. Paul’s most recent encounter with such opponents of the gospel had occurred, or was soon to occur, at Corinth, from where this letter was written. Acts 18:5,6 and 18:12-17 record two occasions upon which the Jews raised violent resistance to Paul’s work in that city and would have harmed him physically except for the Lord’s intervention.
5. The Thessalonian disciples certainly were not among those without faith. Unlike so many to whom Paul had tried to take the word of the Lord, they had allowed the truth to have free course and had glorified the truth by their obedience and faithful service since their conversion (1Thes. 1:3; 2Thes 1:3,4).
6. Although there are many men who have no faith in the goodness of the Lord, He always shows faith in the goodness of men who want to be good. He is more than willing to give men every opportunity to reform their lives for the better. Isaiah said of Him:  
Seek the Lord while He may be found,  
Call upon Him while He is near.  
Let the wicked forsake his way,  
And the unrighteous man his thoughts;  
Let him return to the Lord,  
And He will have mercy on him;  
And to our God,  
For He will abundantly pardon. (Isaiah 55:6,7)
7. The sincere Christian can rest on two clear promises from God:
  - a. He will be established [*sterizo*-- “to fix, make fast, to set”] in the truth of the gospel. The *hope* of the gospel is the anchor upon which steadfastness of faith depends (Col. 1:23; Heb. 6:19). God will not forget His promises to those who will not allow themselves to be moved away from their hope of receiving the promises (Col. 1:23). They will become as “set” in the faith as a post that is set in concrete;
  - b. He will be guarded from the evil one. As a roaring lion, the devil seeks to devour disciples whose faith is weak or crippled and defenseless against his vicious attacks (1Pet. 5:8). Our protection lies in building up ourselves in the faith through the word of God (Acts 20:32) and in having a strong resolve *never* to allow anyone or anything to weaken our confidence in the Lord. In that way, we can resist the devil, and he will flee from us in defeat (James 4:7).

8. Paul was deeply confident about both the present and the future faithfulness of the Thessalonians because he had confidence that *the Lord* would give them, then and in time to come, whatever support was needed for their perseverance in the truth. As always, Paul relied not on what *he* could do for people but on what God could do *through him*.
9. Paul's prayer for the saints was as fervent as he expected theirs to be for him. He did not seek their material prosperity or even a respite from the persecutions they were facing. It was more far-reaching than that. The apostle prayed rather that their hearts would be [more] filled with the love of God and that they would develop the patience of Christ to see them through their trials to eternal life.
  - a. The love of God is life's most fundamental issue. It must take two directions in our hearts:
    - (1) We must believe how much God loves us. That should be easy to do when we assess what He has done for us:
      - (a) He loved us enough initially to create us and to provide for our needs (Acts 17:24-28);
      - (b) He loved us enough after our fall into ungodliness to give His only Son for our salvation (Rom.5:6,8; John 3:16);
      - (c) He is longsuffering toward us and gives us time and opportunity to respond to His love before it is too late (2Pet. 3:9);
    - (2) We must realize how much we should love God. That, too, should not be hard:
      - (a) We love Him because He first loved us so much (1John 4:19);
      - (b) We keep His commandments because we love Him (1John 5:3);
      - (c) We do whatever we believe will please Him (1John 3:22).
  - b. The patience of Christ is essential to "keeping on keeping on" despite the circumstances. This call to "patience" is subject to two interpretations:
    - (1) The Thessalonians should be patient in waiting for the promises made to them about the Lord's return to be fulfilled. This would be a logical thought to follow Paul's teaching in the previous chapter about the long delay that would precede the advent of Jesus. Such patience was crucial to faithfulness as time wore on;
    - (2) A more likely meaning of Paul's prayer has wider application than just to the subject of the advent of the Lord. Instead, the disciples should learn to exhibit great patience in *whatever* adverse situations they might find themselves. There would be many pitfalls ahead for them on the path to heaven, and total loyalty to Christ must define how they would endeavor to get by each one. Such patience would reflect the patience Jesus demonstrated as He suffered each rebuff and each ill-treatment, culminating in the ultimate humiliation of the cross (1Pet. 2:21-24).

## Verses 6-10-- TRADITION AND EXAMPLE

1. For the most part, the condition of the young church at Thessalonica was in pretty good shape. There were many things that could be commended about their faith and works. The prospects for their future usefulness in the cause of Jesus were bright.
2. Nevertheless, there were a few negative situations needing attention before the final words of this letter were written. Paul was never one to “sweep problems under the rug.” His friendship and his spiritual bond with these brethren would be shallow indeed should he fail to point out their deficiencies and tell them what to do about them. [See Gal. 4:16].
3. In his first letter, Paul had told the disciples [KJV; NKJV] to “warn them that are unruly” (1Thes. 5:14) about their unruliness. The ASV says “admonish the disorderly.” Both words are from *ataktos* [“not keeping order”], a military term identifying those who break rank; hence, those who are insubordinate.
4. It appears that Paul’s earlier direction about warning insubordinate members had not achieved satisfactory results to the time of his second epistle. Now, he *commands* that more serious action be directed toward those who persisted in their disorderly walk. It was time to replace *warning* with *withdrawal*. Those who refused to respond to the admonitions of brethren who sought their well-being were not worthy of any further forbearance. They had destroyed their identity with obedient members who were trying to “keep in step” with the “tradition” [commandment] they had received from inspired teachers. Paul will further explain this “withdrawal” in verse 14.
5. “Disorderly” conduct obviously includes all disobedience to apostolic instructions, but Paul here makes a particular application of the term to the *idleness* of which some church members were guilty, as the next few verses demonstrate.
6. Two ideas about this idleness are found in the various commentaries on the passage:
  - a. Some contend that idleness had been characteristic of some members even before their conversion, and their change in spirit had not effected a sufficient change in their lifestyle. They saw within the fellowship of the church an opportunity to *be supported* by soft-hearted but gullible brethren rather than to work with their own hands that they might be able to *support others* who had a real need. [See Eph. 4: 28.] They were setting a bad example before the world and were certainly *not* following the example left for them by Jesus (Mark 6:3) and by Paul (verses 7, 8);
  - b. Others believe that this idleness had developed some time after conversion. They suppose that the expectation of a “soon” return by Jesus had convinced some members that attention to worldly affairs was unimportant for saints who were preparing for the imminent destruction of the earth by fire. Just as many Jehovah’s Witnesses did many centuries later [c. 1844], they gave up jobs and other physical pursuits to await the appearance of Jesus Christ from heaven. Additionally, it is likely that some who *preferred* idleness to honest labor used the advent of the Lord as a *pretense* to justify their laziness.

7. Paul had supported himself with honest labor during his stay in Thessalonica when he took the gospel there. This had also been his practice in other places. [See 2Cor.11:8.] He was always cautious not to give anyone a reason for accusing him of preaching for money, nor did he wish to become a financial burden on his brethren. And, in circumstances like those at Thessalonica, he wanted to set a good example about the importance of honest work in the everyday lives of Christians.
8. Thus, both by *tradition* [apostolic teaching] and by *personal example*, the lesson had been made clear to all: *“If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat!”*

#### Verses 10-12-- WALKING DISORDERLY

1. The Thessalonians had been taught many traditions to observe in their worship, work, and personal relationships as members of the Lord’s church (3:15). For the most part, they seem to have been respectful of the commandments they had been given, and Paul commended them for that (3:4). However, as noted above, there was one of the traditions that continued to present problems to the church. Some few [?] were persisting in “free-loading” on their brethren, even though they were capable of working and supporting themselves. Just who was responsible for this lack of compliance with Paul’s *tradition* [singular--verse 6] is not altogether apparent. Perhaps there was fault on both sides.
2. We know that this “disorderly” [out of step] behavior was a *real* and *present* problem and not just something that only had the *potential to become* a problem for the church. There were some who were guilty of the dual sins of:
  - a. Not working at all. These were church members who were taking advantage of the good heartedness of their brethren and/or of a situation where some [either honestly or in pretense] were setting aside physical things to deal with spiritual things. Regardless of motivation, no able-bodied Christian had the right to abandon his duty of self-support and to become a burden on others. Of course, Paul’s condemnation of their behavior in no way diminished the obligation of the church to care for members who actually could not care for themselves (Eph. 4:28);
  - b. Behaving as busybodies. It is often true that “an idle mind is the devil’s workshop.” Some of the non-working members at Thessalonica, with too much time on their hands, had become busybodies in other people’s matters. Such activity was strictly forbidden for Christians, along with such things as murder, theft, and other forms of evildoing (1Pet. 4:15). Even well-intended meddling can become the source of serious unrest within a congregation, sometimes driving a wedge between brethren and destroying the closeness that otherwise would prevail.
3. A simple solution was available for this unapproved conduct:
  - a. Make sure that the guilty persons understood that their lifestyle was unacceptable in any who considered themselves disciples of Jesus. Let them know that an apos-

tle of the Lord had commanded them to change their practice of idleness. It was not a matter of *preference* but of *necessity*;

- b. Exhort them to comply with the apostolic command. Work is spiritually, mentally, and physically beneficial to the worker. It was ordained by God from the beginning of the world as a practice essential to man's happiness and well-being (Gen. 2:15). It is *commanded* of us because it is *good* for us! Urge idle men to take advantage of one of the Lord's *best blessings*;
- c. Tell each one to get a job! God was not concerned about what job, as long as it wasn't sinful in nature or detrimental to the worker's faithfulness. There is a place among the people of God for honorable labor of every sort, and devotion to excellent work on their part lends dignity and respect to every task;
- d. Caution them about working in quietness as they earn their own bread. The Christian worker should be grateful for the *opportunity* to work. He must appreciate and show respect for the person, industry, or organization that gives him that opportunity. He is content with his wages (Luke 3:14) and seeks to improve conditions in the workplace only by morally acceptable methods.

Verse 13-- A NOTE OF CAUTION

1. It is easy to become discouraged about doing good deeds for others when we see unworthy people taking advantage of our willingness to help. But Paul admonished the *faithful* brethren, "Do not grow weary in doing good" toward the truly needy just because some are pretenders.
2. The Galatian churches were exhorted similarly about persistence in doing good (Gal. 6:9), although Paul's admonition to them probably had a broader application than this statement made to the Thessalonians.

Verses 14,15-- CHURCH DISCIPLINE

1. Much is said in the New Testament about the necessity of church discipline. If the local church is to remain pure and submissive to the Lord's will, members of the congregation must behave themselves appropriately in every phase of the Christian life. When some become "unruly" [out of step with acceptable conduct] in some way, discipline by the other members becomes essential.
2. Discipline, from *sophron*, literally means, "saving the mind," and is used primarily to describe a "calling to soundness of mind or self-control" [Vine]. "Discipline" appears in 2Tim. 1:7 in the ASV, while the KJV and NKJV have "sound mind" and the RSV has "self-control." Paul does not use this term [*sophron*] in the verses related to dealing with the "unruly," but the end result of the prescribed actions clearly points toward a "calling to soundness of mind or self-control" [i.e., discipline].
3. Discipline has both positive and negative aspects. Positively, it includes the teaching, admonishing, and exhorting that are designed to make the young [or old] Christian

strong in the faith. Positive discipline is designed to *develop* faithfulness in disciples. Negatively, discipline involves activities intended to *restore* faithfulness in saints who have fallen into unacceptable behavior. It embraces teaching about pertinent faults, admonitions about the consequences of unchanged conduct, encouragement to faithful service, and, finally, withdrawal of fellowship from persistent offenders when all other efforts have been unproductive. Patience and gentleness are necessary elements in *every* attempt to recover a soul from sin (Gal. 6:1,2).

4. Perhaps there were those at Thessalonica whose deviant behavior had already been given appropriate attention but who had not responded in a desirable manner. Now, there was nothing left for the faithful members to do but to “withdraw” from them (verse 6) and to terminate all personal association with them (verse 14). These actions might shame them into reassessing their earlier decisions and making better ones than before.
5. Attitudes would still play a prominent role in the final outcome of all recovery efforts. Even though withdrawal from a wayward disciple breaks both spiritual and social bonds between him and those who remain steadfast in the truth, he still is worthy of brotherly treatment, gentle and respectful, as rescue work continues. Love will preclude his ever being “counted out” as hopeless, and hope will unceasingly prod God’s family to try to bring a loved one home again.

#### Verses 16-18-- WORDS OF FAREWELL

1. Paul’s final prayer for the spiritual health of the young converts to whom he wrote is found in verses 16 and 18. Peace, and grace were blessings indispensable to a joyous and productive life in Christ. Peace with God that comes through obedience to His commands; peace with others that results from treating them fairly; and peace with oneself that accompanies a conscience devoid of guilt for bad conduct are all available to the saint who truly has his heart set on heaven. This, indeed, is “peace in every way,” and it imparts an abundant tranquility to peaceful people in a troubled world. This “peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:7).
2. Verse 17 suggests that Paul might sometimes have been bothered by unprincipled men who had forged documents purporting to have been written by the apostle. It appears that this had happened at Thessalonica prior to his writing this letter (2:2). A spurious epistle could be devastating to the truth if unsuspecting readers should believe it to be authentic.
3. Evidently, Paul had devised some kind of mark by which churches and individuals could recognize a letter from him as genuine. Such a mark would be familiar to the brotherhood and would provide a way to protect the integrity of the gospel message wherever it might go.

1. Paul wanted two advantages for the word of the Lord:  
a. \_\_\_\_\_ b. \_\_\_\_\_
2. He desired to be \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ men who had no \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Of what two things was Paul confident about the Thessalonians?  
a. \_\_\_\_\_ b. \_\_\_\_\_
4. Strong Christian hearts would exhibit the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ and the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Brethren were \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ from every member who \_\_\_\_\_.
6. A “disorderly walk” was contrary to the \_\_\_\_\_ from the apostles.
7. Who was the person Paul used as an example of someone who was not “disorderly”
8. Paul ate no \_\_\_\_\_ that was \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_; he worked \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ not to \_\_\_\_\_ the disciples.
9. Paul had \_\_\_\_\_ to be supported, but he desired instead to be a good \_\_\_\_\_ for the Thessalonians to \_\_\_\_\_.
10. “If anyone will not \_\_\_\_\_, neither shall he \_\_\_\_\_.”
11. Some were disorderly [unruly] by not \_\_\_\_\_ and by being \_\_\_\_\_.
12. These were told to \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_ and to eat their \_\_\_\_\_.
13. Those who refused to \_\_\_\_\_ this \_\_\_\_\_ should be refused the \_\_\_\_\_ of brethren that they might be \_\_\_\_\_.
14. Christians withdrawn from were still \_\_\_\_\_ and not \_\_\_\_\_.
15. Paul wished the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ and the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ for the church at Thessalonica.