

INTRODUCTION TO THE FIRST LETTER TO THE THESSALONIANS

The history given in the Book of Acts shows Paul crossing into Europe, as he delivers the decree of the Jerusalem council to the churches of Asia Minor (*Acts 16:4*). God called Paul to preach in Macedonia (*Acts 16:9-10*). It must have been 51 or 52 A.D., when Paul planted the church in Thessalonica, on his second tour of missions. Johnson says this letter is the earliest written of the letters of Paul preserved in the New Testament, at least five or six years earlier than Romans, Galatians, and the Corinthian letters. Some think Paul was only in Thessalonica briefly, while others think *Phil. 4:16* implies a longer stay. However, Paul was forced to leave before he had finished all he felt he needed to do (*Acts 17:5-10; 1 Thess. 2:18*). This letter was probably written about a year after Paul planted the church there, toward the close of 52 A.D., or the first part of 53 A.D. He wrote during the early part of his work at Corinth [not from Athens, as some copyist added].

When he was forced to escape from Thessalonica, he went to Berea (*Acts 17:10*), about 50 miles to the west. Again he was forced to escape (*Acts 17:14*), this time to Athens, but leaving Silas and Timothy in Berea. When Timothy came to Paul at Athens, he was immediately sent back to Thessalonica (*1 Thess. 3:1-2*). Later, then, Timothy met Paul at Corinth and gave the report about the Thessalonian Christians (*1 Thess. 3:6; Acts 18:1-5*).

Paul's preaching emphasized "Jesus and the resurrection" (*Acts 17:18*). But he had not had time to explain completely. He had evidently given them spiritual gifts [which would create "instant maturity"], but those who had the gift of "prophecy" [the miraculous ability to teach God's word,

as now in written form as the New Testament] were being ignored (*1 Thess. 5:19-20*). This failure to allow themselves to be taught the Truth, caused them to have a distorted view of Christ's Second Coming, and to think the dead would not share in Eternity (*1 Thess. 4:13-18*). They were being severely persecuted, and needed help to endure this (*1 Thess. 2:14; 3:2-4*). There was also the danger of returning to their old sinful ways (*1 Thess. 4:4-8*).

But in spite of all this, the church at Thessalonica was in satisfactory condition, and maintained a good relationship with Paul. They were a "good example" to other believers, and Thessalonica became an important center for spreading the Good News of Christ (*1 Thess. 1:7-10*).

THE FIRST LETTER OF PAUL TO THE THESSALONIANS

1 From Paul, Silas, and Timothy—
To the people of the church in Thessalonica,
who belong to God the Father and the Lord
Jesus Christ:

May grace and peace be yours.

The Life and Faith of the Thessalonians

²We always thank God for you all, and always mention you in our prayers. ³For we remember before our God and Father how you put your faith into practice, how your love made you work so hard, and how your hope in our Lord Jesus Christ is firm. ⁴We know, brothers, that God loves you and has chosen you to be his own. ⁵For we brought the Good News to you, not with words only, but also with power and the Holy Spirit, and with complete conviction of its truth.

1 Paul, Silas and Timothy,
To the Church of the
Thessalonians, who are in
God the Father and the Lord
Jesus Christ:

Grace and peace to you.

Thanksgiving for the Thessalonians' Faith

We always thank God for
all of you, mentioning you
in our prayers. We continually
remember before our
God and Father your work
produced by faith, your
labor prompted by love, and
your endurance inspired by
hope in our Lord Jesus
Christ.

Brothers loved by God, we
know that he has chosen
you, because our gospel
came to you not simply with
words, but also with power,
with the Holy Spirit and with

1. **From Paul, Silas, and Timothy.** Paul took both Silas and Timothy with him on the second tour of missions (*Acts ch. 15, 16, 17, 18*). **To the people of the church.** The "messianic community," visibly separate from the synagogue of the Jews. **Who belong to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.** The Father is honored only through the Son (*1 John 2:23*). The church belongs to both the Father and the Son. The church is visibly separate from both the Gentiles and the Jews.

2. **We.** This is Paul's letter, not the work of all three. But in "we" Paul is including all who are with him, and perhaps the Christian ministry as well. **Always thank God.** Almost all of Paul's letters begin with "thanks." This teaches us that Christians should pray for each other and thank God for the faith of others. (*Phil. 1:3-5*)

3. **For we remember.** Remembering these good things was a habit. **How you put your faith into practice.** Faith itself is a good work (*John 6:29*). **How your love made you work so hard.** This implies working hard at material things in order to be able to help others (compare *Eph. 4:28; Gal. 6:1-10*). **And how your hope.** "Hope" in the Bible, is "something we expect to see take place." Hope is important, since we act on the basis of what we do believe (compare *Rom. 2:7*).

4. **And has chosen you.** This is another way of saying, "and you know that you have become Christians." It is a paradox that we hear: "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come!" and find out the call is to ALL (*John 6:44-45*). But when we have come into union with him, we find that he has chosen us! God's call must be understood as Peter says in *2 Pet. 1:10* "So then, my brothers, try even harder to make God's call and his choice of you a permanent experience; if you do so, you will never fall away."

5. **Not with words only.** Note that the "power" refers to the ones who brought the Good News. The reasons why they are "chosen" are: (1) the power and conviction with which Paul, Silas, and Timothy

You know how we lived when we were with you; it was for your own good. ⁶You imitated us and the Lord; and even though you suffered much, you received the message with the joy that comes from the Holy Spirit. ⁷So you became an example to all believers in Macedonia and Greece. ⁸For the message about the Lord went out from you not only to Macedonia and Greece, but the news of your faith in God has gone everywhere. There is nothing, then, that we need to say. ⁹All those people speak of how you received us when we visited you, and how you turned away from idols to God, to serve the true and living God ¹⁰and to wait for his Son to come from heaven—his Son Jesus, whom he raised from death, and who rescues us from God's wrath that is to come.

deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

brought this Good News to them; (2) the fact that they received the Good News with joy. **You know how we lived.** Paul points to the power, the Holy Spirit, and complete conviction of truth as it is clearly seen in the lives of himself and his associates. This, he says, is proof that God loves you and has chosen you. [God backed up the apostles with miracles (*Acts 19:11-12*). However, some think these things ended when Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A.D.]

6. **You imitated us.** They imitated the Christian life they saw Paul and others living. **Even though you suffered much.** From the unbelieving Jews (*Acts 17:1-9*). **From the Holy Spirit.** Joy, from the moment they accepted the gospel (see note on *Acts 2:38*).

7. **So you became an example.** They honored Christ with their lives! This made them a good example to other believers. **Macedonia.** See map. This was "Northern Greece," and Thessalonica was its capital. **Greece.** This was "Southern Greece" (Achaia), and Corinth was its capital. Both were Roman provinces.

8-10. **Went out from you.** Thessalonica became an important center for spreading the Good News. The effect of Christ on the Thessalonians created great interest among others. **That we need to say.** Wherever he went, he found the news of the church in Thessalonica was already well known! **And how you turned away from idols to God.** For a Gentile to accept Christ, he had to turn away from the worship of idols, reject a large part of his native society, clean up his life (*1 Pet. 4:3-5*), and *disbelieve* most of what he had been taught was true. (Compare *1 Cor. 1:26-31*.) **And to wait for his Son.** The apostles had seen Jesus ascend to heaven. Since no one could know the time of his return, they waited expectantly! Note that Paul's preaching centered around *Jesus and the resurrection* (*Acts 17:18*). We should always be prepared for his *coming!* [Some think even the apostles thought Jesus would come while they were still alive. However, it is clear that Paul expected a final rebellion before Jesus would Come Again (*2 Thess. 2:3*). This implies the apostles knew that it would be some time until Christ returns.]

Paul's Work in Thessalonica

2 You yourselves know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure. ²You know how we had already been mistreated and insulted in Philippi before we came to you in Thessalonica. Yet our God gave us courage to tell you the Good News that comes from him, even though there was much opposition. ³The appeal we make to you is not based on error or impure motives, nor do we try to trick anyone. ⁴Instead, we always speak as God wants us to, because he approved us and entrusted the Good News to us. We do not try to please men, but to please God, who tests our motives. ⁵You know very well that we did not come to you with flattering talk, nor did we use words to cover up greed—God is our witness! ⁶We did not try to get praise from anyone, either from you or from others, ⁷even though we could have made demands on you as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle when we were with you, as gentle as a mother taking care of her

Paul's Ministry in Thessalonica

2 You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure. We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition. For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness. We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else. As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children.

1. **Was not a failure.** The strong church Paul had planted there was proof of success!

2. **Mistreated and insulted in Philippi.** *Acts 16:19-24.* Yet our God gave us courage. They honored God by being courageous in the face of danger and opposition (*Phil. 4:13*). **Much opposition.** A certain group of Jews made it their purpose in life, to oppose the spread of the Good News (see *Acts 17:13*). This opposition *demonstrated* the faith of the Christians!

3. **The appeal we make to you.** Many people define faith as: "*something you believe, even though you know it isn't true.*" The Good News of Christ is based upon **EVIDENCE!** Paul makes it plain that they do not preach this message through greed, a desire for power, or to trick people. The Good News is that God has acted in Jesus Christ to set men free from their sins and give them eternal life!

4. **We always speak as God wants us to.** They were carrying out a mission for God. He would judge their motives. Therefore, they did not make any attempt to please men.

5. **That we did not come to you.** They knew Paul had not used flattering talk to trick them, nor did he try to hide bad motives under a lot of smooth words.

6. **We did not try to get praise.** Those who opposed the Good News tried to find some hidden motive to explain the unselfish dedication of the apostles. When obviously it was not power and money, they then said it must be to "get praise" for themselves (but see *1 Cor. 4:9-10*).

7. **Even though we could have.** It was their right to be supported by those they were bringing to Christ (*1 Cor. 9:1-7*). But he made a point of not doing this (*verse 9*).

children. ⁸Because of our love for you we were ready to share with you not only the Good News from God but even our own lives. You were so dear to us! ⁹Surely you remember, brothers, how we worked and toiled! We worked day and night so we would not be any trouble to you as we preached to you the Good News from God.

¹⁰You are our witnesses, and so is God: our conduct toward you who believe was pure, right, and without fault. ¹¹You know that we treated each one of you just as a father treats his own children. ¹²We encouraged you, we comforted you, and we kept urging you to live the kind of life that pleases God, who calls you to share his own Kingdom and glory.

¹³And for this other reason, also, we always give thanks to God. When we brought you God's message, you heard it and accepted it, not as man's message but as God's message, which indeed it is. For God is at work in you who believe. ¹⁴You, my brothers, had the same things happen to you that happened to the churches of God in Judea, to the people there who belong to Christ Jesus. You suffered the same persecutions from your own countrymen that they suffer-

We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. 8

You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory. 9

And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe. For you, brothers, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus. You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from 10

8. **We were ready to share with you.** Love was the motive for all that Paul did. Love made him overcome obstacles to bring them the Good News, and he would have sacrificed his own life to do it (2 Cor. 12:15). He loves them as a mother loves her child!

9. **We worked day and night.** He worked with his own hands at a trade, to pay his own way, so that no one could accuse him of having money for a motive when he proclaimed the Good News. [But at other times and places, he took a salary (2 Cor. 11:8).]

10. **You are our witnesses.** They knew the truth of what Paul was saying.

11. **Just as a father.** Who teaches and guides his children for their own good and benefit.

12. **Who calls you to share.** This is God's offer through Jesus Christ. The Kingdom is visible on earth as the church (the messianic community). See Col. 1:13.

13. **Not as man's message.** They had received the Good News as being the teaching of God. Since people act on the basis of what they believe, God works in those who believe his message.

14. **Had the same things happen to you.** They "imitated" the Judean Christians by experiencing the same kind of persecutions. An element of "unbelieving Jews" began persecuting the church at Thessalonica and persuaded others to join in this (Acts 17:5).

ed from the Jews, ¹⁵who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and persecuted us. How displeasing they are to God! How hostile they are to all men! ¹⁶They even tried to stop us from preaching to the Gentiles the message that would bring them salvation. This is the last full measure of the sins they have always committed. And now God's wrath has at last fallen upon them!

Paul's Desire to Visit Them Again

¹⁷As for us, brothers, when we were separated from you for a little while—not in our thoughts, of course, but only in body—how we missed you and how hard we tried to see you again! ¹⁸We wanted to go back to you. I, Paul, tried to go back more than once, but Satan would not let us. ¹⁹After all, it is you—you, no less than others!—who are our hope, our joy, and our reason for boasting of our victory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes. ²⁰Indeed, you are our pride and our joy!

the Jews, who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to all men in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last.

Paul's Longing to See the Thessalonians

But, brothers, when we were torn away from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, did, again and again—but Satan stopped us. For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy.

15. **Who killed the Lord Jesus.** Not all the Jews, but a certain element was responsible for killing Jesus (*Matt. 27:25*). The false teachers here may have said that since the Jews, who were Jesus' own people, killed him and persecuted the apostles, this was proof that the Good News is false. But Paul points out the fact that they even killed their own prophets whom they admitted came from God! (*Acts 7:52-53; Matt. 23:31*) **How hostile they are to all men.** The Jewish leaders were especially noted for this, and even Josephus, the Jewish historian, mentions it. The Law of Moses commanded kindness to foreigners. But after the return from Babylon (where they had been held captive) they developed an "isolationism" which caused them to be openly hostile to everyone but their own group.

16. **They even tried to stop us.** The Christians at Thessalonica were mostly Gentiles. Nothing fanned the flames of hatred among this group of Jews, as did the preaching of the Good News to the Gentiles (*Acts 22:21-23*). **This is the last full measure of the sins.** Note this is their own act of free will. Jesus prophesied that God's wrath would fall on this group of people (*Matt. 23:35-36*). God's wrath did fall on them in many ways, but none so devastating as the destruction of Jerusalem (70 A.D.) which came in less than twenty years time from when Paul wrote this.

17. **How we missed you.** He had been forced to leave them (*Acts 17:10*).

18. **But Satan would not let us.** We are not told how, but some difficulties came up that Paul credits to Satan.

19. **After all, it is you.** Paul uses symbolism to show a timeless reality. The one who won the victory in the Games, was given a *crown* as a token. Paul points with pride to the Gentile churches as the *token* of his victory. When he stands before Christ the Judge, they will be his "reason for boasting." He says: **"Indeed, you are our pride and our joy!"** (See *Daniel 12:3*.)

3 Finally, we could not bear it any longer. So we decided to stay on alone in Athens ²while we sent Timothy, our brother who works with us for God in preaching the Good News about Christ. We sent him to strengthen you and help your faith, ³so that none of you should turn back because of these persecutions. You yourselves know that such persecutions are part of God's will for us. ⁴For while we were still with you, we told you ahead of time that we were going to be persecuted; and, as you well know, that is exactly what happened. ⁵That is why I had to send Timothy. I could not bear it any longer, so I sent him to find out about your faith. Surely it could not be that the Devil had tempted you, and all our work had been for nothing!

⁶Now Timothy has come back to us from you, and he has brought the welcome news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always think well of us, and that you want to see us just as much as we want to see you. ⁷So, in all our trouble and suffering we have been encouraged about you, brothers. It was your faith that

3 So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God's fellow worker in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them. In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know. For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter might have tempted you and our efforts might have been useless.

Timothy's Encouraging Report

But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you. Therefore, brothers, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith.

1. We could not bear it any longer. He felt like a father separated from his children. Satan had made it impossible for Paul to go to them (*1 Thess. 2:18*). So, he will stay in Athens and send someone else.

2. While we send Timothy. Whatever Satan was doing did not make it impossible for Timothy to go to assist and strengthen the church at Thessalonica.

3. So that none of you should turn back. Persecution placed terrific pressures on the Christian. "Turning back" to the world would eliminate these pressures, but bring God's wrath. **Such persecutions are part of God's will for us.** Compare *Matt. 10:34-39; Heb. 12:5-11*. The struggle is important! Remember: the unbelievable conditions before the Flood, produced eight righteous people (*1 Pet. 3:20*).

4. We told you ahead of time. He had prepared them for the persecution which would come. (Compare notes on *Rev. 6:3-6*.)

5. Surely it could not be. There was a real possibility the false teachers might succeed in convincing them that Paul really did not love them, and there was no reality to the salvation which Paul preached. Perhaps that's why Jesus said to make people his *disciples* (*Matt. 28:19-20*), and then to teach them to obey all he has commanded.

6. To us from you. Timothy met Paul at Corinth (*Acts 18:5*) with a good report. [This implies Paul wrote them from Corinth.]

7. We have been encouraged. He is filled with joy that they are faithful to Christ! (Compare *2 John 4*.)

encouraged us, ⁸because now we really live if you stand firm in your life in the Lord. ⁹Now we can give thanks to God for you. We thank him for the joy we have before our God because of you. ¹⁰Day and night we ask him with all our heart to let us see you personally and supply what is needed in your faith.

¹¹May our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, prepare the way for us to come to you! ¹²May the Lord make your love for one another and for all people grow more and more and become as great as our love for you. ¹³In this way he will make your hearts strong, and you will be perfect and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all who belong to him.

A Life that Pleases God

4 Finally, brothers, you learned from us how you should live in order to please God. This is, of course, the way you have been living. And now we beg and urge you, in the name of the Lord Jesus, to do even more. ²For you know the instructions we gave you, by the authority of the

For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord. How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.

Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May he give you inner strength that you may be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

Living to Please God

4 Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. You know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.

8. **Because now we really live.** This "good news" about their faith has given him "new life!" If you stand firm. This is really his confidence speaking, convinced they will go all the way with Christ.

9. **Now we can give thanks.** That is, how can we be thankful enough for our great spiritual joy which you have made possible by your faith!

10. **Day and night we ask him.** This shows how much he wanted to see this group of people who had heard the Good News from him. **And supply what is needed.** Just coming out of idol worship, they had much to learn about the One True God. Paul wanted to teach them more truth, so they could "go forward" to spiritual maturity (see *Heb. 6:1-3*).

11. **Prepare the way for us.** He appeals his case to God, asking that he may be allowed to visit them once more. He was allowed to do this (*Acts 20:1*), but it was three or four years later.

12. **Grow more and more.** Love is even more important than faith or hope (see *1 Cor. 13:13*). Whether he sees them again or not, he prays God will make their love grow!

13. **He will make your hearts strong.** Love makes us "unshakable!" See *Rom. 13:8*.

1. **Finally, brothers.** He says this to call their attention to what he is about to say. **How you should live.** The Gentile world was very wicked (see *1 Pet. 4:1-5*). One who lived a "Christian life" contrasted sharply with the world in which he lived. This is still true today.

2. **For you know the instructions we gave you.** Faith and actions cannot be divorced one from another (see *James 2:14-26*). After making people disciples of Christ, we are to teach them to obey everything Jesus has commanded.

Lord Jesus. ³This is God's will for you: he wants you to be holy and completely free from immorality. ⁴Each of you men should know how to take a wife in a holy and honorable way, ⁵not with a lustful desire, like the heathen who do not know God. ⁶In this matter, then, no man should do wrong to his brother or take advantage of him. We have told you this before, we strongly warned you, that the Lord will punish those who do such wrongs. ⁷God did not call us to live in immorality, but in holiness. ⁸So then, whoever rejects this teaching is not rejecting man, but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit.

⁹There is no need to write you about love for your fellow believers. You yourselves have been taught by God how you should love one another. ¹⁰And you have behaved in this way toward all the brothers in all of Macedonia. So we beg you,

It is God's will that you ³ should be holy; that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you ⁴ should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter ⁵ no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not ⁶ call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, he who rejects this instruction ⁷ does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit. ⁸

Now about brotherly love ⁹ we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. And in fact, you ¹⁰ do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more.

3. **This is God's will for you.** Now he gives an example. "Immorality" was the *normal* way of life in the Gentile world. [Immorality means any sex act outside the marriage relationship: adultery, homosexual acts, etc.] The Gentiles did not consider immorality a sin.

4-5. **Each of you men should know how to take.** "To take" = ΚΤΑΣΘΗΑΙ "which can only mean 'to acquire,' not 'to possess.'" [Alford (Greek Testament)] Paul is advising marriage, as he does in *1 Cor. 7:2*. The Gentiles went either to the extreme of celibacy or else unrestrained lust. Women were treated as "disposable," and as "necessary evils." God himself decrees marriage is holy (*Gen. 2:18; Heb. 13:4; see notes on Matt. 19:4-5*). No Jewish High Priest would have believed marriage to be an unholy thing! [Paul speaks to men, but this would apply to women also.] **Not with a lustful desire.** "Lust" is obsessive desire outside the marriage relationship. Lust makes a poor standard to choose a prospective mate. God intended a man and woman to join for life in marriage. This is a holy bond, in which they fulfill each other's needs. Paul makes this plain in *1 Cor. 7:3-5*; and points out that celibacy is a special "gift" *1 Cor. 7:7*.

6. **No man should do wrong to his brother.** Paul is talking about adultery, and about stealing another man's wife. **The Lord will punish.** This shows the seriousness of this sin.

7. **But in holiness.** God sets standards of purity for his people, and calls them to live transformed lives (*Rom. 12:1-2*).

8. **Whoever rejects this teaching.** These are God's commands. God calls us to holy living. **Who gives you his Holy Spirit.** Read what Paul says in *1 Cor. 6:15-20*. We insult God when we defile our bodies with sin.

9. **Have been taught by God.** God teaches us to love our fellow believers. If we love them, we will not sin against them, or do things to destroy their faith. Read *1 John 4:19-21*.

10. **And you have behaved in this way.** Their lives showed this love for their fellow believers.

brothers, to do even more. ¹¹Make it your aim to live a quiet life, to mind your own business, and earn your own living, just as we told you before. ¹²In this way you will win the respect of those who are not believers, and will not have to depend on anyone for what you need.

The Lord's Coming

¹³Brothers, we want you to know the truth about those who have died, so that you will not be sad, as are those who have no hope. ¹⁴We believe that Jesus died and rose again; so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have died believing in him.

¹⁵This is the Lord's teaching that we tell you: we who are alive on the day the Lord comes will not go ahead of those who have died. ¹⁶There will be the shout of command, the archangel's voice, the sound of God's trumpet, and the Lord himself will come down from heaven. Those who have died believing in Christ will rise to life first;

Make it your ambition to ¹¹ lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody. ¹²

The Coming of the Lord

Brothers, we do not want ¹³ you to be ignorant about those who sleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe ¹⁴ that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who sleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For ¹⁵ the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will ¹⁶

11. **Make it your aim to live a quiet life.** Don't be a "busybody." It is implied that some at Thessalonica expected Jesus to come immediately, and so had quit working, and become loafers and troublemakers.

12. **You will win the respect.** It would be an insult to God if the unbelievers could say: "This new religion makes loafers and beggars out of men." **And will not have to depend.** There is a strong "work ethic" in Christianity. Paul wrote: "*The man who used to rob must stop robbing and start working, to earn an honest living for himself, and to be able to help the poor.*" (Eph. 4:28).

13. **We want you to know the truth.** What the apostle has said about "a life that pleases God" in the first part of the chapter, likely has something to do with their misunderstanding of Christ's Coming. Some part of the preaching of the Good News had been twisted into a "reason" why they should not live a quiet active life; and why they were sad about those believers who had died. **As are those who have no hope.** That is, as the heathen and those of the Jews who do not believe in a "raising from death." This shows their sadness had its roots in their belief that the dead would not share in Christ's heavenly kingdom.

14. **We believe.** His argument is: We believe that Jesus raised from death; *therefore*, we believe the dead will be raised through Christ when he Comes.

15. **This is the Lord's teaching.** He shows the authority of what he is saying. **Will not go ahead of.** Those who are living when our Lord Comes will not go into his presence before the dead are raised. [We also see that Paul (speaking by inspiration) says there will be Christians living when Jesus returns!]

16. **And the Lord himself will come down.** The signal for all this will be the archangel's shout of command, and the sound of God's trumpet blowing a blast. The Thessalonians must have believed the living Christians would rush to meet Jesus, but the dead would be unable to follow, and so would be left behind forever. **Will rise to life first.** Not "first before the other dead are raised," but "first - before the living are caught up." Compare Rev. 1:7.

¹⁷then we who are living at that time will all be gathered up along with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸So then, cheer each other up with these words.

Be Ready for the Lord's Coming

5 There is no need to write you, brothers, about the times and occasions when these things will happen. ²For you yourselves know very well that the Day of the Lord will come as a thief comes at night. ³When people say, "Everything is quiet and safe," then suddenly destruction will hit them! They will not escape—it will be like the pains that come upon a woman who is about to give birth. ⁴But you, brothers, are not in the darkness, and the Day should not

rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words. 17 18

5 Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. 2 3

But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a 4

17. Will all be gathered up. All of God's people since the beginning of time will be gathered up, as the dead rise to life and the living are changed (*1 Cor. 15:51-52*). **To meet the Lord in the air.** Nothing says Jesus will ever set foot on earth again. His people will rise to meet him! [Judgment will be a separation. See *Matt. 25:31-33*.] **And so we will always be with the Lord.** The Church Militant [the messianic community active on earth] will become the Church Triumphant [the messianic community in the eternal world - in God's presence]. The church of Christ does not TERMINATE, but is united with Christ as a bride to her husband, and the Wedding Feast continues forever without end (*Rev. 19:5-9*)!

18. Cheer each other up with these words. Tell those who are sad about their fellow believers having died, that when they are called to meet the Lord, they will find their own dead raised to life and in that happy crowd of the Redeemed!

1. About the times and occasions. A misunderstanding of the Second Coming was the basis for the problem at Thessalonica. Having shown that those who have died "in Christ" will be raised before the living are changed, Paul now proceeds to the punishment of the unbelievers. God has given Christ the right to judge the world (*Acts 17:31; Matt. 28:18*). This shows the Father has put his "stamp of approval" on the Good News, and authorized Christ to punish all who do not obey it (*2 Thess. 1:8-9*). However, notice the world is *already doomed*, and Christ offers a way to escape from it (*John 8:24*). Paul reminds them of what they already know [*that only the Father knows the time of the Second Coming (Matt. 24:36)*].

2. Come as a thief comes. Sudden, unexpected! This can be understood of: the day of each person's death; the day of Jerusalem's destruction [which was still future as he wrote this]; the day of Christ's Second Coming at the end of the world.

3. When people say. Some think this means the signs which preceded the destruction of Jerusalem (*Matt. 24*) will NOT appear again just before the Second Coming. People will be saying: "everything is quiet and safe," and suddenly, Jesus will be here! No one will be ignorant of his Coming (*Rev. 1:7*).

4. The Day should not take you by surprise. Darkness is symbolic of ignorance. Christians are instructed in truth, and will not be caught unprepared. [If they obey *Heb. 6:1-3*.]

take you by surprise like a thief. ⁵All of you are people who belong to the light, who belong to the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. ⁶So then, we should not be sleeping, like the others; we should be awake and sober. ⁷It is at night when people sleep; it is at night when people get drunk. ⁸But we belong to the day, and we should be sober. We must wear faith and love as a breastplate, and our hope of salvation as a helmet. ⁹God did not choose us to suffer his wrath, but to possess salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰who died for us in order that we might live together with him, whether we are alive or dead when he comes. ¹¹For this reason encourage one another, and help one another, just as you are now doing.

thief. You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore, let us encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

Final Instructions and Greetings

¹²We beg you, brothers, to pay proper respect to those who work among you, those whom the Lord has chosen to guide and instruct you.

Final Instructions

Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who

5. **Who belong to the light.** Light is symbolic of truth. Truth makes you free (*John 8:32*). People of the night or the darkness reject Truth.

6. **We should be awake and sober.** Christians must be alert to spiritual danger, and must live transformed lives (*see 1 Thess. 4:11-12; Luke 21:34-36*).

7. **It is at night.** People sleep at night. But also, people do things at night that would make them ashamed in the day. He means that the stupidity and lust of the world are appropriate for the darkness of ignorance in which they live.

8. **But we belong to the day.** The fact that he stresses this, may imply that some were not living this way. He uses the symbolism of a soldier's armor to emphasize what he is saying. **Faith and love.** As a *breastplate* to protect our "heart." **Hope of salvation.** As a *helmet* to protect our "head." The Christian's fight is against *wicked spiritual forces* (*Eph. 6:12*). (Compare *Eph. 6:13-18*.)

9. **To suffer his wrath.** God's act in Jesus Christ offers us a way to escape from the wrath which is to come! (*See Rev. 7:14-17*.)

10. **Who died for us.** This was Christ's deliberate act of free will to fulfill God's Plan (*John 10:17-19*). **Whether we are alive or dead.** Death cannot rob us of our salvation! We shall all be changed (*1 Cor. 15:51-52*).

11. **For this reason.** That is, because of God's promises to us. **Encourage.** Through faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, etc. (*2 Pet. 1:5-11*). **Help.** With the loads of life (*Gal. 6:1-5*).

12. **To those who work among you.** Preachers (*evangelists*, *see note on Eph. 4:11*) and church leaders (*elders or pastors*, *see note on Eph 4:11*). **To guide and instruct you.** Christianity is a teaching religion, "*On-the-job-training for Eternity!*" Evangelists and church leaders are to help each Christian to fulfill his or her individual ministry! [Christians are a *kingdom of priests* to God (*Rev. 1:6*).]

¹³Treat them with the greatest respect and love, because of the work they do. Be at peace among yourselves.

¹⁴We urge you brothers: warn the idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with all.

¹⁵See that no one pays back wrong for wrong, but at all times make it your aim to do good to one another and to all people.

¹⁶Be joyful always, ¹⁷pray at all times, ¹⁸be thankful in all circumstances. This is what God wants of you, in your life in Christ Jesus.

¹⁹Do not restrain the Holy Spirit; ²⁰do not despise inspired messages. ²¹Put all things to the test: keep what is good, ²²and avoid every kind of evil.

admonish you. Hold them in 13 the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. And 14 we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays 15 back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else. Be 16 joyful always; pray continu- 17 ally; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not put out the Spirit's 19 fire; do not treat prophecies 20 with contempt. Test every- 21 thing. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil. 22

13. **Treat them.** Christians were not divided into "clergy" and "laity" at this time. They are to honor evangelists and church leaders because of the work they do. [Note what Christ said in *Luke 22:24-27*.]

14. **Warn the idle.** Those who want their own way about everything (see *James 4:1-4*). [These are some of the people mentioned in *1 Thess. 4:11-12*.] **Encourage the timid.** Those who are easily discouraged by the pressures and problems of life. **Help the weak.** Those weak in "the faith" [who still have much to learn]. **Be patient with all.** All who err through ignorance, just as God is patient with each of us. The duties in this verse apply especially to the church leaders (*who watch over your souls, Heb 13:17*), also to the evangelists (whose duties somewhat overlap), but also to every Christian. **WE ARE OUR BROTHER'S KEEPER!**

15. **See that no one pays back wrong for wrong.** See note on *Rom. 12:21*. "Actions speak louder than words."

16. **Be joyful always.** The Christianity which we see in the New Testament is not gloomy and sour. God's people are full of joy! They can be happy even when the world seems to frown! One who is united to Christ (*2 Cor. 5:17*) has a source of joy and life not available to the world; a Savior who is always with him; and an eternal hope!

17. **Pray at all times.** That is, make a habit of prayer. See *Luke 18:1-8; Eph. 6:18*.

18. **Be thankful in all circumstances.** God gives "problem-opportunities." Every problem contains an opportunity; every opportunity contains a problem. Note this speaks to Christians (see *Rom. 8:28*).

19. **Do not restrain the Holy Spirit.** Do not resist him, or destroy his influence by failing to live a holy life. We restrain the Spirit when we disobey the word of God; when we rebel against those who guide and instruct us; when we suppress our own conscience.

20. **Do not despise inspired messages.** During the time when Paul wrote this, prophets were men inspired by God to speak his message. Yet each prophet was to be carefully tested (*1 John 4:1-3; 1 Cor. 12:1-3*). The content of God's revelation was closed with the last apostle, John. Paul calls God's curse on any who would change what has been revealed (*Gal. 1:8-9*). Spiritual life is nourished, not so much by new knowledge, as by things already known being taken out and looked at, and carefully studied.

21-22. **Put all things to the test.** Tradition is a collection of things which are accepted as being true, without examination. The Bible, especially the New Testament, is the "yardstick" by which to measure religious things. Paul says to examine everything you believe by using this "yardstick" of God. **Keep what is good.** Those which pass the test are "good," and should be kept. **And avoid every kind of evil.** Those which will not pass the test should be avoided.

²³May the God who gives us peace make you holy in every way, and keep your whole being, spirit, soul, and body, free from all fault at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴He who calls you will do it, because he is faithful.

²⁵Pray also for us, brothers.

²⁶Greet all the brothers with a brotherly kiss.

²⁷I urge you, by the authority of the Lord, to read this letter to all the brothers.

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

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.

Brothers, pray for us. Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

23. **Make you holy in every way.** This is Paul's word of blessing on the Thessalonian Christians. But God will make each one of his people holy in every way [that is, those who follow *1 John 1:7*]. **And keep your whole being.** Man is "triune," just as is God. The "whole man" is *spirit, soul, and body*. [Note Paul's reasoning that the *body* will be raised from death (*1 Cor. 15:35-49*).]

24. **Because he is faithful.** God does not "go back" on his word. If you trust him [live in the light of his truth], he will *keep* you!

25. **Pray also for us.** Paul asks for prayers many times. See *Eph. 6:19; Col. 4:3; 2 Thess. 3:1; compare James 5:16*.

26. **Greet all the brothers with a brotherly kiss.** In many parts of the world, a kiss is still the common form of greeting [we shake hands], as it was in New Testament times. (*See also Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20*.)

27. **By the authority of the Lord.** He places this obligation on them by the Lord's authority. The church leaders were to read this out loud to the entire congregation. Perhaps the "young" Christians at Thessalonica would not realize the importance of circulating this letter from Paul. This letter was to be circulated among all the churches (*implied in Col. 4:16*).

28. **The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.** This is his usual way of saying "good-by." He gives a final word of benediction.