

## A LETTER TO A LIVING CHURCH...

Where, today, can we obtain a good paradigm or example of a living church? It is difficult to answer that question, seeing the criteria for what we may call 'a living church' often differ. Probably, however, we would find such a church in a Third World country, or a community living under a totalitarian government. It does not much matter.

History has left a remarkable example of a living church in the one which came into being in the days of Paul the Apostle, in Thessalonica of Greece. Roughly speaking it was in the place now called Salonika.

Paul and his friends visited this city and proclaimed their message under stormy conditions. In fact an 'arranged riot' took place to dishearten the evangelists and to scare people away from receiving their message. Many 'devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women', along with a number of Jews, joined the apostolic band, out of which grew a dynamic church.

This new church has left us a pattern we could well follow. Indeed we ought to follow it. So gripped were its members that they immediately set about transmitting the message of Christ across that part of Europe. They were people filled with faith, hope, and love. They were quickly coming to grips with the situation around them, but their answers to human problems did not derive—as is mostly the case today—from the horizontal. They were in contact with the living God and spoke out of that relationship.

It is a fascinating exercise to discover the power by which they worked, and to seek to apply it to our human situation today.

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NEW CREATION PUBLICATIONS INC. 

## THE FIRST LETTER OF PAUL TO THE THESSALONIANS

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

**L** I give thanks always for you,  
all, continually in our  
prayers, remembering  
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Other ancient authorities read babes

OTHER COMMENTARIES BY THE SAME AUTHOR

The Gospel of St. Mark  
The Gospel of St. John  
The Acts of the Apostles  
The Epistle to the Galatians  
The Epistle to the Ephesians  
The Epistle to the Philipians  
The Epistle of First Peter  
The Book of the Revelation

**A LETTER TO A  
LIVING  
CHURCH**

**Studies in I Thessalonians**

**Geoffrey Bingham**

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# INTRODUCTION

## THE BACKGROUND OF THE BOOK

### The City of Thessalonica.

Acts 17:1-15 introduces its readers to the town of Thessalonica, as also the entrance into it of Paul, Timothy and Silas. They had come from Philippi to preach the gospel in this capital city of Macedonia. Macedonia had once been a kingdom independent of the Greek states, but had at one stage absorbed the Greek states into its kingdom. These had been liberated by the Romans, and Macedonia had been confined to itself, as a kingdom. Later the Romans had annexed it, built a fine military highway to it—the ‘Via Egnatia’ and made it a base for Roman military advance. It was made a colony of Rome which meant that all born there were ‘free-born’, i.e. were given Roman citizenship and rights.

The city was named Thessalonica by Cassander who founded a new city near the original city which had the name of Therma, because of the hot springs situated in it. ‘Thessalonica’ was his wife’s name, and she was half-sister to Alexander the Great. It seems that old Therma and new Thessalonica grew and merged into the one city. Today it is called Salonika and has quite a large population.

### The Gospel Comes to Thessalonica

Acts 16:6-10 describes Paul and his companions as they sought to know God's will for them. They were on the second missionary journey, and had been forbidden to preach the gospel in Asia. They were prevented from going into Bithynia. One night Paul had a vision of a Macedonian beckoning him to come over into Macedonia. He took this to be guidance and the team crossed into Macedonia to the city of Philippi. Here they had a mixture of success and persecution, and were finally freed from the gaol where they had been imprisoned for exorcising the spirit of divination from a slave girl.

Paul and his companions had had a rich ministry at Philippi, bringing Lydia to the gospel, and also the gaoler of their prison. He and his whole household were baptised, believing in Christ. A church was established to which Paul was later to write his famous letter.

On being freed they made their way to Thessalonica where Paul made his apostolic proclamation. He reasoned from the Scriptures that the true Messiah was to suffer, and to rise from the dead. Having done that, he showed that Jesus was the Messiah because of these things. A number of devout Greeks and some of the leading women accepted Paul's message and joined themselves to the new teachers.

This precipitated a crisis of jealousy with the Jews who caused an uproar, attacking the house of Jason where the apostolic team was sheltered. The new teachers were accused of preaching another king (other than Caesar) namely, Jesus. Jason and others were bound over to keep the peace, and this called for the hasty exit of Paul and Silas, who then went on to Beroea where the word was

received 'with all eagerness' and the Jews searched the Scriptures daily to verify what Paul had said. Even so the angry Jews of Thessalonica came to disturb this work. Paul left quickly on the advice of the new Christian brethren, making his way to Athens whilst Silas and Timothy remained behind. Paul urged them to follow him as soon as possible. He, himself, seems to have envisaged a quick return (see I Thess. 2:15 16) but was prevented from doing so (I Thess. 2:18).

When we read I Thessalonians 1:2 2:20 we are able to enlarge our information of the apostolic visit and ministry. The Book of the Acts was partly designed to be *apologia*, i.e. to show that the Christians were not insurrectionists: they did not deliberately stir up trouble. The Jews at Thessalonica would deeply resent any numbers being withdrawn from their group. Paul's reasoning was in order since he showed what Messiah would be, and what Jesus was, and that the two were identical. For the Jews in their jealousy to be 'taking some wicked fellows of the rabble and gathering a crowd was really professional rioting. Luke, in writing Acts, is determined to show the Christians as a peaceful group, which they were.

Paul's first letter shows that the new church sprang out of the gospel, which itself was preached with great power, in the Holy Spirit. It had evoked a warm response from Gentiles who had 'turned from idols to serve the living God. and to wait for His Son from heaven.' It seems Paul only had a few weeks, but he had used the short time well. For their part the Thessalonians had sounded out the gospel without Paul's aid, and the commendations of their faith, hope and love in both letters shows they grew quickly into spiritual maturity. Indeed the value of studying the letters is to see what happens when the gospel is proclaimed faithfully.

We need also to note that Paul had sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to aid the new believers. It seems that Silas also must have been with Timothy, so that the new church would have had a useful strengthening from these two men.

#### The Time of the Writing of the Epistle

There are two possibilities: (a) that Timothy and Silas had joined him in Athens after the affair in the Areopagus and he had sent a letter back to Thessalonica when he sent Timothy there, or (b) that he had written the letter in Corinth after Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia (Acts 18:5), in which case the letter was probably written about AD 50. Only the Galatian letter—of all the Pauline letters—could have been written prior to it, and possibly I Thessalonians is the first letter Paul wrote.

#### The Purpose of the Letter

The purpose of the letter can be worked out from the letter itself. There is enough of Paul's personal affection shown in the first two chapters of the letter to show what pastoral concern he had for them.

The church would have had to live with the ignominy of their founder having to leave town. Paul acknowledges that they received the gospel in the midst of this affliction so he wishes to both praise and encourage them. He reminds them of the fact that, no matter what his critics may say, he and his companions had been honourable in

everything. They had not used men-pleasing modes to entice listeners to the gospel. Indeed, he himself had been like a nurse to the new converts, and had shared himself with them. See 2: 1-12.

He also shows that the persecution which they were suffering at Thessalonica was not confined to that city. In Judea the Christians had suffered at the hands of their fellow-Jews. So the Macedonians were suffering at the hands of their fellow countrymen. See 2: 14ff.

As in other letters to former pagans Paul wishes to stress the matter of holiness. Moral and ethical values—especially in sexual matters—were not always easily and quickly seen. Paul had some clear prescriptions to give, and he gave them. See 4:1-8.

It seems, too, that teaching concerning the last things (eschatological doctrine) was somewhat confused. In 1:10 Paul says they are waiting for the appearing of God's Son. In 4:13-17 Paul shows that those who have died will not lose out in *the parousia*, i.e. Christ's appearing. Indeed the dead in Christ will rise first, and then the living will be caught up with them. Far from being a cause of fear the coming of Christ should be a source of present comfort (4:18).

There may be other reasons also for the injunctions given in 5: 12-21; they may have been written to correct deficient practice. It is difficult to say, but generally speaking the letter was written as pastoral encouragement and ethical exhortation. The note of love and exhortation to love, as well as the commendation of their love, means the epistle must have been of great benefit and help to the church at Thessalonica.

## CHAPTER ONE

I Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.

**Paul, Silvanus and Timothy:** this is a greeting but not one which is merely formal. The three names here had formed the apostolic team whose ministry had brought the church into being. **Paul:** we notice that he does not use his general statement 'called to be an apostle' or simply 'an apostle of Jesus Christ'. He was well known to, and loved by, the Thessalonians, and he was not insisting on his apostolic authority in order to bring certain people into line on teaching and practice.

**Silvanus and Timothy** had stayed behind in Thessalonica to help the church after **Paul** had had to leave quickly. He had also sent them back from Athens to give further aid to the new congregation. So their names would be known and dear to the church.

It would seem that the three were writing the letter together. On other occasions Paul would include his companion or companions. Probably the others were content for Paul to take the initiative in the letter, but note he uses the constant 'we'.

**Silvanus** was Paul's chief assistant on the second missionary journey. In Acts 15:22 Judas and Silas (Silvanus: Peter

and Paul use the full name, Luke, in Acts, the nickname, Silas) are chosen to go to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas to deliver the message from the apostles and elders at Jerusalem concerning the important matter of the place of the Gentiles in the Christian church. They are called 'leading men among the brethren'. In 15:32 they are called 'prophets'. When Paul and Barnabas had a quarrel over Mark, Barnabas' nephew, the two former comrades parted and Paul chose Silas to go with him. In I Peter 5:12, Peter calls Silvanus 'a faithful brother' and uses him to write his letter. In II Corinthians 1:19, Paul recalls that Silvanus was—along with Timothy and himself—a faithful preacher.

**Timothy:** A lot is known about Timothy. In Acts 16:1–3 we find Timothy as a disciple. His father was a Greek, his mother a Jewess. He had not previously been circumcised, but it was necessary for him to do this in order to go on circuit with Paul. He had a godly mother and grandmother (see I Tim. 1:5), and he himself had been taught the Scriptures (II Tim. 3: 14ff.). While Paul was at Ephesus he sent Timothy and Erastus into Macedonia on a mission.

Quite an impression of Timothy can be gained from I Corinthians 4:14-17, where Paul said he had sent Timothy to Corinth. He calls him 'my beloved and faithful child in the Lord'. It seems Timothy followed Paul and his ways most closely, and could thus remind the Corinthians of what Paul did and how he lived so that they too could imitate him (cf. I Cor. 11: 1).

We can discover quite a lot about Timothy in the two pastoral letters addressed to him. It seems he was a timid person (cf. II Tim. 1:7), and by contrast Titus was a much stronger person, for Paul was able to leave him in Crete as an apostolic delegate, and Crete was a most difficult

situation. Timothy had to be urged to continue in teaching and preaching, and not to allow his youthfulness to be despised. He seems not to be as resolute as Titus. Timothy was with Paul quite a lot in his journeyings and is mentioned in the salutations of the following letters—II Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, I and II Thessalonians and Philemon.

**To the church of the Thessalonians:** the very fact that a church arose in Macedonia is a thrilling matter. No church that Paul founded was forgotten by him. Each church was on his heart continually. So also were its cares (II Cor. 6:11-12; 11:28). Paul cared for churches that he never directly founded, as we see in Colossians 2: If.

**in God the Father:** this phrase is used here and in II Thessalonians 1:1 of all the Pauline epistles. The understanding of God as Father is the heart of the gospel. Paul was anxious to bring this home to the Athenians after leaving Thessalonica, and it is a teaching close to his heart. The passages in other epistles such as Galatians 3:26, 4: 1-7, Ephesians 3: 14-15, 4:6, Romans 8: 14-17, and the constant use of 'brethren' show he saw the church as the family (household) of God (Eph. 2: 18f.).

**and the Lord Jesus Christ:** in 2:14 he has the phrase 'the churches of God in Christ Jesus'. The term **Lord** is also at the heart of the gospel. The knowledge that the risen and ascended man **Jesus** is over all was of the highest importance. For **Lord** see Acts 2:36, 10:36, Romans 10:9, 14:8-9, I Corinthians 12:3, II Corinthians 4:5, Revelation 1:5, 17:14 and 19: 16. He is **Lord** because of the resurrection. **Jesus** means 'Yahweh is Saviour', and was the name divinely given at his birth. It stands for his true humanity (see Matt. 1:21; Rom. 8:3; Gal. 4:4; Heb. 2:14-18).

**Christ** is the Greek term (*Christos*) for the Hebrew word



*Messiah* and means *the anointed one*. The image of Christ in the Old Testament is a powerful one. See Matthew 16:16, 22:42, 26:63, John 4:25 and 26. The church then was secure, protected, enriched, and made powerful in **the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**.

**Grace to you and peace:** The word **grace** (Greek: *charis*) is one of the most important words of the New Testament. It has a history in the Old Testament under the Hebrew words *then*, which means 'favour', and *chesed*, which means 'loving kindness' or 'compassion', whilst the word *abed* is used for love. John 1: 14 shows the Son to be 'full of grace and truth'. In regard to salvation, everything is grace, and grace is everything. In regard to the gifts of God (repentance, faith, forgiveness, justification, purification, holiness, sonship, love, the Spirit, and glorification), all are given out of grace. Paul put all his ministry down to grace (I Cor. 15:10; cf. II Cor. 12:8-10).

**peace:** this word (Greek: *eirene*) has a meaning that is rich. It carries the idea of both 'serenity' (John 14:27; Phil. 4:7) and 'reconciliation', (Rom. 5:1; Eph. 2: 14), although there is a more technical word for the latter, eg. Romans 5 (Greek: *katallage*). James Denney has said, 'Grace is the love of God, spontaneous, beautiful, unearned, at work in Jesus Christ for the salvation of sinful men; peace is the effect and fruit in man of the reception of grace'. Every day the church needed grace and peace. Peace is indispensable for normal human living and is the gift of Christian living.

2 We give thanks to God always for you all, constantly mentioning you in our prayers,

**We give thanks to God always for you all:** this statement

was neither formal nor flattering. The church at Thessalonica was exceptional in its life and power, and—as we shall soon see—in its faith, hope and love. The rich experiences of Paul, Silas, and Timothy there were memorable.

Giving thanks for other persons was not a pagan idea, but giving thanks to God is the sign of spiritual well being and true worship (cf. Eph. 5:20; Phil. 3:1; 4:6; Col. 1:3; 3:17; I Thess. 1:2; 5:18). Failure to give thankfulness attended the fall of man (Rom. 1:21). Notice the **we** here which showed the unity of the apostolic team in their love and prayers. II Corinthians 4:15 shows that the basis of thanksgiving is grace.

constantly mentioning you in **our prayers:** Paul's prayers, especially in Ephesians and Colossians (see Eph. 1: 15-23; 3: 14-21; Col. 1:9-14; 2: 1-3), are positive, practical and to the point. They are prayers of great depth. Paul prays for them all. There were so many converts to pray for that constantly must refer to the times when the Thessalonians came to mind. Paul also asks for prayer for himself so that there is nothing of patronage in his praying (cf. Eph. 6:19; Phil. 1:19).

3 remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

**remembering before our God and Father:** the church is 'in the Father'. The three things mentioned are part of the Family living. These things are then 'in the sight of God the Father'. Obedience to the Father was Christ's primary drive (see John 4:34; 5: 17ff.; 8:28-30). What is in the sight

of God is a triad of **faith, hope and love**. Paul says in I Corinthians 13:13, 'So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love'. For parallels see Colossians 1:4-5, I Thessalonians 1:3, 3:6, 5:8, II Thessalonians 1:3, Romans 5:1-5, Ephesians 1:15ff., Hebrews 6: 10-11, 10:23-24, I Peter 1:3, 22, I John 3:1-3, cf. Titus 2:11-14, Jude 20-21. In this triad the three are inextricably linked, though not always mentioned together. One without the other is impossible. Together they are the essence of Christian living.

**your work of faith:** faith is brought to birth by grace (see Rom. 3:24; 10: 17; Eph. 2:8-10). Faith is the acceptance of the truth (Rom. 1:25), redemption by it (Rom. 10:8-9—'the word of faith', Acts 13:48; 16:31), and obedience to it (Rom. 1:5; 15:18; 16:26; cf. John 3:36). Thus faith produces works (Eph. 2:8-10; I Thess. 1:3; II Thess. 1:11; cf. Titus 2:11-14; Heb. 11 [the whole chapter], and James 1:18-26, 'faith without works is dead'). The word work (Greek: *ergon*) is something accomplished (John 9:4; 14:12; 17:4; Titus 2:14; Rev. 14:13; 20:12). Note that faith works through love (Gal. 5:6).

**and labour of love:** for the fact that work comes from love also, see John 14:15, I John 4: 10, 19, 5:3, II Corinthians 5: 14.

**labour** (Greek: *kopos*) denotes real toil. Love (Greek: *agape*) is often said to denote a higher quality than *philein* (affection, inter-relational love) and *eros* (said to be 'sexual' but in fact the most altruistic form of [Greek] love). In fact all love is *agape*, rightly exercised. The Christians gave it as the meaning of God's love, but love now to all men (I John 4:19; cf. I Thess. 3:12).

**labour of love** then is a great passion. Passages such as in II Corinthians chapters 6 and 11 show an incredible

*constraint* was essential for unwavering labour. Christian history has shown this as against serf-gaining labours.

**steadfastness of hope:** hope is a fixed assurance based on the nature, works and promises of God. It rises from the prophetic word (II Cor. 1:20), and is linked with faith (Heb. 11:1ff.). Christ is our hope (Col. 1:27), and we have been born to this (I Peter 1:3). Hope springs from love (Rom. 5:5). It is initiated and aided by the Spirit (Rom. 8:18-25) and looks to things such as resurrection, eternal life, the inheritance, glory, and seeing God face to face. Hope is a constraint to holiness (I John 3: 1-3; Heb. 12: 14). The Thessalonians had seen the apostolic hope and been confirmed in it. They needed it in the midst of persecution.

Note the steadfastness of hope, i.e. the things we hope for—as also our present experience of love—will make us endure anything (cf. Rom. 5: 1-5; James 1:24).

in **our Lord Jesus Christ:** faith, hope and love—these three essentials—all happen only in Christ, as the saints are under his Lordship, kept by it, and work in it. We must keep seeing them as the inseparable triad by, and in, which we live.

4 For we know, brethren beloved by God, that he has chosen you;

**For we know:** i.e. 'are convinced', for Paul had seen the fruits of the gospel in their lives. Notice the term **brethren**. Again it is a family statement. They never call each other 'disciples'. All mankind may be **brethren** by creation but only specially by redemption (Gal. 4:4 6) since they now relate to God as Father.

**beloved by God** certainly points to God's personal love, but it is also a term for 'election'. It is supported by **he has**

chosen you. See the parallel in II Thessalonians 2:13-14.

Election (**he has chosen you**), is an offence to the fallen human mind and spirit, but of incredible comfort (but not pride) to the elect. For the whole subject see Ephesians 1:5, 11,3:11, II Timothy 1:9, John 6:38, 39, 17:2-12, Acts 13:48, Romans 8:29-30.

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

**for our gospel came to you:** the proof of their being elect is that the gospel came to them. See Romans 1:17, I Corinthians 1:18 and present context. The gospel is powerful of itself because it is 'the word of faith' (Rom. 10:8), i.e. the word which itself effects its results (Rom. 10:17; cf. II Thess. 2:13-14).

**not only in word:** it did come in word, but not powerless word. For word see Acts where the word, some thirty-five times, is said to be 'of God', 'of the Lord', 'to prevail', 'increased', 'flourished', being attended and confirmed by signs and wonders, and is called 'the word of the gospel', 'the word of salvation', 'the word of his grace'. The apostolic band knew it must be effective.

**also in power:** this is linked with and in the Holy Spirit, because the Spirit gives power (Acts 1:8; I Cor. 2:4-5; I Pet. 1:12; Rom. 15:19). The Spirit alone can convict (John 16:7-11). Notice in I Corinthians 1:17 and 2:3-5 that 'peddling the word' (II Cor. 2:17; 4:2) deprives it of its power. The Holy Spirit does not give power to the word but releases the power that is there. See II Thessalonians

*2:9 where evil seeks to emulate the same power!*

**and with full conviction:** no man can proclaim beyond what has happened to him. Much had happened to Paul and his brethren. Thus the proclamation was also a witness (cf. Acts 1:8; 4:2; 4:33; 22:16). In fact the Spirit of truth assures the listeners that what they hear *is* the truth. See II Corinthians 4:2.

You know what kind of **men we** proved to be **among** you for your sake: what Paul and his team had shown themselves to be, their hearers (v. 7) had become. The gospel is not just a matter of words, of doctrine, but of demonstration and action. The Thessalonians had quickly tested the team and found them to be consistent with the truth they taught.

**for your sake** would mean credibility, but also a demonstration of the new way of life, i.e. imitating the apostolic pattern (I Col 4:16; 11:1).

*6 And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit;*

And you became imitators of us and of the Lord: the 'you' is emphatic, i.e. 'you yourselves'. We see now the principle of imitation as in Ephesians 5:12. They 'followed' and 'imitated' but did not mimic! It was not only that they believed and were saved, but the actions of their life showed new faith. This is why they did the acts which were apostolic.

**for you received the word in much affliction:** see Acts 17:5 and 13. The opposition was intense. I Thessalonians 2:14 shows that their 'imitation' was that like other churches, i.e. those in Judea. The **much affliction** was no

stumbling block to them, but rather the stepping stone to glory.

**with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit:** ‘love, joy and peace’ (fruit of the Spirit: Gal. 5:22-23) had come to them. This joy was no mild thing, no transitory emotion. John 16:22. Acts 5:41 and 16:25 all show that joy along with love and peace- is part of the fruit (harvest) of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23), i.e. the fruit of forgiveness, justification, sonship and holiness. Christ knew his joy in doing the Father’s will. Man is in joy when he is back with the Father.

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

**so that you became an example:** not only did they imitate the apostolic ‘model’ but they became those who could be-and were imitated by others. The word **example** is *typos*, i.e. ‘type’ (cf. Rom. 5: 14). It can refer to an image (Acts 7:43, i.e. ‘models’ or ‘figures’), or pattern (Acts 7:44; Heb. 8:5), but generally the sort of person who can be an example to follow (Titus 2:7; I Pet. 5:3).

**to all the believers:** literally ‘to the ones believing’. Paul means, ‘When people come to belief they need a *typos*, and you are it’. Not confined to Thessalonica their example makes its impact in **Macedonia and in Achaia**. This means that the church as a community became the type for the other communities.

8. For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything.

For: the conjunction (as in v. 4) is important. It tells that what follows is the way and manner of their *typos*.

**the word of the Lord sounded forth from you:** the word of the Lord is the word which comes from the Lord, which he himself utters, and which is about himself. See verse 5 above.

**not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth:** i.e. ‘you were a sounding board’. The effect was powerful. The **word of the Lord** is always dynamic and effective. The Thessalonians were preaching the gospel.

**but your faith** in God has gone forth everywhere: in verse 3 Paul has spoken of ‘your work of faith’. Here (in v. 8) your faith is equal to ‘the gospel’. In the same way as the apostolic band preached, so do the Thessalonians.

**has gone forth everywhere** is also the apostolic pattern. This is what Roland Allen calls ‘the spontaneous expansion of the Christian church’. The church is indeed reproducing the *typos* of the apostles. That is why we need not say anything. This is true proclamation, issuing from the hearts of radically changed people.

9 For they themselves report concerning us what a welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God,

**For they themselves report:** i.e. those who have heard the Thessalonians, those of the everywhere of verse 8. Those of us who live in an historical Christian society—no matter how much it may have departed from ‘the essence of the truth’—cannot really understand what had happened at Thessalonica. The pagan (polytheistic) way of life differs so utterly from the new Christian one. What was so amazing

was **what a welcome we had among you**. Pagans do not easily welcome a new truth and pattern of life.

**and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God:** this is the heart of the matter, i.e. the difference between **idols and a living God**, and **a true God**. These terms were most significant for those of Israel where the debate had always been between dead (static, passive, powerless) idols, and the living God, for that term meant (a) the God who gives life (cf. Jer. 2:13; Acts 17:25) and sustains it (Acts 17:28; Heb. 1:3), and (b) the God who acts. He acts in creation (Acts 14:15), and in everything (John 5:17). For **living** see in Israel, Joshua 3: 10ff., I Samuel 17:28 *passim*, Daniel 6:20. In the New Testament see Matthew 16: 16, 26:63, John 6:57, I Timothy 3:15, Hebrews 3:12, 9:14, 10:31. For the dead idols see Psalm 115:3-8, and for their evil see Deuteronomy 32:15-18, 29:16ff., Acts 7.

For contrast between false (unreal) idols and the **true God**, see I Corinthians 8:4-6, John 17:3, I John 5:20-21.

**to serve a living and true God:** the verb here for **serve** is *douleuo*, i.e. to serve as slaves. See Hebrews 9:14 and Revelation 7:15 where the verb is *latreuo*, i.e. 'to serve' and 'to worship'. The Thessalonians had passed from one system to another, the way of death (idolatry) to the way of life, of the **living and true God**. See Colossians 2:16-23 and Galatians 4:8-11 for the slavery of serving idols and evil powers linked with them (I Cor. 10:20).

10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

**and to wait for his Son from heaven:** the word wait is

used only here in the New Testament. It carries the idea of continued patience, as also of unwavering trust that the event will happen.

The teaching of Christ's second appearing **from heaven** (cf. Phil. 3:20-21) is often found in these two letters. The church seemed to have this much in mind. See I Thessalonians 2:19, 3:13, 4:13, 5:1-11, II Thessalonians 1:7-2:12. This then shows the basis for their 'steadfastness of hope' (1:3). The doctrine of Christ's return is said to be referred to once every thirteen verses of the New Testament. It is an integral part of the whole gospel.

**whom he raised from the dead:** this also was an integral part of the gospel. See passages such as Romans 1:4, 4:25, 10:9, I Corinthians 15 (whole chapter). Christ's Lordship is rounded on this (Acts 2:36; Rom. 14:9). The Father testified to His Son, and vindicated his shameful crucifixion by raising him (Acts 2:24-32; Rom. 6:4). The Thessalonians believed in the living Lord.

**Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come:** the whole matter of God's wrath is raised here. Romans 1:18 32 is the *locus classicus* of the subject. Here wrath is God giving man up to his sin and guilt (24, 25, 28) because he has refused to know God, has become idolatrous and 'exchanged the truth of God for a lie'; is suppressing that truth in wicked acts, and is serving not God but 'the creature'. Other references in the New Testament are John 3:36, Romans 9:22, Ephesians 5:6, Colossians 3:6, Revelation 11:18, 7:16-17, 14:10, 19, 19:15 cf. I Corinthians 6:9f., Galatians 5: 19-21.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus makes reference to hell (*Gehenna*), and in Mark 9:42-8 of 'unquenchable fire' and the place 'where their worm does not die'. God's wrath, however, is simply His implacable opposition to

evil, and His unchanging intention (and action) to destroy all evil.

Wrath is a present visitation of God (as we have here seen), but is also **the wrath to come** (see II Thess. 1:6ff.). Man dreads this wrath; see Hebrews 2:14-15, I John 4:17-18. He is always restless because alienated from God. He sees Him only through the lens of his own guilt. He is in fear of death, which is really fear of judgement—the ultimate execution of God’s wrath upon evil. This relief for former pagans of being delivered from the fear of wrath to come must have been immense. It also added ‘fire’ to their proclamation of the gospel. Being free from guilt they would have a new power and constraint to proclaim the gospel.

## CHAPTER TWO

I ‘For you yourselves know, brethren, that our visit to you was not in vain;

**For:** this little conjunction carries on from the ‘for’ of 1:5 and 1:7. There has been slander of the apostolic team by opponents of Paul at Thessalonica. Paul is not justifying himself or the team, but is simply stating what the church already knows—**you yourselves know**. That is, the facts declare themselves. The Greek word *kene* (cf. II Cor. 6: 1) means ‘empty’, ‘in vain’, and Paul is saying their visit was ‘full’, ‘profitable’, ‘productive’. All that follows in the next fifteen verses proves this. In the Galatian letter Paul sets out his apostolic office so that his teaching will be taken as truth: here he is setting out the apostolic ministry that has already taken place, and that speaks for itself.

2 but though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the face of great opposition.

**but though we had already suffered:** this refers to Acts 16: 19-24, i.e. the wrongful beating of Paul and Silas. The use of **but** is really emphasising that far from acting in a wrong way the apostolic team had not desisted from

preaching the gospel, but to the contrary, had come on to Thessalonica to do so.

**suffered and shamefully treated** ('having been insulted') indicate shocking treatment which would have deterred many. Instead we **had courage**, i.e. we were emboldened. A study of II Corinthians shows that suffering increased the desire to preach the gospel and strengthened faith (see especially II Cor. 4:7-15).

**in our God:** the Greek we **had courage** means 'we had freedom of speech', i.e. 'we did not become more circumspect in speaking when we came to Thessalonica, but rather were without fear'. This freedom came from God, and in that sense was supernatural. This the Thessalonians had seen, and that was why they had responded.

**to declare to you the gospel of God:** Paul's confidence lay in the fact that this gospel was 'not man's gospel' (Gal. 1:11-12), but God's (Rom. 1:1; 15:16; II Cor. 11:7). Even so, in 1:5 Paul can speak of 'our gospel', and in Romans 2:16 of 'my gospel'.

**in the face of great opposition:** i.e. 'amid great conflict', 'in much contention'. They showed they were 'not ashamed of the gospel' (Rom. 1:16).

3 For our appeal does not spring from error or uncleanness, nor is it made with guile;

**For:** here Paul is continuing the argument countering the slanders.

**our appeal:** the Greek *word paraklesis* (see II Cor. 5:20, 'God making his appeal through us') carries the idea of 'strengthening', 'encouraging,' and 'exhorting'. It is not a weak pleading, but a strong demand.

**does not spring from error or uncleanness:** 2000 years of evangelism has made Paul's ministry seem 'regular' to us, but in his day all kinds of charlatans, cultists and others were travelling for motives of deceit and sexual involvement. Indeed they do today, and such charges must have been levelled at the apostolic team. See I Corinthians 4:15, II Corinthians 4:1-3 and II Corinthians 2: 17, ('For we are not like so many, pedlars of God's word; but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.').

**error** here refers rather to 'deceit' (cf. II Tim. 3:13), **uncleanness** means immorality, as often religious teaching was linked with ritual prostitution.

**nor is it made with guile:** here **guile** equals 'trickery'. Charlatans, hucksters and others used such 'bait' to catch 'fish'. Paul does not see men as people to be ensnared or duped, or the gospel as a 'lure'. In so many places he shows the gospel has its own power and appeal (cf. I Cor. 1:17; 2:1-5; Rom. 1:16). He speaks of '*out of error*', '*out of uncleanness*' and '*in guile*', showing that their motives and condition were not linked with these forms of evil.

4 but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please men, but to please God who tests our hearts.

**but just as we have been approved by God:** approved means 'tested' (see Rom. 12:2; Phil. 1: 10). The 'testing' did not have to come from the slanderers, since God had already done that.

**to be entrusted with the gospel:** since this was God's commission both the preachers and the listeners could

have full confidence in the gospel proclaimed. See 1 Corinthians 9:17, ('I am entrusted with a commission'), and Romans 10:15, ('How can men preach unless they are sent?').

**so we speak, not to please men, but to please God:** Paul knew—as all true proclaimers know—that the gospel of grace is abhorrent to men (cf. I Cor. 1:18, 23). There is always the temptation to water it down, or make it appealing to the human ego, but Paul and his companions never succumbed to this.

**to please God:** must mean both manner of life and manner of preaching.

**who tests our hearts:** again the use of 'test' or 'approve' is here.

5 For we never used either words of flattery, as you know, or a cloak for greed, as God is witness;

**For:** again the link word with verse 3.

Again **as you know** as in verse 1. Their witness stands unimpugned.

**we never:** i.e. 'not at any time'. **words of flattery:** this thought needs no commentary, but flattery in those days was the use of cunning and persuasive speech.

a **cloak for greed:** i.e. their evangelism was not a 'cover' for making money etc. **Greed** here covers a number of things in the New Testament, namely 'impurity' (Eph. 4:19), and is linked with 'covetousness' (Eph. 5:3) which is itself 'idolatry' (Col. 3:5). In Mark 7:22 the word is linked with other evils such as fornication, adultery and murder. The slander was that the disciples were preaching for

self-gain. This seems to be the case, often, in our own day.

**as God is witness:** this is a solemn invocation. The true believers knew God would thus witness to the disciples.

6 nor did we seek glory from men, whether from you or from others, though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.

**nor did we seek glory from men:** applause of others is what men seek more than anything else (see John 12:43). It may be the slanderers were jealous of the fact that the apostolic team did receive esteem from the church and were imputing their own kind of thinking to the messengers.

**glory** (Gk. *doxa*) is what God develops *in* a believer. Human beings covet glory because they lost it in the Fall. (Rom. 3:23, where to fall short of God's glory is also to fall short of man's true glory.) To receive esteem is to achieve security.

**though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ: apostles** are messengers. In the more particular sense Paul is an apostle whereas Timothy and Silas are not, but as messengers sent out from the church at Antioch they are certainly apostles. This doubtless entitled them to be cared for by the [new] church. Paul is about to say that they did not draw on such rights.

7 But we were gentle among you, like a nurse taking care of her children.

**But we were gentle among you:** far from making heavy demands they were **gentle**, i.e. gave care instead of requiring it.



**like a nurse taking care of her children:** this probably means ‘a nursing mother’, rather than a nurse with the children of others. For the maternal image see also Galatians 4: 19.

**among you** suggests that Paul shared with them, rather than stood apart as one proclaiming the gospel.

8 So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

So, **being affectionately desirous of you:** this verb is used only here in the New Testament. It can mean ‘having a longing for you’, or ‘having such an affection for you’. It is a strong term. Paul did not look upon proclamation as a business, but knew it led to deep personal relationships.

**we were ready to share with you:** Paul always loved his converts and would be spent for them (II Cor. 12:15). There is no patronage here from apostle to people, but an habitually being one with them.

**not only the gospel of God but also our own selves:** in Romans 1:14 Paul sees an obligation to share the gospel with all. Indeed this was his whole life, yet it was not merely something objective, separate from Paul. It involved his whole being. They (the team) were ready to impart their ‘own souls’, i.e. their inner beings. This was most intimate.

**because you had become very dear to us:** the slanderers must have misread this intimacy. The converts had become *agapetoi* to the disciples, i.e. ‘beloved’. Here is the

true model (*typos* 1:7) for missionaries in all ages and situations.

9 For you remember our labour and toil, brethren; we worked night and day, that we might not burden any of you, while we preached to you the gospel of God.

**For you remember our labour and toil, brethren:** again the significant ‘For’, furthering Paul’s argument of their integrity towards the new church.

**labour and toil** represents hard work. Acts 18:3 shows that Paul was a tentmaker. Acts 20:34 shows Paul always worked to maintain himself *and others*. Paul had a strong doctrine of work (Eph. 4:28; II Thess. 3: 10-12).

**we worked night and day, that we might not burden any of you:** in I Timothy 5:17-18 Paul agrees that ‘the labourer is worthy of his hire’. Even so in I Corinthians 9:18 he says his desire is ‘that I may make the gospel free of charge’. It is a gospel of grace, and this is indicated in the way it is proclaimed. They worked while they preached. This reassured the listeners that they were not in the gospel for commercial gain (cf. II Cor. 11:20, where unscrupulous leaders used the flock. See also I Pet. 5:2 where ‘shameful gain’ is the motive for ministry).

**while we preached to you the gospel of God: by preached** we must not understand our modern use of the term. The word is ‘proclaimed’ (Gk. verb: *kerussein*, from *kerux* ‘herald’), and means an imperial declaration which is to be believed and obeyed. The proclaimer had to be loyal to his king, and his manner of delivery in conformity with the nature of the message. Hence the disciples’ manner of life had nothing of chicanery in it.

10 You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our behaviour to you believers;

**You are witnesses, and God also:** the term **witness** in the New Testament is an important one for it is always related to the truth. Without witness from an authentic source we can be sure of nothing. John the Baptist bore witness to Jesus (John 1:6-8; 5:33-35), the Father bore witness to the Son (Matt. 3:17; 17:5; II Pet. 1:16-19, John 5:36-37). The Son bore witness to the Father (John 18:37), and the Spirit bears witness to the Father and the Son for he is the Spirit of truth (John 16:12-15; 15:26; I John 5:6-7). Christ's people are witnesses to him (Acts 1:8; John 15:27; Luke 24:48; I John 5:9-11). Paul is making a solemn asseveration.

**how holy and righteous and blameless was our behaviour to you believers:** the three adjectives here are really adverbs. The word **behaviour** is not, in fact, present. Paul is saying 'We were being (behaving) holily, righteously, and blamelessly'. These three elements are not mere abstractions, but are dynamic and concrete ways of living. In Titus 2:12 we see these things spring out of the grace of the gospel. Certainly the slanderers had no grounds for reproaching the apostolic messengers. This true behaviour was **to you believers**, i.e. 'in the sight of you all'.

11 for you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged and charged you:

**for you know:** again in the indicative. It was a self-evident fact (see Acts 20:31).

**how, like a father with his children:** in verse 7 above Paul's role as a nursing mother is gentleness and tenderness, but as a father it is stronger. We may say it is more masculine. Thus it is truly fatherly (cf. Eph. 4:6 for the paradigm of true fatherhood). God only is Father (Matt. 23:9), but in another sense Paul is spiritual father to his converts. John used to say, 'My little children', whilst Paul says to Timothy, 'My child in the faith' (I Tim. 1:2).

**we exhorted each one of you and encouraged and charged you:** his ministry was personal—**each one of you**.

**exhorted** and **encouraged** are two similar words, actions seeking to keep the new converts on course in the face of many difficulties. They are strong words, but even stronger is the word **charged**, for it is a solemn calling to obedience as outlined in verse 12.

12 to lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

**to lead a life worthy of God:** literally it is 'that you should walk'. The idea of the Christian life as a walk is often used (see Eph. 4:1; Gal. 5:16; I Thess. 4:1). The way a person walks indicates the lifestyle of that one. Paul had given them a paradigm for such a walk by his own life.

**worthy of God** indicates the high level of living that is demanded.

**who calls you into his own kingdom and glory:** the motive or constraint for this obedience is God's elective calling.

**calls** virtually means 'has effected'. Colossians 1:13 says believers 'have been transferred from the powers of darkness, into the kingdom of his beloved Son'. In II Thessalon-

ians 1:5 Paul says ‘... that you may be worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering’. Other passages in Paul’s letters tell us that one day we will inherit the Kingdom, and that we should never presume upon this (see I Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:5). He describes the Kingdom in Romans 14:17 and I Corinthians 4:20, and these things are a present experience.

The message of the **kingdom** is called in Mark 1:14, ‘the gospel of the kingdom’, but it awaited the Cross and Resurrection to become ‘the gospel of the grace of God’. See Acts 20:20-27 where Paul develops the theme. Suffering for the gospel’s sake is a New Testament theme of importance (see II Thess. 1:5; Acts 14:22; Matt. 5:10). We must understand the Kingdom of God primarily as God’s rule and His sovereignty over all things, and then as that Kingdom in particular over which Messiah (Jesus Christ) reigns, and which is destroying the evil powers and kingdoms which have risen as the result of revolt against God by men and angels. These kingdoms will become the Kingdom of our Lord and His Christ (Rev. 11: 15; I Cor. 15:24-28; Phil. 2:9-11).

**and glory:** we have treated this partly in 1:3 (‘patience of hope’) and 1:10 (anticipation of Christ’s *parousia*). **Glory** is a powerful theme in the Scriptures (cf. Isa. 43:6-7). See I Corinthians 2:6f.; Romans 5:2; Ephesians 1:11-14; II Corinthians 3:18; 4:17. Man was created as the image and glory of God (I Cor. 11:7), but fell short of God’s glory, and therefore of his own. The Kingdom and the glory are closely related.

A life, then that is ‘worthy of God’ is the life of the Kingdom, both in experience and the anticipation of hope. It is also linked with the glory which is God’s alone but which is shared with those of His Kingdom.

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

**And we also thank God constantly:** in 1:2, Paul has thanked God for the Thessalonians, and in 2:3-8 added other elements for thanksgiving. Here he is definite, they have truly accepted the apostolic word as the word of God.

**that when you received the word of God which you heard from us:** Paul uses the Greek *word paralambano*, a word which he used in I Corinthians 15:1-3 for what the church received and what he also received. He does not hesitate to call it ‘the word of God’. For this use see Acts where the apostles believe that what they preach is ‘the word of God’. Sometimes it is called ‘the gospel’ and sometimes ‘the word of His grace’. It grows, flourishes and spreads.

**you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God:** many critics of Paul did not agree it was the word of God, but he always claimed it was from God (see Gal. 1:11-12 where he says the word he had *received—paralambano—was* not of man but of God). The word **accepted** carries with it the idea of ‘welcomed’. They were eager for the word.

**which is at work in you:** two meanings are possible-(a) ‘is made operative or effective’ and (b) ‘which works effectively’. Whichever is the correct one, the outcome is the same. The word of God (as in Heb. 4:12-13) is powerful and effective.

This is ‘the word of the Cross’ (I Cor. 1: 18) and ‘the word of his grace’. Paul and the team had nothing to fear if they

preached the word of God, for it would do its own work. If it had been the word of men then it would have been ineffective.

14 For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus which are in Judea; for you suffered the same things from your own countrymen, as they did from the Jews,

**For, you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus which are in Judea:** in the salutation (1: 1) the church is described as being ‘in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ’. Here it is **in Christ Jesus**. The word **church** (Greek: *ekklesia*, i.e. ‘assembly’) is not simply religious. It is used for any purposely gathered group, eg. Acts 19:32, 39, 41. The word ‘church’ is not used of Christians prior to Acts 5:11. It then becomes a term signifying a new company, distinct from the *ekklesia* of Acts 7:38 (‘congregation in the wilderness’).

**became imitators:** this does mean ‘consciously so’, but points to the fact that persecution will always be the lot of the people of God. See II Timothy 3:12, ‘Indeed all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted’. Wherever the word of God is preached it will bring similar results and will trigger off action, and some of the action will be bitter opposition to the gospel. In the case of the Thessalonians who were mainly of Gentile origin they were opposed by their own countrymen, just as the Jewish churches of Judea were opposed by Jewish people.

who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all men:

**who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets:** Paul is saying that the Jews have always consistently opposed the truth. This was the essence of Stephen’s message to the Jews, ‘You do always resist the Holy Spirit’. Christ said it was not possible for a prophet to perish outside Jerusalem. Paul is pointing to a Judea-wide persecution, but primarily it was the Jewish Council—the Sanhedrin, the 70 elders—who had officially condemned Christ (cf. Acts 4: 17, 21; 5:33f.). In Acts chapters 4 and 5 they repudiated Jesus as Messiah, and at the time of Stephen began their persecution of the Christian community. 1 Timothy I: 15-16 shows Paul’s persecuting part in this. Stephen had asked, ‘Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?’ (Acts 7:52).

**and drove us out:** this had happened at Thessalonica and was a pattern of what happened elsewhere. Paul’s ministry should be seen in II Corinthians 4:7-12, 6:3 10 and 11:23-29.

**and displease God and oppose all men:** here, and in 4: 1, the Thessalonians learn how to please God. These persecutors displease God by their opposition to the gospel. To **displease God** is in fact to **oppose all men**, for they need to hear the gospel. We gather that the Jews would be happy to make (Jewish) proselytes, but grimly oppose conversion to the gospel. The principle of Matthew 23:13 is here evident.

16 by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they may be saved—so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But God’s wrath has come upon them at last!

by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they

**may be saved:** this needs no comment, since it is itself a commentary upon the Jews. Note that Paul does not call them 'Israel' or 'the Hebrews' but points specifically to those Jews who directly opposed the gospel and were a blockage to the Gentiles who needed to hear the gospel and be saved (cf. Rom. 10: 14ff.).

**so as always to fill up the measure of their sins:** what they will do they will do. This is inevitable. They will act according to their own character. cf. Matthew 23:32, 'Do you, then, fill up the measure of your fathers?' An attitude must express itself in action. To do these sins is to move to unswerving judgement.

**God's wrath has come upon them at last!** Paul is saying, 'They have done everything they can do to oppose the gospel, and so earned themselves wrath which is now visiting them, and will to the utmost degree!'

17 *But since we were bereft of you, brethren, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavoured the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face;*

**But since we were bereft of you brethren:** but here is an adversative 'but', i.e. as opposed to the Jews and Gentiles who hate and persecute the church, Paul loves it.

**bereft of you:** Paul has been both nursing mother and a father to them, and now they are as orphans. He is as a parent without his children.

**for a short time:** i.e. 'for a season or an hour'. Only temporarily.

**in person not in heart:** their relationship has not been impaired, for it is in heart, not subject to the separation of time and distance.

**we endeavoured** the more eagerly: i.e. 'we did not daily. We used every effort. We had **great desire**'. Paul is insisting that his love for them was not lukewarm or dilatory.

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

**because we wanted to come to you:** only one who has had converts can understand this. An unbreakable bond builds up.

**because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again:** Paul's desire to impart himself to his converts and his imparting of himself had 'bonded' them, and now he must see them. When he says, I, Paul, he is not excluding Silvanus and Timothy but saying, 'As for me ...'

**again and again:** Paul may be pointing to actual occasions when it seemed possible to return to them.

**but Satan hindered us:** Paul uses this idea in Romans 15:22, 'This is the reason I have been so often hindered coming to you'. An obstacle has been placed in Paul's way, otherwise he would have made the visit.

**Satan** means 'adversary', i.e. against any who would do God's will. In I Chronicles 21:1 he moves David to number the people. In Job chapters 1 and 2 he is 'the accuser'. So also in Zechariah 3: 1ff. he accuses Joshua the high priest. He seeks to prevent Jesus carrying out God's will by tempting him to avoid the Cross. Peter becomes a servant of Satan in trying to do the same with Jesus. Judas allows Satan to enter his heart (Luke 22:3; John 13:27) and try to prevent the will of God. Likewise Ananias—'Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?'

We do not know the ways in which Paul was hindered,

but it was perhaps by the very things that had already happened at Thessalonica. In the appropriate time Satan will not be able to hinder him. For advice regarding Satan see James 4:7, I Peter 5:9, Ephesians 4:27, 6:11, I Corinthians 10: 13. Paul says, 'I would have you wise as to what is good and guileless as to what is evil; then the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet' (Rom. 16: 19-20).

This must mean that Satan is under the authority of God and limits are placed on him (cf. Job chs. 1 and 2). It also means that, having been defeated at the Cross (Heb. 2:14-15; Col. 2:14-15), he can be crushed under our feet (Rom. 16:20).

19 For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you?

**For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting:** these three words represent the fruits of the apostolic ministry. The day of Christ—his *parousia*—will be the time when matters will be summed up, the tests made, and the results displayed. Paul waits for that day. In I Corinthians 4:5 he says, 'Therefore do not pronounce judgement before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness, and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then every man will receive his commendation from God.' The Thessalonians are the **hope** of the disciples, i.e. that the work which their ministry initiated will reach a rich conclusion in spiritual maturity and glory.

The converts are also their **joy**, i.e. because of the way they received the gospel and flourished and prospered in it. Again, they are **the crown of boasting** (exultation), for at

the *parousia* the apostles will be proud of them. Paul and other apostles urge believers to live their lives fully and serve God wholly so that they 'will lose not their reward' and will receive the crown which the Lord will give. Every true sowing brings a rich reaping (Gal. 6:7 9).

20 For you are our glory and joy.

**For you are our glory and joy:** man is God's glory and thus shows the excellencies of God. The wife is the glory of the husband and thus displays his excellencies. The Thessalonians likewise display the ministry of the apostles, showing forth what they have done. Doubtless this is a great cause for joy in the apostolic team. Paul mentions 'the brethren' in II Corinthians 8:23-24 and says they are 'the glory of Christ'. He then addresses the Corinthians in particular. He says, 'So give proof, before the churches, of your love and of our boasting about you to these men'. The Corinthians also, then, are to be the glory of Paul and Titus.

We conclude the chapter, then, by seeing that Paul's care and love for the Thessalonians was rewarded by what they were. and the joy they provided in their devotion to Christ and his word.

## CHAPTER THREE

Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone,

**Therefore:** i.e. 'for this reason', that is 'when we could hold out no longer', i.e. against the need that was at Thessalonica for confirming the new converts in the faith. In Acts 17:14 Paul went on to Athens by the aid of some brethren, leaving Timothy and Silas at Berea.

It seems that Timothy and Silas came to him at Athens and, after a time, Paul sent Timothy back to the Thessalonians whilst Silas, it would appear, went to some place in Macedonia. Paul is making the point that **we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone**. This was for the sake of the church, as the next verse informs us. The use, then, of *we* is a little puzzling until we understand it as the 'editorial' **we**. Even so it must mean that the three consulted on the matters Paul outlines here.

2 and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's servant in the gospel of Christ, to establish you in your faith and to exhort you,

**and we sent:** in I Corinthians 4:17 and Philippians 2:19 the same verb is used in sending Timothy to Corinth and to Philippi, both of course in the region of this apostolic

ministry.

**our brother and God's servant:** we have seen that Timothy is also Paul's spiritual son (I Cor. 4: 17).

**brother** is another aspect of the family tie. See I Timothy 3:15 'the household of God '.

**and God's servant:** some translations have 'God's fellow worker' which agrees with I Corinthians 3:9 where it means 'fellow workers with God '. Paul, by the use of the terms **brother** and **God's servant**, is certifying Timothy as a competent person in Christ.

**in the gospel of Christ:** in 1:3 it is 'our gospel'. In 2:2, 5 and 9 it is 'the gospel of God '. The term 'gospel of Christ' is general in Paul's writing (Rom. 15: 19; I Cor. 9: 12; II Cor. 2:12; 9:13; 10:14; Gal. 1:7; Phil. 1:27). In II Thessalonians 1:8 it is 'the gospel of our Lord Jesus'. The thought is that it is the gospel concerned with Christ, and the gospel which issues from the work of Christ. It keeps in mind that what matters is the gospel alone—in all things.

**to establish you in your faith: to establish** has the idea of strengthening and supporting. This means that conversion alone is not everything although it is the basis of everything for the believer. All the epistles are concerned with this strengthening and supporting ministry.

**and to exhort you: exhort** carries the idea of exhorting to encourage and strengthen. This is what was needed in the face of the afflictions mentioned in the next verse.

3 that no one be moved by these afflictions. You yourselves know that this is to be our !or.

**that no one be moved by these afflictions: be moved** has two possible meanings: (i) 'be shaken or disturbed ' ,

i.e. by the continuing afflictions of the apostolic band, and (ii) be cajoled or enticed by others to leave the faith in the light of the fact of persecution, i.e. to take the easier way of reverting to Judaism or Gentile paganism.

**You yourselves know this is to be our lot:** this is not a counsel of despair but an honest assessment of the life of those proclaiming the gospel (see 2: 14f.).

4 For when we were with you, we told you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction; just as it has come to pass, and as you know.

**we told you beforehand:** from Acts 14:22 we see Paul always taught—prior to persecution—that suffering is entailed in Christian living. There is often the view that when a person suffers he is out of the will of God, or that the ‘good news’ he has is not valid—otherwise God would not let him suffer! The doctrine of Christian suffering is a vast one but teaching such as in Romans 8:17ff. and II Corinthians 4:16 are sufficient to show it is the will of God, and valuable for Christian growth and maturity. See Colossians 1: 24.

5 For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent that I might know your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and that our labour would be in vain.

**For this reason:** as above in verse 1. **Likewise when I could bear it no longer.** See II Corinthians 2: 1-13, where Paul has another pastoral anxiety. He was always concerned

for the life of the church, and for its members, personally.

**I sent that I might know your faith:** no sooner is faith born in a person than it is attacked by *the* tempter who knows the danger faith in God presents to the system of evil. Faith arises from grace (Eph. 2:8; Rom. 3:24), and if faith recedes, then grace is obscured. By **your faith** Paul is not so much thinking of faithfulness, but the impact the gospel has made and is making. It does of course refer to *what* they believed, and heresies grow up in the path of the gospel as weeds in a newly-turned garden.

**somehow the tempter had tempted you:** the grammatical construction here suggests the temptation has already happened, but not that they have acceded to it. Temptation as such is not a blot on the tempted. The verb means literally ‘to test’. See James 1:24, I Corinthians 10:13. Christ was tempted ‘in all points like as we are’, but did not accede. Note I Corinthians 7:5 for advice on preventing temptation, and Ephesians 6: I Off. for victory under Satanic pressure.

**and that our labour would be in vain:** the word, here, for ‘labour’ indicates long, laborious toil. The apostolic proclaimers did not take their work lightly. For in vain see 2:1.

6 But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you—

**But now that Timothy has come to us from you: but now** could mean ‘just now’, or ‘even now’. Silvanus would



also have come from Beroea.

**and has brought us the good news of your faith and love:**

i.e. as against verse 7 in which is the thought that their ministry might have been in vain.

**the good news** is really a play on words, for **the good news** (the gospel) has been effective and now **good news** of the Thessalonians standing firm in Christ has come to relieve Paul of the fear of 'bad news'.

**of your faith and love:** Calvin said that these two constitute 'the sum total of godliness'. We saw the triad of faith, hope, and love in 1:3, and elsewhere the binity of hope and love (Rom. 5:5) whilst here it is **faith and love** as also in Galatians 5:6, 'faith which works through love' (cf. 1 John 3:23). There is nothing more Paul needs to know to set his heart at rest.

**and reported that you always remember us kindly:** as against the slanders certain men have made. Paul has been defending himself against these charges, but Timothy's report shows this is not really necessary. This would comport with **faith and love**.

**and long to see us as we long to see you:** Paul's first relief would be that they stand firm in the teaching given, and then secondly that they think well of him. Because of his personal relationship (2:8) he is glad they long to see him, and he has the same feeling in his heart. **Faith and love** were mutual.

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

**for this reason, brethren:** i.e. 'for this cause', that is 'because of the news Timothy has brought us'. See the

parallel situation in II Corinthians 7:3-7 where Titus brought 'good news' concerning the Corinthian church.

**in all our distress and affliction:** at Corinth, at the moment of writing, Paul was facing **distress and affliction**, of which he has spoken in verses 34 (cf. Acts 18:5).

**we have been comforted about you through your faith:** it was the matter of their faith which had troubled Paul, but now he is relieved. Note in 3:2 that Timothy had been sent to them 'to establish you in your faith'.

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

**for now we live:** i.e. 'we breathe freely'—a strong way of stating the relief of the apostolic team. It was life to Paul to see his converts stand fast in the faith. The opposite was some kind of 'death', i.e. anxiety, fearfulness etc.—certainly Paul felt great anxiety over them (cf. II Cor. 7:5).

**if you stand fast in the Lord: stand fast** really means 'stand firm'. In the light of some whose doctrine differed from Paul's and who slandered Paul, the 'standing firm' was a great relief to the apostle. At the same time 1:6-10 shows the great importance of this church standing fast **in the Lord** because of their witness and the impact they were making in Macedonia and Achaia. Paul has changed the phrase 'in the faith' to in **the Lord. The Lord** is the source of faith.

9 For what thanksgiving can we render to God for you, for all the joy which we feel for your sake before our God,

**For what thanksgiving can we render to God for you:** technically **what** kind of **thanksgiving?** **Thanksgiving** is the

sign of spiritual health, as thanklessness is also a sign of evil (cf. Rom. 1:21). Psalm 116:12 asks, 'What shall I render to the Lord for all his bounty to me?' The answer is, 'I will lift up [AV 'take'] the cup of salvation'. Paul is saying here, 'One of the highest reasons for thanksgiving is your state'.

**for all the joy which we feel for your sake before our God:** the 'distress and affliction' of verse 7 has given away to joy. See the Philippian epistle for the principle of being commanded to joy.

**before our God:** i.e. 'in the presence of God'. See 1:3, 'in the presence of our God and Father'. In 2:19 and 3:13 'before our Lord Jesus at his coming', 'before our God and Father' are linked with the eschaton. Here thanksgiving is part of apostolic daily practice.

10 praying earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?

**praying earnestly night and day:** not merely a pious statement. Paul's prayers are well known for their content and for coming from a heart that has pastoral concern.

**earnestly** can be translated 'super abundantly'. The word (Greek: *hyperekperissou*) is used in 1 Thessalonians 5: 13. 'very highly', and Ephesians 3:20, 'far more abundantly'.

**praying** is in fact 'making request'.

**that we may see you face to face:** only a missionary on whose heart are his converts, or a leader who has been separated from his congregation can understand the feelings Paul has for this church.

**and supply what is lacking in your faith:** that there will

always be deficiencies is certain. Here Paul is not pointing to them, but in Romans 1:11-12 Paul is saying, 'I long to impart to you some spiritual gift, for there is always need of such. When I come I too wish to be strengthened by the experience of mutual faith'. No special defect is indicated, and Paul is more than joyful at the state of the church. Even so he wishes to contribute towards their growth in ministry and maturity.

11 Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you;

**Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus:** the association of the Father and Christ is important. It is a feature of apostolic teaching. In this epistle it is mentioned many times (cf. I Thess. 1:1,9-10; 5:9; II Thess. 1: 1, 2; 2: 16). The Kingdom of God is the Kingdom of the Father, and of the Son (Eph. 5:5; Col. 1:13; I Cor. 15:24-28; Phil. 2:9 ! 1; Rev. 1 I:15). Paul prays that both will 'direct our way to you'.

**direct our way to you:** see II Thessalonians 3:5 and Luke 1:79 for the same phrase. The first part of Paul's prayer is that far from Satan hindering (2:18), the Father and Son will act to **direct**, i.e. 'guide', 'make straight the path', and so take any impediment away that Satan may be seeking to place in the way.

12 and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all men, as we do to you,

**and may the Lord make you:** i.e. it will be both the Father and Son who will accomplish what Paul prays. Jesus is Lord, and Yahweh (here, 'the Father') is also

Lord. Again Paul needs the power of God for the fulfilment of his following prayer.

**make you increase and abound in love to one another:** the fact of the love of the Thessalonians is seen in 1:3. Here Paul is praying for an **increase**. The demand for **love** amongst the brethren is strong in the New Testament. In 4:9 Paul says they do not need to be taught 'brotherly love'. God Himself—as Father of course, i.e. by just being Father—teaches them Himself.

Passages such as 1 John 4: 16-19, I Peter 1:22-23, as also John 13:34 and 15:12-13, together with I John 3:16 show us that brotherly love was paramount. Judgement follows where brotherly love is abandoned (see Rev. 2:4-5), including love for the Lord (I Cor. 16:22). Everything is to be done in (by) love (II Cor. 5:14; I Cor. 16:14; Gal. 5:6), for without love nothing has worth (I Cor. 13: 1-3). Paul's prayer, then, is not a desire for mutually tolerant living, but since God is love (I John 4:8, 16), then the way of love must be the functional way for man.

We now come to the idea behind **increase and abound**. Does love **increase and abound** or does human experience of it **increase and abound**? It is the latter. In Matthew 24:12, 'And because wickedness is multiplied, most men's love will grow cold'. I John 2:15-17 warns against having love for the world (Greek: *agapeo*, 'to love', so that *agape* is used in whatever love we have, either rightly or illicitly). Love for the world means 'the love of [or, for] the Father is not in us'.

Philippians 1:9-11 is almost a parallel prayer to here (vv. 12-13). As indicated in I Corinthians 13:4-13, love develops and matures the believer. Love has its own characteristic (like grace) of innate abundancy as indicated in Romans 5:5. Ephesians 3:14-19 indicates that a

growth in love climaxes in a person 'being filled unto all the fullness of God'.

**to one another, and to all men:** mutual love within the community of Christ is indeed wonderful. Paul's love had extended beyond his people to all the nations (cf. Rom. 1:14-15; 15: 19-20). Christ commanded love to one's enemies (Matt. 5:43-48). Paul had said, 'Do good unto all men' (Gal. 6: 10). The principle of love is I John 4: 19, 'We love [God and others, including enemies] because He first loved us'. I Thessalonians 1:7-8 shows this was what the Thessalonians were doing.

**as we do to you:** they had seen this love in action. He was their *typos* of love. They could use this living example, imitating it. Paul and the team had undoubtedly shown love to those outside the Christian community.

13 so that he may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

**so that he may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness:** the heart for the Hebrew represented the personal being of man, in which mind, will and emotions worked together and were meant to be as one. Hence it stood for the whole personality of man. In the Old Testament the heart could be gripped by other things than love for God, thus the deadly sin of idolatry. In 2:10 we looked at the significance of being **unblamable** (cf. Phil. 2:15 'the blameless children of God', and Eph. 1:4; 5:27; Col. 1:22; Heb. 12:14; Jude 24).

The heart, being the centre and source of life's dynamic action, needs stability, i.e. to be stabilised. In 2:4 Paul says

God tests the heart (cf. I Cor. 4:5). Without regeneration the heart of man is wholly deceitful (Jer. 17:9). What then can **establish** the heart? Paul's answer is 'Love that makes for holiness'.

**before our God and Father:** this is love and holiness which is based on hope. God the holy Father (John 17:11; Matt. 6:9; I Pet. 1: 14-17). Paul looks to the time when we will stand before the Father, as pure and holy. Hope is a powerful spur to true **holiness** (I John 3:13).

**at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints: saints** or 'holy ones' is the term used in the New Testament for redeemed people, now members of Christ's body, eg. Ephesians 1: 1, 'to the saints [which are at Ephesus]'. This term may well derive from Daniel 7:13-28 where such phrases as, 'But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, for ever and ever', 'the saints received the kingdom', and 'the kingdom and the dominion ... shall he given to the people of the saints of the Most High'.

Some see this term applied to the angels who in the Old Testament are sometimes called 'the holy ones' (cf. Ps. 89:5; Dan. 8: 13; Zech. 14:5), and in Matthew 13:41,24:31 and 11 Thessalonians 1:7 angels are linked with the coming of Christ. Primarily **saints** would refer to believers who have died, and rising, accompany Christ as he returns to claim and transform his elect, as we see in I Thessalonians 4: 14, cf. I Corinthians 6:2. As we have said, hope motivates, 'acting as a powerful constraint. The thought of **before our God and Father** as also **at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints** must surely constrain to holiness in love.

## CHAPTER FOUR

1 Finally, brethren, we beseech and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you learned from us how you ought to live and to please God, just as you are doing, you do so more and more.

**Finally, brethren, we beseech you and exhort you in the Lord Jesus:** finally i.e. 'for the rest then'. Paul uses this term quite a lot, eg. II Thessalonians 3:1, I Corinthians 1:16, II Timothy 2:8, etc.

**beseech** (5:12) means 'we request' which is then followed by the stronger term **exhort**. If we look at 5:1, 14 and II Thessalonians 3:12 we see that the exhortation is grave.

**in the Lord Jesus** gives the setting as well as the source of Paul's exhortation. See verse 2 'through the Lord Jesus'.

**that as you learned from us:** again Paul is not going beyond **that** they have seen in the apostolic team. They learned by example as well as the word preached. They had been well catechised not only in the form of doctrine, but in the practice of faith. The apostles taught deeply as is evident from the oft repeated term 'as you know'. In Romans 6:17, 'you have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed', tells us how thorough and living the teaching was.

**how you ought to live and to please God: ought** (Greek: *dei*) is a strong word meaning 'must'.

**to live** is literally 'to walk', so that Paul is saying 'to walk

[live] to please God ‘.

**just as you are doing, you do so more and more:** Paul has already commended them on their way of life. See also 4:10 and 5:11 which show they are walking well. They need only to develop habituation and extend the area of their practice.

2 For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

**For you know:** when we look at 1:5, 2:1, 2:2, 2:5, 2:11, 3:3 and 3:4 it is clear that new and different things are not being taught but that Paul is underlining what they already know.

**what instructions we gave you: instructions** means ‘commands’, ‘charges’ or ‘exhortation’. In fact these were more directions than straight commands since the word is used for commands being passed along the line in an army.

**through the Lord Jesus:** must mean ‘by the authority of the Lord Jesus’, and would make sense. These directions are passed on from him. The apostles are not dominating the Thessalonians.

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

**For this is the will of God:** if the Thessalonians will please God, then they must do His will. The **will of God** is a vast theme in the Scriptures and we cannot deal with it here, wholly. Paul is saying, ‘The instructions we gave you are in conformity with God’s will: they are not instructions

initiated by us’. Elsewhere Paul speaks of knowing and testing (proving) the will of God by practice of it (cf. Eph. 5:17; Rom. 12:2). He also says that God is working out His own will in us (Phil. 2:12-13).

**your sanctification:** Paul comes to the heart of God’s will, namely our sanctification. God is holy (Isa. 57:15), and demands true holiness from His elect (Lev. 11:44; Exod. 19:5-6; cf. I Pet. 1:16; 2:9-10). He has planned such holiness (Eph. 1:4) and will effect it (Col. 1:22-23 cf. Phil. 1:6; 2:12-13; I Thess. 5:24).

**that you abstain from unchastity:** God’s will in general is our **sanctification**. In particular it touches on the point of sexual purity. For the aberration of adultery and fornication see Romans 1:21-25. In refusing the true nature of God, man became deviant and used functional sexuality malfunctionally.

The evil nature of such **unchastity** is shown in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20. In the Old Testament idolatry is often spoken of as immorality, i.e. ‘fornication’ and ‘adultery’. These, with homosexuality and bestiality, constitute **unchastity**. The principle behind this is that since man must love God utterly (both because of creation and redemption), then to give the love that is due to God to any person or idol is immoral. By ‘immoral’ we mean ‘wrong moral choices’.

that each one of you know how to take a wife for himself in holiness and honour,

**that each one of you know:** i.e. ‘that each of you learn’. We may know the principles, but we have to learn by practice. We learn by habituation. Although **taking a wife**

is one act, yet living in that relationship is continuous and must be habituated in the proper way. In fact to take a wife can also be translated to control his body, or even to control his vessel, i.e. by which he has marital intercourse, (cf. I Sam. 21:5). I Peter 3:7 speaks of 'the wife as the weaker vessel'. Paul's meaning is clear in principle, that marriage must be in **holiness and honour**.

**in holiness and honour** must mean the relationship the man has with his wife must be pure. Marriage must always be chaste. I Corinthians 6:19 speaks of the body as being the temple of the Holy Spirit, and I Corinthians 6:2 makes the call to glorify' God in the body.

5 not in the passion of lust like heathen who do not know God;

**the passion of lust:** this suggests quite clearly that true marital relationships do not demand aggressive passion, uncontrolled desire.

**lust** is any desire that is out of control. Self-control (cf. Gal. 5:23; II Tim. 1:7) means a person is in control of his body. It also means that marital life is meant to be holy.

**heathen who do not know God:** a good commentary on this is Romans 1:21ff. (cf. Ps. 79:6).

**heathen** is 'the nations', i.e. those nations outside Israel, its laws and its covenant. Holiness comes from knowing God, and knowing is relational, covenantal.

6 that no man transgress, and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we solemnly forewarned you.

**that no man transgress:** i.e. go beyond the boundaries set out for man in true morality. This could include premarital sex which defrauds the pure partner of the true 'one-flesh' union, but also adultery within marriage in which case one's own partner and the partner of the offending spouse are being defrauded of their 'one-flesh' rights (cf. Gen. 2:24).

**because the Lord is an avenger in all these things:** God does not pass over sins (cf. Rom. 3:25; 8:30-32), although some think He does (Eccl. 8:11). In this case **the Lord** is Christ (I Cor. 8:5f.). His refusal to allow evil to go unjudged is also a proof of His love, and His righteousness. Nothing goes unjudged, or the creation would not make true moral sense.

**is an avenger in all these things** means Christ brings retribution and punishment (II Thess. 1:8). He may do this through civil magistrates, or by the anguish of guilt, or the ultimate judgement, or all. The apostles continually warn against moral laxity and immoral practice (1 Cor. 6:9; Gal. 5:19 21; 6:7; Eph. 5:6; Col. 3:5-6), and the inbuilt deceit of sin which goes with such practice (Heb. 3:12-14). Against the idea that God does not avenge, the insistence that He does shows His intimate concern not only for justice, but for the damage that is done by such *defrauding*. Thus avengement is both His insistence upon His holy law, and His personal love for His people. Note that **his brother** cannot be limited to a Christian brother, but applies to any person who is defrauded.

7 For God has not called us for uncleanness, but in holiness.

**For God has not called us:** calling with Paul is something which God effects, having taken the initiative. It has

nothing to do with man's efforts. (See Gal. 5: 13, 'called to freedom'; Eph. 2: 10, 'for good works'; I Cor. 1:26-29, 'to confound things wise, strong, and "things that are"'.) Hence the calling is **in holiness**, i.e. these are the grounds of His calling. It follows that the **calling** is not **for uncleanness**, i.e. the things mentioned above, but for the things of sanctification.

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

**who gives his Holy Spirit to you:** the important factor here is that God 'goes on giving his Holy Spirit to you', and although other references in the New Testament speak of it as an accomplished fact and act, yet here the idea of the Spirit continually coming to us makes the action of the Spirit continually dynamic. Hence whoever **disregards this** (i.e. the holy calling) is really opposing the Holy Spirit who continually brings holiness, and continually fills out sanctification (cf. II Thess. 2:13; Acts 15:8-9). Thus sexual defrauding is not something committed privately, but is a sin against the Holy Spirit. We may not call it *the* sin against the Spirit, but it is a sin, and as such seriously reprehensible. This links with I Corinthians 6:19 where fornication is a sin which is done against the body of the believer, and this body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

9. But concerning love of the brethren you have no need to have any one write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another;

**love of the brethren** is an important topic of the New Testament. See Romans 12:10; Hebrews 13:1; I Peter 1:22, II Peter 1:7; I John 2:7ff.; 3:10ff.; 4:7-5:3. The church at Thessalonica is 'in the Father' (1 : 1) and as such is 'family'. Hence all are brethren. The Father teaches the children simply by His presence, by being Father. I Thessalonians 1:3, 3:6 and 4:10 (cf. II Thess. 1:3; 3:4) show that brotherly love is already present.

**you have no need to have anyone write to you:** this reminds us of I John 2:22-27 where the anointing of the Spirit brings innate truth. It is natural and instinctive to the Christian to have love for the brethren. The reason for this is that you yourselves have been taught by God. Such brotherly love is taught in the Old Testament and Christ personally commanded it (John 13:34; 15:12), but most of all, because God is love they would know the nature and need of brotherly love. The principle of I John 4:19 is immutable, 'We love because he first loved us'.

10 and indeed you do love all the brethren throughout Macedonia. But we exhort you, brethren, to do so more and more,

**you do love all the brethren throughout Macedonia:** this kind of love was not common to pagans. It was a miracle, especially as it embraced a variety of persons, and seems to have deliberately been extended to many places.

**we exhort you to do so more and more:** it is not that they need more love, but more exercise and operation of the love they have. In 3:12-13 we saw the principle of maturing love, and also its link with holiness of life. I Corinthians chapter 13 tells us the ways of love. Its endurance, faith

and hope are essential for the life and growth of Christian persons and the Christian community. Indeed when love goes, everything goes (cf. Rev. 2:1-6).

11 to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we charged you;

**to aspire to live quietly:** there must have been some kind of 'enthusiasm' which troubled Paul. Perhaps it was 'gnostic', i.e. delving into the mysterious, or it may have been the frenetic compulsion associated with ambition, seeking to 'get things done'. We saw in chapters I and 2 that Paul defends the ministry he had given. Perhaps these over-energetic aspirers wanted to fill out what was lacking in Paul! Quietness is not quietism. The former springs from faith in God (cf. Isa. 28:16), the latter from a subjectivism which does not properly relate to God's objective word, commands and actions. The word **aspire** is really 'study' or 'be ambitious', i.e. 'be ambitious not to be ambitious!' Compulsive action of this kind may often spring from guilt and not grace.

**to mind your own affairs:** II Thessalonians 3:11 reveals that there were 'busybodies' at Thessalonica. 'Mind your own business' is something we say today. Perhaps these others were gossipers, overly interested in things which were not their matters. We must keep remembering that being quiet and not being busybodies flows from love.

**to work with your hands as we charged you:** what we have to remember is that the Judaic and Christian doctrine of work was not paralleled in paganism. Paul had already had cause to speak to them. In II Thessalonians 3:11 -! 2 he has to repeat this point, as on these occasions it

had not been taken. Those of the apostolic band had worked with their own hands (2:9). Paul had a doctrine of work. Ephesians 4:28 saw work as enabling the earner to give to others in need, and not only to care for oneself.

12 so that you may command the respect of outsiders, and be dependent on nobody.

**so that you may command the respect of outsiders:** Paul saw this as important. He mentions the principle in Colossians 4:5, I Corinthians 5:12-13 and I Timothy 3:7. He desires that outsiders see the reality of faith and practice in the believers. Doubtless, since all Christian living is witness (Acts 1:8), believers must give reason for respect. If they work they will not be dependent on others (outsiders) with the disrespect and hold which that often involves.

13 But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.

**But we would not have you ignorant, brethren:** this statement introduces a whole new topic, namely the *parousia* or appearing of Christ. Paul is saying, 'Concerning this subject we want you to know'. It has the idea that it is an apostolic revelation of the truth, as, perhaps, against a misconception or false teaching. See Colossians 2:1; I Corinthians 1:8; Romans 11:25; I Corinthians 10:1 and 12:1.

**concerning those who are asleep: sleep** here is a gentle saying' for 'death'. It was a common saying in the Old



Testament that a person 'slept with his fathers'. There is no doctrine of 'soul-sleep' here, as such. Jesus said, 'Lazarus sleeps'. It is death as we see it: one goes to sleep but does not yet awake. Later there will be an awakening (v. 16). Here it simply means 'those who have died in Christ'.

**that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope:** Paul is not referring to the natural grief that comes with the parting that death brings. He is speaking about a misconception at Thessalonica. It seems that some thought that Christ would come before any died. Since he had not, then that must mean that those who had died were not now part of his *parousia*. Of course this was not the case as he goes on to show.

**others... who have no hope** would, of course, refer to pagans. In 4:5 he said, 'heathen who do not know God' and in Ephesians 2:12, 'having no hope, and without God in the world'. They have deep cause for grief, but believers do not. Ephesians 2:1-3 shows that those outside of Christ are 'children of wrath' and can only expect disastrous judgement. Hebrews 2:14-15 and I John 4:18 show that fear of death is fear of judgement (cf. I Cor. 15:55-56).

14 For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.

**For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again:** Paul is basing his encouragement on the objective fact of Jesus' death and resurrection. In Acts 2:23 Peter claims the death was predetermined by God, although executed by men, God also effecting the resurrection. In Luke 24:25ff. Jesus twice shows it was prophetically ensured. So too, in

Acts 17:2-3 (cf. I Cor. 15:3) Paul shows it to be the basis of redemption. The whole New Testament shows the indispensability of the death and resurrection. On this basis, then, Paul proceeds to comfort his readers.

**even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep:** this could mean, 'those who have fallen asleep through Jesus, God will bring back with him [Jesus]'. The general sense is that because of the death and resurrection, God ensures that those who have died will come back with Christ at the time of his appearing.

15 For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep.

**For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord:** this could mean many things such as the recorded sayings of Jesus (eg. Matt. 24:31), or the thrust of his teaching, which in the Synoptics does not directly nominate resurrection, or it could be an unrecorded saying of Christ which—like Acts 20:35—was remembered by many. It is possible that Paul received such teaching as a revelation (Gal. 1:11-12; cf. I Cor. 15:3) but probably, as often, Paul is claiming to have 'the mind of Christ' on this matter (see I Cor. 2: 16). In any case he is saying it is dominical, i.e. not his own idea but the word of Christ.

**that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep:** this is all so clear, 'Those who are now alive and anticipate the *parousia* here, whilst alive, will have no advantage over those who have died in Christ'.

16 For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first;

**For the Lord himself will descend from heaven:** who will come but **the Lord Himself!** Is the **Lord Himself** God or Christ? It does not matter. It is God descending **from heaven** and no intermediary. See Micah 1:3. History is going to round off with divine intervention. This is how important it is.

**with a cry of command:** i.e. 'the shout of command'. Whilst it does not say whether it is the voice (shout) of God or an angel, we can assume it is God's command. John 5:25 has, 'the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live'. The word **command** is a military noun, and is imperious.

**with the archangel's call:** call = 'voice'. An **archangel** appears to be over a course of angels. We know of two, Michael and Gabriel, although the Jews knew of seven. Revelation 12:4 might indicate that Satan was once the third archangel, since he took a third of the stars of heaven, i.e. a third of the angels. In the Revelation angels cry with loud voices, i.e. something that is commanding and important (cf. Rev. 10:2-3).

**and with the sound of the trumpet of God:** Paul mentions this trumpet twice in I Corinthians 15:52. The trumpet was often associated with the action of God in the Old Testament. See Exodus 19:16, Isaiah 27:13, Joel 2:1, Zechariah 9:14. For the most part it is a military action, speaking of triumph. It is also linked with judgement. Here it means God is summoning His creation to the event.

And **the dead in Christ shall rise first: for the dead in Christ** see 1 Corinthians 15:18, 'those also who have fallen asleep in Christ', and Revelation 14: 13, 'the dead who die in the Lord'. Such were not only 'alive in Christ', but are still in him 'the dead in Christ'. Romans 8:9-11 shows that those in Christ are in the Spirit, and the Spirit is in them as the assurance of their resurrection (cf. 'the day of redemption', Eph. 4:30).

**shall rise first** means that all will be alive, for those believers still living will not die.

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

**then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds:** the meaning is very clear: the dead will be raised and the living will be lifted up to them and the Lord.

**in the clouds:** must not be thought of meteorologically, but the clouds must be seen as the clouds of heavenly and divine glory. (See Dan. 7:13; Matt. 24:30; 26:64; Acts 1:9; Rev. 1:7).

**in the air** (cf. Eph. 2:2) is not simply a spatial concept, but refers to where evil once had power. Now that power is gone, and all belongs to Christ, and is under his sovereignty. God has finally triumphed—not that He never was in triumph!

**and so we shall always be with the Lord:** Paul is reassuring those who thought those who had died would miss out. He is also assuring believers that beyond fear of death lies the joy of life. There are other elements not mentioned in

this straightforward passage, such as in Philippians 3:1 (cf. 1 Cor. 15:42-44) where it said that this earthly body will be transformed into 'a body of glory', and when the body will not be 'flesh and blood' doomed to corruption, but now fitted to inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. Nothing, then, will ever separate them from the presence of God, for here they shall dwell forever.

18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

**Therefore comfort one another:** so often the thought of 'the Day of the Lord' has been a matter of terror. This would be so to one out of Christ, and perhaps for a slothful believer. The verb comfort means 'to exhort', 'to encourage' (Greek: *parakaaleo*, see on 3:2).

**with these words:** such words dispelled the fear that Christians who had died would miss out on the *parousia*, and encouraged those alive to wait for the coming with joy.

## CHAPTER FIVE

But as to the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need to have anything written to you.

**But as to the times and the seasons:** it is clear from 1: 10 that the Thessalonians had heard of Christ's coming 'from heaven', and were awaiting it.

**times and seasons** may have a technical meaning, but probably was used as we do. See Acts 1:7 where Jesus said these were not our concern for they were (are) in the Father's hands. For the matter of time see I Peter 3:3-10, Luke 18:7-8, Revelation 6:10-11.

**you have no need to have anything written to you:** see 1:5, 2: 1, 4:9 which show how well taught they were.

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

**For you yourselves know well:** i.e. having been taught perfectly of the matter.

**the day of the Lord:** see 4:16-17. See Amos 5:18-20 (against misconceptions), Joel 2:31 and Malachi 4:5 which are Old Testament references. In the New Testament, see Romans 2:5, Ephesians 4:30, I Peter 2:9 (different designations concerning judgement). Also see II Peter 3:12, 'day of God'; Philippians 1:6, 'day of Jesus Christ';

1 Corinthians 5:5, 'the day of the Lord Jesus; II Thessalonians 1: 10, 'that day'; John 6:39, 'the last day', and Jude 6, 'the great day'. In Revelation 22:20 the Lord says, 'Surely I am coming soon'. Mark 13:32 (cf. Acts 1:7) shows the day is hidden. The thought was certainly uppermost in the minds of Christian people.

**like a thief in the night:** Luke 21:34–36 cf. 17:24. Matthew 24:43–44 seems to have been the source of Paul's statement.

3 When people say, 'There is peace and security', then sudden destruction will come upon them as travail comes upon a woman with child, and there will be no escape.

**When people say:** see Jeremiah 6:14, Ezekiel 13:10. Believers will have both peace and safety because of justification, but not because of presumption as in Ecclesiastes 8:11–13, Psalm 10:13. The general idea is that God will not interrupt the stream of life as humans know it.

**then sudden destruction will come upon them:** the idea of 'the day of the Lord' varies from person to person. Some see it as the final day when all judgement will take place, and some as the day of visitation when the Lord will bring things to righteousness and justice and reign upon the earth. Whatever the interpretation it will not go well with the unprepared, who are those who ignore God and His Messiah, His gospel and His law.

**as travail comes upon a woman with child:** there is nothing evil in such womanly travail, but it is only a figure of a sudden seizure and, in this case, of **destruction**.

Is this **destruction** universal? It would seem so, though

**destruction** is not annihilation but 'exclusion from the presence of the Lord' (II Thess. 1:9).

**there will be no escape:** man always rationalises his situations, but this will be impossible. Destruction will confront him.

4 But you are not in darkness, brethren, for that day to surprise you like a thief.

**But you are not in darkness, brethren:** of course they are in light—the whole letter shows that—but light is anticipation of Christ's coming. See Romans 13:12 and Ephesians 5:2–14. So then, it will not be that the day will surprise you (them) like a thief. They will see everything because living in light. See again Romans 13:11–14.

**that day** is, of course, 'the day of the Lord'.

We have seen **like a thief** means Christ comes without warning. He is not, of course, 'sneaking up on us'. It is we who are indolent, not anticipating, not living in light.

5 For you are all sons of light and sons of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness.

**For you are all sons of light:** John's gospel and his first letter speak so much of light. See especially John 3: 19–21. But Ephesians 5:7–14 is speaking about **sons of light**, i.e. those who are awake in anticipation of all that is God and good and holy.

**not of darkness:** see Ephesians 2:1–3, i.e. we do not do the things of darkness.

So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.

**So then let us not sleep:** to sleep is to be indolent, slothful, but also to indulge in the things of darkness.

**as others do** is meant to contrast believers and unbelievers. Fox' them it is natural. For Christians it is incongruous.

**sleep** can mean spiritual dullness, insensitivity. See Ephesians 5: 14.

**let us keep awake:** see Matthew 24:42f., 25:13, Mark 13:34ff. Even so it is not just thoughtfulness about 'that day' but present action of obedience (see below, vv. 12-22).

**and be sober:** cf. 4:11. Other injunctions to sobriety and watchfulness are Ephesians 6: 10f., I Peter 1: 13, 5:8. The drunken man is insensitive to what is going on about him. **sober**, here, is not limited to a non-alcoholic state, but all states which destroy awareness, cf. Galatians 5:19-21, Romans 13: 13.

7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night.

**For those who sleep:** this verse is explained in the light of the former verses. Carelessness is typical of unbelievers, but atypical of believers: yet let not believers be as unbelievers!

8 But, since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.

**But since we belong to the day** our identity is fixed. Being **sober** is part of our character and lifestyle.

**put on the breastplate of faith:** Paul is taking on the language of warfare. We are not only doing what we ought to do, but we are warring. In regard to weapons note 11 Corinthians 6:7, 10:4, Ephesians 6:13ff., Romans 13:12. Note that Paul has no 'codified' weapons. His weapons are weak, i.e. spiritual and not *material* the world uses. The armoury in Ephesians 6:10-18 is all moral or spiritual. cf. 'the sword of the Spirit', i.e. 'the word' (Rev. 1:16; 2:12; 19:15, cf. Jer. 23:29; Rev. 11:5; 20:9). In Ephesians 6:16 it is the *shield* of faith, and in 6:14 it is the *breastplate* of righteousness. It does not matter. What we see here is the perpetual triad of faith, hope and love—the believer's true weapons (see 1:3; I Cor. 13:13; etc.).

Note that **hope** is a fixed assurance, trust in God's word, grace, action and promises.

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

**For God has not destined us for wrath:** **destined** can be translated 'appointed' (see John 15:16; I Tim. 2:7; II Tim. 1:11). In 1:10 we saw wrath (Greek: *orge*) is for the idolaters, not the redeemed. We are therefore the 'non-wrath' people, the relieved and saved people. So we battle accordingly.

**but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ:** i.e. we have been destined (appointed) **for the obtaining of salvation**. That is our whole matter. We have been saved (Eph. 2:8-9), and are being saved (I Cor 1: 18), and will be saved (here) for it is first a *crisis*, then a *process*, and finally a *climax*. But here Paul is simply saying we are not of darkness, but of light and so we battle.

**through our Lord Jesus Christ:** this and the following verse shows that salvation is not of us but of God through Christ: this is His grace.

10 who died for us so that whether we wake or sleep we might live with him.

**who died for us:** Paul has said little in this letter about the atonement, mainly because they know it all. 1:5 shows they heard the whole gospel, and, also, other statements indicate they know 'the whole counsel of God'. Here, anyway is the heart of the matter—**who died for us**.

**so that whether we wake or sleep:** Here Paul is not referring to the 'night' and the 'day', waking and sleeping morally but to living now, or having died, or moving towards physical death. There is no need for any to worry on this score.

**we might live with him:** II Corinthians 5:15, Romans 14:8-9 are echoed in this passage. His death was with a view to our life, and our being with him, here, or in heaven (cf. Phil. 1:21-23, 'For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain ... to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better'), but here Paul seems to be speaking about the immediate situation which has worried some, encouraging his readers to battle on, and to live in peace and security in their salvation, and not to worry about dying or not dying in view of Christ's *parousia*. The whole of life then is Christ (Gal. 2:20).

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

**Therefore encourage one another:** this is like 4:18. It is the same verb used there (*parakaleo*), but has the stronger idea of 'exhort one another to take courage in the matter of keeping awake, watching, battling darkness with the armour of life, living in faith, hope and love, anticipating the great day, and not at all worrying whether physical death comes or does not come'.

**build one another up:** love, of course, is the great builder (Rom. 14:15, 18; I Cor. 8:1; cf. I Pet. 4:8) but the point is the mutuality of action for true growth in maturity, and standing against a common enemy (cf. Phil. 1:27). We have already seen the mutuality of love in this church, so **that just as you are doing** is not an exhortation to get moving, but to maintain this steady ministry of life. As we have seen in 4:11, a quiet steadiness of life is that which matters most.

12 But we beseech you, brethren, to respect those who labour among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you,

**we beseech you, brethren, to respect those who labour among you:** we are now brought face to face with the question of leadership or authority—however that may have worked out in their situation.

**who labour among you** indicates genuine and continuous toil (cf. Rom. 16:6, 12), not simply detached leadership uninvolved in the lives of the people.

**respect** means 'know' or 'to come to understand and appreciate'. It may have been that these leaders were not recognised, taken for granted, or not seen in their rightful vocation. Because the believers do not recognise their

functional situation, there must be some deficiency in the congregation.

**are over you in the Lord:** the question of superiority or inferiority is not here, but the matter of function. It is the most emotive of all. Human beings—because of guilt, fallenness, loss of glory, identity, and the like— are quick to resent any form of superordination (or subordination). The Thessalonians may not have realised that these persons were **over you [them] in the Lord**. The whole question of ministries such as described in Ephesians 4:7-11, I Timothy 3: 1 - 13. Titus 2:5-9, Hebrews 13:7, 17. I Peter 5:1-6, and I Corinthians 16:10 has to be examined. Note that they are **over you in the Lord**, i.e. it is not a matter of an official hierarchy.

**and admonish you:** the word **admonish** (Greek: *noutheteo*) is often used by Paul (cf. Acts 20:31; I Cor. 4:4; Col. 3:16; Titus 3:10). See verse 14. It carries the idea of rebuke, correction and direction. There are other words which relate to this such as 'exhort'. See Hebrews 3:13 -14. Because of the danger of the deceit of sin such admonitions were necessary.

13 and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.

**esteem them very highly in love:** Paul wants the leaders held in high regard, because this will reflect the importance of the place of the leaders, as they fulfil their functions in the church. To tolerate leadership but not to endorse it, and see the well-being of the church in it is to miss the point of leadership.

**because of their work** indicates that their office is not for

their personal advancement but for the work of Christ. Their labour has been spoken of in the previous verse, and so their care for the flock should commend them. Responsibility for others is no easy task, and the way in which Paul has pointed to the apostolic ministry in chapters 1 and 2 tells what lengths the leaders have to go to in pastoral care and direction.

**in love** is not speaking merely of affection, but the principle of divine love—agape—which is spoken of in I Corinthians 13. In I Corinthians 16:14 Paul enjoins, 'Let all that you do be done in love'.

**Be at peace among yourselves** must relate to possible disturbance because of leadership, i.e. some do not wish to be subject to it. Peace forms a considerable subject for the church, for—never being apart from grace, as we see in the epistolary salutations, nor apart from love and joy as we read so often (eg. Gal. 5:22-23)—it is greatly important (Rom. 12:18; 14:19; II Cor. 13:11; Col. 3:15; I Tim. 2:22; Heb. 12: 14). The *shalom* of Israel, is the peace of the New Testament (*eirene*), i.e. serenity, tranquillity, assurance and security.

14 And we exhort you, brethren, admonish the idlers, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.

**And we exhort you, brethren:** i.e. 'we enjoin you'. The matter is not inconsequential. The **brethren** are the same as above, i.e. the whole church. All brethren are to **admonish the idlers**, for such idling is culpable because it is intentional. Also it destroys a man, and may be a rebellion against the curse come upon man from the Fall (Gen.

3: 17-18). The true principle of work is seen in Ephesians 4:28. In II Thessalonians 3:7-11, Paul speaks of idlers layabouts—who will not work, and he says that if they will not work, then neither let them eat.

**encourage the fainthearted:** since the old adage was ‘a bruised reed he will not break’ (Isa. 42:3), then those who are strong should be tender towards those who are not, hence **help [support] the weak.** That there were those who were weak can be seen from Romans 14 and I Corinthians 8. This is worth noting since we tend to think that regeneration makes every person dynamic.

**be patient with them all:** God is the God of patience (Exod. 34:6; Rom. 2:4; II Pet. 3:9), and patience is part of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). Love is patient (I Cor. 13:4), but the idlers, the disrespectful, can rouse anger, in which case love is not at work.

15 See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all.

**See that none of you repays evil for evil:** the church of the day knew persecution, and those at Thessalonica no less. Some of the folk mentioned above may have been critical and wrong in their attitudes. The temptation to effect justice—and no more—is always present. Taking justice seems permissible. Not, however, for believers. Romans 12:17 and I Peter 3:9 (cf. Matt. 5:43f.) show that judgement and retribution are God’s acts, and no one must seek to do what only He can do in true justice.

**always seek to do good to one another and to all:** See Galatians 6:10 for a similar exhortation not only to do good to the household of faith, but to all men. The believers

should have their whole world in mind, and not do good for appearances’ sake, but because it is right to honour all men, and do good for all when it is possible. See 3:12 where Paul enjoins his readers to love all men.

16 Rejoice always,

17 pray constantly,

**Rejoice always:** in Philippians 4:4 Paul enjoins rejoicing, and it is to be ‘in the Lord’. This takes rejoicing away from the stimulation by the natural into stimulation by that which is the spiritual. This accords with ‘joy of the Holy Spirit’ (Rom. 14:17; I Thess. 1:6; Gal. 5:22). It is the joy which comes from the liberation of the gospel, and is always linked with love and peace. Whilst there may be malcontents, idlers and unsubmitive folk in the church—as there are in all churches—yet this is no reason not to have joy, i.e. ‘the joy of Thy salvation’. Joy and tribulation are not opposites but companions (Acts 16:25; Rom. 5:3; II Cor. 6: 10).

**pray constantly:** prayer is communion with God, a two-way traffic of communication. Man is dependent upon the Spirit for true praying (Rom. 8:25f.; Eph. 6:18). Constant prayer is therefore an unbroken link with the Father, i.e. the habituated practice of worship, praise, self-disclosure, meditation, petition and intercession, including special seasons which are also part of the operation of prayer. See Luke 11:1ff., 18:1 and Romans 12:12.

18. give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.



**give thanks in all circumstances:** refusal to give thanks was part of man's rejection of God (Rom. 1:21). Thanksgiving arises from seeing the glory of God and all that His work in creation, providence and redemption has effected. Thanksgiving is constantly enjoined as it does not come naturally to fallen man, whilst redeemed man must learn to be thankful. See Ephesians 5:4, 20, Philippians 4, Colossians 2:7, 3:15, 17. Note that it is '*in* all circumstances [things]' and *not for* them. One can only be *thankful for* them when one sees them within the sovereignty of God, and thus—ultimately—for our benefit.

**for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you:** the three things—rejoicing, constant prayer and thanksgiving—are God's will for His people, for thereby they are consistent with the truth and come to maturity. **Christ Jesus** is the one through whom the Father leads His people and works out His plan for them.

19 Do not quench the Spirit,

20 do not despise prophesying,

21 but test everything; hold fast what is good,

22 abstain from every form of evil.

**Do not quench the Spirit:** i.e. 'Don't put out the fire of the Spirit'. The Spirit is so often referred to as a fire (Acts 2:3; Matt. 3:11; Luke 12:49; Isa. 4:4, cf. Rev. 11:5). *Vexing* and *grieving* the Spirit are found in Isaiah 63:10 and Ephesians 4:30, and these would be similar to quenching, for they oppose the Spirit.

**do not despise prophesying:** this seems to be one of the ways in which they were quenching the Spirit, since true prophecy is always by the Spirit. Prophetic utterance was

one of the gifts of the Spirit, and is expounded powerfully in I Corinthians 14 where Paul places it as the highest gift since it builds up the church. He sees it as most powerful when an unbeliever comes into contact with it (I Cor. 14:24-25). The whole community is prophetic (Acts 2: 14ff.), but here Paul is almost certainly speaking about the gift of prophecy. Some scholars conjecture that some of the Thessalonians looked down on prophecy as one of the poorer gifts, and looked for more spectacular *charismata*. We have no proof of this. There may even have been some who were rejecting the exercise of other spiritual gifts. Certainly prophesying was despised by some.

**but test everything; hold fast what is good:** if they were not to quench the Spirit by rejecting the use of certain gifts, so too, they were not to be gullible, but to test out what purported to be prophecy, and this would be particularly so if ever a prophet gave a directive prophecy. In I Corinthians 14:29-33 Paul—later—gave directions on the use and testing of prophecy. The verb 'to test' was used for testing a coin to see whether it was genuine or spurious. Thus to **hold fast what is good** would mean that whatever communication came from the Spirit—in whatever way the Spirit chose to do that—then the church ought to hold fast to it, for it was **good**.

**abstain from every form of evil:** this would not only mean that which is false in prophecy, but the whole range of evil. The AV. has 'from all appearance of evil', which could mean that some things appear evil when they are not, but for the sake of a pure testimony, believers ought to forsake what appears to be evil, but whilst that principle is true, here Paul is saying that when the outward form portrays what is inwardly evil, then one must **abstain**, the same strong word used in 4:3—'abstain from unchastity.

23 May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**May the God of peace himself:** for the God of peace see Romans 15:33 and 16:20, Philippians 4:9, cf. II Corinthians 13:11, II Thessalonians 3:16. For **peace** itself look back to the comments in 5:13. In all opening salutations Paul invokes 'grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ'. He also closes most of his letters with the same greeting. In verse 28 he does not include peace with grace since he has written it in verse 23.

**sanctify you wholly:** Paul has already dealt directly and indirectly in this Letter regarding the matter of the believer's sanctification or holiness of living. See 3:13, 4:3ff. Other Pauline writings speak of God preordaining to holiness, and keeping the believer in continuing (and perhaps progressive) holiness (Eph. 1:3-4; 5:25-27; Col. 1:22; II Tim. 2:22; Titus 2:14). On the one hand God does this work, and on the other, man is expected to keep himself from defilement.

**your spirit and soul and body:** this would seem to inform us that man has three 'sections'—body, soul and spirit. Many so-called biblical psychologies have been built around this and other verses (eg. Heb. 4:12). We might as easily build up on the statement 'all your heart, .. all your soul, and ... all your might (Deut. 6:5). Man is a single integrated entity or unity. Sometimes the word 'body' (i.e. flesh) is used to denote mankind, sometimes soul and sometimes spirit, so that these three words can be used interchangeably. They simply mean 'your whole being'.

**at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ:** in Philippians

1:6 Paul says he is sure that He (God) who had begun a good work in his children, would surely continue it and bring it to completion 'right up until and on the day of Jesus Christ' (a literal but expanded translation), i.e. He would keep them 'pure and blameless' (Phil. 1: 10) along the way and climax His work in the very day of Jesus Christ, that day which is the Last Day. So here, this is the idea, i.e. that daily they would be kept wholly pure, and ultimately be utterly pure.

24 He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.

He who calls you: literally 'is calling you'. We have seen the matter of calling in 2:12 and 4:7, the first speaking of living 'a life worthy of God', and the second for a life of holiness (cf. I Pet. 1: 15). Paul is telling us that we live every day in the grace of God's present and continuous calling, i.e. that He is continually and unceasingly **faithful**.

**and he will do it:** He not only calls conclusively (cf. Rom. 8:30) but He also ensures the outcome of that calling. The believer does not have to look at himself, wondering whether he will be good enough for the day of Christ. The gospel (word of God) which redeems, also guarantees the ultimate outcome, for it is never apart from the Father. Jesus the Lord, and the continuous working of the indwelling Spirit.

25 Brethren, pray for us.

**Brethren, pray for us:** Paul does not say this with a heart that is sickened with fear. He has just said that God

will fulfil the calling He has been pleased to ordain. Had Paul not requested prayer we might have thought he was above others, not weak, not needing prayerful support, and able to manage on his own. The *content* of the requested prayer can be seen from his other requests for prayer such as in Romans 15:30, Ephesians 6: 19, Colossians 4:3ff. and Philippians 1:19. Paul is primarily concerned with fulfilling his ministry.

**26 Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss.**

**Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss:** kissing is an ancient custom both in non-Christian and Christian circles. See Romans 16:16, I Corinthians 16:20, II Corinthians 13:12. Peter speaks of it as 'the kiss of love' (I Pet. 5: 14), i.e. of holy love. It appears the kiss was on the cheek, and that men kissed men, and women women. In this present context the verse would seem to mean, 'Give everyone a holy kiss for me'.

**27 I adjure you by the Lord that this letter be read to all the brethren.**

**I adjure you by the Lord** is a strong statement, as though the apostle were putting them on oath under God. We know Paul's passion of love for the Thessalonians, so that he may simply have been emphasising the significance of his letter, wanting to have it read—and read seriously—for their benefit. It could be that some who received it may have found it too strong and so not read it to others. What is clear is that Paul wishes all the brethren to hear it. Time

and use of the letter down through the centuries has proved the immense value of it.

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

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you:** This is not a final formal salutation. As we have seen in 1:1, the constant need of every believer and the body of Christ as a whole for grace and peace prompts Paul to invoke it in his prayers. None knew this better than Paul. So ends a rich and beautiful letter.