

## 1 Thessalonians

The city of Thessalonica was one of the richest port cities of the day. Thessalonica is in the northwest corner of the Aegean Sea. Today, it is part of Greece. In Paul's day, it was a major seaport of the Roman province of Macedonia. Thessalonica was one of three most important shipping centers of the day – Thessalonica, Corinth and Ephesus.



Thessalonica was located on the Roman trade route from Rome to the Orient. That meant there was a constant exchange of goods and people. The population has been estimated at around 200,000. Most of those were native Greeks, but there were also Romans, Asians and Jews living there.

Although Thessalonica was under Roman rule at this time, it had been granted status as a free city, which meant there were no Roman troops stationed there, and the citizens were allowed to govern themselves.

Paul and Silas first preached the gospel in Thessalonica during Paul's second missionary journey (Acts 17). They had been led to Thessalonica by a divine vision (Acts 16:9-10). They probably stayed there for about 2 months. The non-Christian Jews in Thessalonica hired troublemakers to falsely accuse Paul, and run him out of town.

Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians to praise the Thessalonian believers for their dedication even during persecution. He also wanted to answer some questions they had asked. Paul also wrote to correct some wrong information and false claims that were circulating through the church.

Paul wrote the epistle while he was in Corinth (see Acts 17 and 18) in the early 50s. (Between 50 and 54). 1 Thessalonians was one of the earliest of Paul's epistles.

The emphasis of 1 Thessalonians is on the Rapture: the coming of Christ to take His church out of this world. In 2 Thessalonians, the emphasis is on the coming of Christ to the earth to establish His kingdom.

**1:1 From Paul, Silas, and Timothy. To the church in Thessalonica, the church in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you.**

At the time this letter was written, it was the custom to begin your letter with these three elements: the name or names of the author, the name(s) of the addressee, and a word of formal greeting.

Although the letter was sent from Paul, Silas, and Timothy, Paul was the main writer of the letter. He addresses himself in the singular (I) in other places in the letter.

Paul was Saul of Tarsus. His Hebrew name means "asked for." His Roman name, Paul, which he was more commonly known by, means "little."

Silvanus is the Roman form of Silas. Luke referred to him as Silas in Acts 15:22, etc. Silas had gone with Paul on his second missionary journey (Acts 15-18).

Paul led Timothy to the Lord most likely on his first missionary journey (Acts 13-14). Timothy had recently returned from a trip to Thessalonica with news of the conditions in the church there (1 Thessalonians 3:1-2, 6).

No doubt Paul, Silas and Timothy were the best known and respected missionaries in Thessalonica.

1 Thessalonians is addressed **to the church in Thessalonica**. The church is the people – not the building. The Greek word *ekklesia* refers to any gathering or assembly, and shows the relationship of believers to one another and to Christ. So this letter was addressed to the body of believers (not to individual believers) who lived in the city of Thessalonica.

The church is described as being **in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**. Forget anything you might be thinking about the Trinity, or about two

separate persons. Paul is reemphasizing that God is the Father, who gives security, love and strength, and He is the Lord – the sovereign One who is to be obeyed. He is “Jesus,” the human name for the Lord, from the Greek form of “Joshua,” which means “Savior.” “Christ” is the Greek translation of the “Messiah” of the Old Testament and means “Anointed One.”

The short greeting that follows is common throughout Paul’s epistles. **Grace and peace.** **Grace** is equivalent to “greetings” or “rejoice.” The Greek **peace** is equivalent to the Hebrew *shalom* which means “favor,” “prosperity,” and “well-being.”

These two words of greeting always appear in this same order throughout the New Testament. Theologically God’s grace is the basis for and leads us to peace.

### **1:2 We always thank God for all of you and mention you when we pray.**

In general, the first three chapters of 1 Thessalonians are personal, and the last two are practical.

Paul, Silas, and Timothy rejoiced together in what God had done in the lives of the Thessalonians. They continually and frequently gave thanks. The Thessalonians were a constant source of joy to them. These apostles had suffered labor pains in giving birth to the church, and the infant church at Thessalonica was deeply rooted in their hearts.

Paul must have had an enormous prayer list! You might be surprised if you look through his epistles at all the churches and individuals he was praying for. I don’t think many leaders today spend that much time in prayer.

**Acts 6:4** Then we can continue to pray and to teach the word of God.

### **1:3 We continually recall before God our Father the things you have done because of your faith and the work you have done because of your love. And we thank him that you continue to be strong because of your hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Here are three important characteristics of believers: **the things you have done because of your faith** – they had turned from idols to the true God. Faith in God had brought true repentance. (1:9) note that the faith brought repentance, not vice versa.

**the work you have done because of your love** – they were serving the living and true God in the midst of persecution (1:6) Serving the Lord is not always easy. We often get tired *doing* the work, but not tired *of* the work.

**continue to be strong because of your hope** – literally “bearing up patiently under a heavy load.” They were waiting for God’s Son from heaven (1:10). If you put your hope in man, you’re going to be disappointed. It is only when we put our hope in God that we can “bear up patiently.”

**Isaiah 31:1** How terrible it will be for those people who go down to Egypt for help. They think horses will save them. They think their many chariots and strong horsemen will save them. But they don’t trust God, the Holy One of Israel, or ask the Lord for help.

**Psalms 20:7** Some trust in chariots, others in horses, but we trust the Lord our God.

These three qualities, (faith, hope, and love) should be obvious in every Christian.

**1 Corinthians 13:13** So these three things continue forever: faith, hope, and love. And the greatest of these is love.

Notice that each of these qualities is focused on Christ. Jesus is always supposed to be the focus of the church.

#### **1:4 Brothers and sisters, God loves you, and we know he has chosen you,**

Paul referred to his fellow Christians as **Brothers and sisters**. (*adelphoi*) He used that term 15 times in 1 Thessalonians, and 7 times in 2 Thessalonians. Paul was an apostle. The top of the line in church authority. But he didn’t consider himself superior to others, but spoke with great humility, recognizing that before God, we are equally redeemed.

Paul had been a proud Pharisee. Now he referred to Gentiles as equals before God.

**God loves you.** He doesn’t just put up with us because we’re His family, and He is stuck with us. He loves us.

The proof of God’s love for us is that He chose us. The word indicates selection, or election. Like we do at the market when we select which of the fruits or berries we want. Or what we do in November every 4 years, when we elect who we want for our next president.

**Ephesians 1:4-6** That is, in Christ, he chose us before the world was made so that we would be his holy people—people without blame before him. <sup>5</sup> Because of his love, God had already decided to make us his own children through Jesus Christ. That was what he wanted and what pleased

him, <sup>6</sup> and it brings praise to God because of his wonderful grace. God gave that grace to us freely, in Christ, the One he loves.

Clearly, we are also individually responsible to decide to trust in Jesus Christ. (John 3; Romans 5). The Bible makes it clear that both election and choice are true. But to fully understand how that all works seems to be beyond the capabilities of the human mind.

**1:5 because the Good News we brought to you came not only with words, but with power, with the Holy Spirit, and with sure knowledge that it is true. Also you know how we lived when we were with you in order to help you.**

**the Good News** –it is the message that we preach. It is the good news of the grace of God.

**Acts 17:2-3** Paul went into the synagogue as he always did, and on each Sabbath day for three weeks, he talked with his fellow Jews about the Scriptures. <sup>3</sup> He explained and proved that the Christ must die and then rise from the dead. He said, “This Jesus I am telling you about is the Christ.”

**came not only with words** – Paul didn’t preach his own thoughts or any human philosophy.

**1 Corinthians 2:1-5** Dear brothers and sisters, when I came to you, I did not come preaching God’s secret with fancy words or a show of human wisdom. <sup>2</sup> I decided that while I was with you I would forget about everything except Jesus Christ and his death on the cross. <sup>3</sup> So when I came to you, I was weak and fearful and trembling. <sup>4</sup> My teaching and preaching were not with words of human wisdom that persuade people but with proof of the power that the Spirit gives. <sup>5</sup> This was so that your faith would be in God’s power and not in human wisdom.

The message brought by Paul was brought home to their hearts by the **power** of the **Holy Spirit**.

**John 16:8** When the Helper comes, he will prove to the people of the world the truth about sin, about being right with God, and about judgment.

The gospel message had radically changed Paul’s life, and it has the power to radically change our lives.

The Thessalonians had observed Paul (and those who ministered with him), and knew they were living testimonies to the truth of the gospel.

It’s not enough to preach the gospel; we must live it. We are to be living epistles.

**2 Corinthians 3:1-3** Are we starting to brag about ourselves again? Do we need letters of introduction to you or from you, like some other people? <sup>2</sup> You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone. <sup>3</sup> You show that you are a letter from Christ sent through us. This letter is not written with ink but with the Spirit of the living God. It is not written on stone tablets but on human hearts.

**1:6 And you became like us and like the Lord. You suffered much, but still you accepted the teaching with the joy that comes from the Holy Spirit.**

The result of responding to the gospel is a changed life. They became **like us and like the Lord** - like their spiritual parents, and like the Lord. That should be a normal Christian experience.

Everyone needs teachers, especially new converts.

Personally, I'd prefer others were copying only the Lord, and not me. I know the mistakes I make. But that really isn't an option that God has given us. As we mature in the Lord, we are supposed to grow into the role of being a model of Christ. People are supposed to be able to look to us. That serves as a reminder to me that I need to be crucifying my flesh every day. In that sense, we don't ever get a "day off."

There should be no difference between copying "us" and copying the Lord. We are supposed to live and act like Him.

**1 Peter 2:21** This is what you were called to do, because Christ suffered for you and gave you an example to follow. So you should do as he did.

**still you accepted** indicates a warm welcome. The Thessalonians had grabbed hold of the gospel with joy, even though it meant facing persecution.

The Thessalonians had welcomed the gospel message despite **suffering much**. These converts must have had serious opposition to their faith. But they hadn't let that stop them. In spite of all the trials they had to face, they had **the joy that comes from the Holy Spirit** to comfort them.

Joy isn't determined by the circumstances you find yourself in. It is determined by your relationship with Christ.

**1:7 So you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Southern Greece.**

The word **example** is from a root which means "strike" or "hit." It means an impression left by a blow – like from a block print, a rubber stamp, or a typewriter.

So Paul was saying that the Thessalonian believers became like a stencil by which these other believers would be drawn.

It's one thing to have a good testimony among your close circle of friends. It is quite another to have that testimony throughout the entire region, (essentially all of southern Greece).

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he pointed out these Thessalonian believers as an example of benevolence. (Thessalonica was the largest city and the capital of the province of Macedonia).

**2 Corinthians 8:1-2** And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace God gave the churches in Macedonia. <sup>2</sup>They have been tested by great troubles, and they are very poor. But they gave much because of their great joy.

The way you manage your money is one of the most revealing evidences of your commitment to Christ.

**1:8 And the Lord's teaching spread from you not only into Macedonia and Southern Greece, but now your faith in God has become known everywhere. So we do not need to say anything about it.**

This verse explains how the Thessalonians' testimony was spread. It wasn't through any kind of organized evangelistic campaign. It was by one-on-one, word of mouth evangelism.

The word here translated as **spread from you** implies a reverberation, or an echo. As though the words of these Thessalonian believers were being broadcast throughout the region. Most likely this "broadcasting" was done by travelers passing through the city, and bringing the message to their home towns.

Although the Christians in Thessalonica were still just babes in Christ, their faith, love and hope were already a model for others.

**1:9 People everywhere are telling about the way you accepted us when we were there with you. They tell how you stopped worshipping idols and began serving the living and true God.**

Other people are telling Paul about what happened when Paul visited Thessalonica! The stories were not relayed by missionaries, but by ordinary travelers who had seen the believers and were impressed. The events of his visit were well known, not because Paul had been telling the story, but because of the powerful witness of others.

Turning to God from idols suggests that the Thessalonians had been pagan Gentiles. They had worshipped idols of wood, stone and natural phenomena. Now they were worshipping the **living and true God**. Throughout the Old Testament, the one true God was distinguished from all the other so-called gods as the “living God.”

**1:10 And you wait for God’s Son, whom God raised from the dead, to come from heaven. He is Jesus, who saves us from God’s angry judgment that is sure to come.**

**Wait for God’s Son** – Paul was hoping for the Lord’s return to happen at any moment. “**Wait for**” indicates an eager and expectant looking forward to the return. We don’t wait sitting down, or with our noses pressed against the window. We are serving Him faithfully right up until the moment of His return.

**Heaven** here is plural, indicating the atmosphere, or awaiting Jesus’ return through the clouds, or literally “out of the heavens.” (As opposed to heaven singular, which would indicate Jesus coming from His throne.) Either way, our focus is not supposed to be on where He is coming from, but on Him who is coming! He is the object of our hope. We’re waiting for Jesus Himself, rather than anything that will accompany Him or characterize His return. He Himself is the one who fills us with hope.

There are lots of reasons we should be excited about Jesus’ coming, but here Paul emphasized our escape from **God’s angry judgment that is sure to come**.

The **angry judgment** of God will be poured out on unrighteous people because of their failure to trust in Christ.

**Romans 1:18** God’s anger is shown from heaven against all the evil and wrong things people do. By their own evil lives they hide the truth.

That angry judgment will be poured out on several occasions:

1. The great white throne judgment of Revelation 20:11-15
2. The time of Jacob’s trouble of Jeremiah 30:4-7
3. The Great Tribulation of Revelation 7:14

Chapter 1 (and all the chapters in 1 Thessalonians) ends with a reference to the return of Jesus Christ. Even though the chapter breaks were not part of what Paul wrote, (they were added in the 13<sup>th</sup> century) we still find no fewer than five encouragements of the return.



## **2:1 Brothers and sisters, you know our visit to you was not a failure.**

Some people were spreading rumors about Paul. They said he had wrong reasons for coming to Thessalonica.

Paul starts to defend himself. He reminded the Thessalonians that they were there when Paul was ministering. They should know personally that the rumors are not true.

The **you** is strongly emphasized in the Greek. Paul is asking the brethren to carefully remember his visit.

Paul's visit had not been **a failure**. It was not a waste of time. He had not come just to entertain them for a few days and then leave them.

In fact, Paul's visit had been very successful. The Thessalonians' lives were changed. That was proof of the success of his visit.

## **2:2 Before we came to you, we suffered in Philippi. People there insulted us, as you know, and many people were against us. But our God helped us to be brave and to tell you his Good News.**

Paul said he had been treated shamefully in Philippi.

**Acts 16:22-24** The crowd joined the attack against them. The Roman officers tore the clothes of Paul and Silas and had them beaten with rods. <sup>23</sup> Then Paul and Silas were thrown into jail, and the jailer was ordered to guard them carefully. <sup>24</sup> When he heard this order, he put them far inside the jail and pinned their feet down between large blocks of wood.

Even after that experience in Philippi, they came to the synagogue in Thessalonica and preached the same message. That seems to me to be the very definition of being **brave**. This bravery was a sign of God at work among them, and proof that they were really doing God's work.

The Greek words translated **many people were against us** means conflict, agony, or struggling under great strain with great conflict. But still they were able to **tell you his Good News**. This was not the kind of witnessing you might do at Starbucks!

In verses 3-6 Paul is going to tell us about what he preached in Thessalonica. It wasn't the words he spoke, but the life he lived which preached the loudest.

Regardless of your ministry in the church, you are a preacher. Your life is preaching every day. Does the message of your life match the message of your words?

**2:3-4 Our appeal does not come from lies or wrong reasons, nor were we trying to trick you. <sup>4</sup> But we speak the Good News because God tested us and trusted us to do it. When we speak, we are not trying to please people, but God, who tests our hearts.**

Paul's message was truth; not error. His reason for ministering was clean; not impure. (He wasn't being greedy.) His method was straightforward; not with tricks or lies. He didn't lower his standards to put up with the prejudices and passions of the old nature.

**Trick you** is from a Greek word used of a fishing lure to catch fish. It brings to mind the moving stage lights, fog machines and mirror balls which have been used in "seeker-sensitive" services to lure the unsaved to the altar. If those methods really draw people out of their lifestyle of sin into a relationship with Christ which lasts, then so be it. But I'm siding with Paul on this one. I want to present no flash, only substance.

God proved that Paul's message was genuine (**God tested us and trusted us**). Paul saw himself as a servant entrusted by God to carry His message of salvation to lost men and women.

Paul didn't choose the work; God selected him to announce the gospel. Since Paul realized that he was under the constant inspection of the Lord, he wouldn't dare misrepresent the Word or serve with wrong motives.

**2:5-6 You know that we never tried to influence you by saying nice things about you. We were not trying to get your money; we had no selfishness to hide from you. God knows that this is true. <sup>6</sup> We were not looking for human praise, from you or anyone else,**

Paul's message did not change to try to gain something for himself. He was not looking for praise from anyone but God.

This is the only New Testament use of the word translated **influence you by saying nice things**. It was common practice among the Hellenistic (Greek) speakers of the day to use flattery. Once again, Paul was showing how different he was and his message from the common.

It probably just seems right that preachers should not use flattering speech to try to win favor with a congregation, but I think flattery is more common than not. We have become so used to a consumer mentality, that if the message isn't exactly what we want to hear, we're ready to change the channel. It might seem wise for

a preacher to change the presentation so as not to offend the audience. But Paul refused to water down the message.

At what point does “changing your message to fit your audience” become flattering speech?

**2:5 ...not trying to get your money** - Paul called God as his witness, since no human can really know your motives.

Paul was not preaching the gospel in order to gain some fame or wealth for himself.

Greed is not limited to money. I think it's just as common to be tempted to become greedy for fame, honor, respect, recognition or position. We need to search our hearts to uncover any greediness there.

Paul didn't even take financial support from the Thessalonians. Instead he paid for his own way, like he had done in Corinth (1 Corinthians 9 and 2 Corinthians 11).

**2:7 even though as apostles of Christ we could have used our authority over you. But we were very gentle with you, like a mother caring for her little children.**

Certainly Paul, Silas and Timothy had a right to be respected by the Thessalonians, but they chose to minister, instead of being ministered to. They cared for their converts like a nursing mother **caring for her little children**. This is a good instruction for anyone who is responsible for a congregation. A professional nurse would know how to care for the needs of an infant, but they might not have nearly the same concern for the child as its mother will.

A nursing mother's love for her child makes her want to care for it. If a nursing mother does not feed herself, she cannot feed her baby. If she eats certain foods, her baby will get sick.

The spiritual diet of a parent Christian is vitally important to the health of a newer Christian.

Paul loved the Thessalonians with a mother's love. He would have sacrificed his own life for them if that had been necessary.

**John 10:12** The worker who is paid to keep the sheep is different from the shepherd who owns them. When the worker sees a wolf coming, he runs away and leaves the sheep alone. Then the wolf attacks the sheep and scatters them.

**2:8 Because we loved you, we were happy to share not only God's Good News with you, but even our own lives. You had become so dear to us!**

The Apostles had been accused of being greedy (v5), but in fact, they were delighted to give whatever they had in order to help the beloved Thessalonians.

Genuine love can be seen in giving to people – not only to their spiritual needs, which are primary, but also to their physical needs.

Paul had a genuine love for the Thessalonians, and was willing literally to give his life for them.

**2:9 Brothers and sisters, I know you remember our hard work and difficulties. We worked night and day so we would not burden any of you while we preached God's Good News to you.**

**Hard work and difficulties** – the apostolic calling is not a life of ease and comfort. The Greek word indicates strenuous work that produces weariness and fatigue.

Paul probably worked on making tents like he did in other cities.

**Acts 18:3** Because they were tentmakers, just as he was, he stayed with them and worked with them.

Paul probably preached the gospel and taught as much as he could, both in the daytime and in the evenings. This is more proof that Paul's ministry was not motivated by greed.

**2:10 When we were with you, we lived in a holy and honest way, without fault. You know this is true, and so does God.**

**holy** – morally good; careful in your duty to God

**honest** – just; correct; careful in your duty to man

**without fault** – able to stand up to the careful examination of critics, because their behavior was right.

That doesn't mean that Paul's enemies didn't blame him – because they did. But the charges didn't stick.

People will say ugly things about you, but the important thing is to make sure the criticisms are not true.

Living a holy life is very important. It has nothing to do with getting your salvation, but it has everything to do with the salvation of people around you, because they are watching you.

Could your behavior stand up to these standards? We're called to nothing less!

**2:11-12 You know that we treated each of you as a father treats his own children. <sup>12</sup> We encouraged you, we urged you, and we insisted that you live good lives for God, who calls you to his glorious kingdom.**

Paul likened his conduct with them to the unselfish care of a nursing mother in verse 7, and here to that of a father. The suggestion is that they trained and instructed the Thessalonians as a responsible father disciplines his children.

The training included strong positive appeals (**we urged you**), soothing persuasion (**we encouraged you**) designed to cheer up and to inspire correct behavior, and solemn, earnest urging (**we insisted**).

**Live good lives for God** (living in a way that measures up to the God we serve) is the highest calling for all of us. It seems like an impossible goal, but God has called us to it, so in Him it must be possible.

**Philippians 1:6** God began doing a good work in you, and I am sure he will continue it until it is finished when Jesus Christ comes again.

We have been called to share His **glorious kingdom**.

**2:13 Also, we always thank God because when you heard his message from us, you accepted it as the word of God, not the words of humans. And it really is God's message which works in you who believe.**

When the Thessalonians heard Paul preaching, they recognized that it wasn't just human words. Paul's message had its source in God.

They sensed the supernatural truthfulness of the gospel Paul preached as the Holy Spirit brought this conviction home to their hearts.

The Word of God has power to change lives. Not only to change us at the point of salvation, but to change us from day to day as we continue to believe.

**Believe** – the Greek tense indicates continuing action – **And it really is God's message which works in you who *continue to believe***. The Word of God is like a good medicine which continues to benefit us as long as we continue to take it.

**2:14 Brothers and sisters, your experiences have been like those of God's churches in Christ that are in Judea. You suffered from the people of your own country, as they suffered from the Jews**

Paul now calls them brothers. He reminds them that when we take a stand for Jesus, and allow Him to change our lives, others will criticize us.

It's tempting to think that when we experience persecution and troubles, it is a sign that God has abandoned us. That is absolutely not true. God has promised He will never leave us.

**1 Peter 4:15-16** Do not suffer for murder, theft, or any other crime, nor because you trouble other people. <sup>16</sup> But if you suffer because you are a Christian, do not be ashamed. Praise God because you wear that name.

Many Christians pray for revival (and God knows, we need it!). But I don't know any prayer groups who are praying for suffering. But suffering brings us together as brethren, and draws us closer to God. And suffering is one of the conditions that makes us ready for revival.

**2:15-16 who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets and forced us to leave that country. They do not please God and are against all people. <sup>16</sup> They try to stop us from teaching those who are not Jews so they may be saved. By doing this, they are increasing their sins to the limit. The anger of God has come to them at last.**

The Thessalonians were not the only ones suffering. Their persecutors had **killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets**. The Apostle Paul and his co-workers had also been driven out by the Jews.

Persecuting believers is the same as persecuting God. Paul knew what he was talking about – he had been one of the chief persecutors before his conversion.

The worst effect of unbelief is not just that it damns the unbeliever, but that it blocks the salvation of others. Unbelievers try to extinguish the light of God's Word, and in so doing, cause others to stumble. They bring God's **anger** on themselves.

**they are increasing their sins to the limit.** The implication is that we (individually or as a group) can collect only a certain amount of sin before His judgment falls on us. God permits sin to run its full course.

**2:17 Brothers and sisters, though we were separated from you for a short time, our thoughts were still with you. We wanted very much to see you and tried hard to do so.**

Again, Paul refers to the Thessalonians as **brothers and sisters**. He explains that he left Thessalonica not by choice, but by being **separated from you**. The verb literally means “to be orphaned.” To Paul, it was as though his family had been torn apart. He hoped the separation would only be **for a short time**.

Paul reminded them that even though they were “out of sight,” they were *not* “out of mind.” He still felt a strong desire to with them, even in the face of great persecution.

**2:18 We wanted to come to you. I, Paul, tried to come more than once, but Satan stopped us.**

Regardless of who was preventing Paul’s return, the ultimate responsibility for the block was Satan. Satan uses people to do his bidding. Paul wasn’t blaming the people, he recognized the real mover behind the movement.

It is unusual for Paul to insert his own name. Perhaps he was emphasizing that he personally had repeatedly tried to return.

**2:19 You are our hope, our joy, and the crown we will take pride in when our Lord Jesus Christ comes.**

The Thessalonians were his hope and joy. The Philippian believers were the only others who received such warm words of personal love from Paul.

The Thessalonians filled his life with sunshine. “When life is over, and we stand in the presence of our Lord Jesus, you Thessalonians will be our source of glory and joy. You mean that much to us.

**2:20 Truly you are our glory and our joy.**

One of the greatest things we can look forward to is when Christ comes to take His church home, and he will be able to see these people whom he had labored for in the Lord receiving their crowns of eternal life.

## **1 Thessalonians 3:1 When we could not wait any longer, we decided it was best to stay in Athens alone**

Because they **wanted very much to see you and tried hard to do so** (2:17), Paul again stated his sincere concern for the Thessalonians.

When Paul and Silas were forced to leave Thessalonica, they went to Berea. The Jews who opposed Paul heard about that, and came to Berea to stir up trouble. Paul's friends then escorted him south to Athens. There Paul left word for Silas and Timothy to join him, but before they arrived, Paul left for Corinth. (Acts 17:13-15)

Paul was unable to return to Thessalonica, so he and Silas decided to send Timothy.

Timothy and Silas rejoined Paul after their missions, (Timothy went to Thessalonica while Silas went to Philippi). They all met up in Corinth, the next city on Paul's itinerary. (Acts 18:1, 5)

## **1 Thessalonians 3:2-3 and send Timothy to you. Timothy, our brother, works with us for God and helps us tell people the Good News about Christ. We sent him to strengthen and encourage you in your faith <sup>3</sup> so none of you would be upset by these troubles. You yourselves know that we must face these troubles.**

Paul's introduction of Timothy seems to suggest that the young man needed more than Paul's normal authorization. Maybe because of his youth he was not recognized and respected the same as the older missionaries.

Paul called Timothy **our brother**, suggesting equality with the other apostles.

Timothy's mission was to **strengthen and encourage** – to make them firm and solid in the faith by providing what they needed to fight the good fight of faith.

**3:3 so none of you would be upset ...** the Greek word here translated **upset** is used of a dog wagging its tail. You can see the image of the Thessalonians going back and forth because of their persecutions.

Trials are not a symptom of God's punishment. They are an expectation for all of us. They often come to help us stand strong instead of being blown away.

**2 Timothy 3:12** Everyone who wants to live as God desires, in Christ Jesus, will be persecuted.



**1 Thessalonians 3:4 Even when we were with you, we told you we all would have to suffer, and you know it has happened.**

Paul isn't trying to point out his "prophetic accuracy," he is trying to comfort the Thessalonians.

**1 Thessalonians 3:5 Because of this, when I could wait no longer, I sent Timothy to you so I could learn about your faith. I was afraid the devil had tempted you, and perhaps our hard work would have been wasted.**

Paul had sent Timothy back to Thessalonica because he was genuinely concerned for their spiritual health. Were they still trusting God or had they abandoned Him and returned to paganism?

There is disagreement among theologians as to whether Paul's concern was that they had lost their salvation, or not. It's hard to think that the devil would stop at anything less than turning you away from heaven.

**1 Thessalonians 3:6 But Timothy now has come back to us from you and has brought us good news about your faith and love. He told us that you always remember us in a good way and that you want to see us just as much as we want to see you.**

Timothy had brought good news, that the Thessalonians' faith had not become weak, and it was having fruit in love.

A clear picture of the love of and for the Thessalonians is seen here in their mutual longing to see each other.

**1 Thessalonians 3:7 So, brothers and sisters, while we have much trouble and suffering, we are encouraged about you because of your faith.**

Timothy's report had been sweet relief for Paul. As brothers in Christ, we are bound together by our mutual faith in Him as well as by our love for one another.

**1 Thessalonians 3:8 Our life is really full if you stand strong in the Lord.**

**Our life is really full** indicates that as believers we enjoy life.

**If** could be translated "since." Even in the midst of troubles, we can still enjoy life.

**1 Peter 4:12-13** My friends, do not be surprised at the terrible trouble which now comes to test you. Do not think that something strange is happening to you. <sup>13</sup> But be happy that you are sharing in Christ's sufferings so that you will be happy and full of joy when Christ comes again in glory.

Whether this passage is translated as “if you stand” or “since you stand”, the implication is that you have a choice to make. Whether it has anything to do with losing your salvation or not, it is a serious choice – to stand strong in the Lord.

Standing strong in the Lord strengthens us so we can withstand the storms of life. Even if you have trouble it is going to work out for your good.

**1 Thessalonians 3:9-10 We have so much joy before our God because of you. We cannot thank him enough for all the joy we feel. <sup>10</sup> Night and day we continue praying with all our heart that we can see you again and give you all the things you need to make your faith strong.**

Essentially Paul is saying “We can’t thank God enough for you.” Paul didn’t take any credit for their growth in God – he gave all the honor to God.

Just knowing all was well with the Thessalonians was not enough. Paul still earnestly wanted to be with them.

**all the things you need to make your faith strong** indicates the Thessalonians still needed to grow and mature. Their need was not because they had failed in any way, but just that maturity requires time! (“We grow too soon old, and too late smart.”)

**1 Thessalonians 3:11 Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus prepare the way for us to come to you.**

Paul has already told the Thessalonians how much he wanted to see them again, now he addresses this request to God in prayer.

***Our one and only God who is our Father Himself and who is our Lord Jesus***

...

**1 Thessalonians 3:12-13 May the Lord make your love grow more and multiply for each other and for all people so that you will love others as we love you. <sup>13</sup> May your hearts be made strong so that you will be holy and without fault before our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.**

The Thessalonians were noted for their love. Here Paul prayed that their love would **grow** and that they would have more than enough.

Genuine Christian love is one of the few things you can never have too much of.

Paul did not pray that they would be sinless – that would be impossible. He prayed that they would be **without fault**. After they sinned, they would deal with it as God requires and so be free from any reasonable charge by their fellow Christians.

They **will be holy** – separated to God in their hearts and actions.

Paul prayed that when Jesus Christ returns, He will find them without fault before men and holy before God.

**when our Lord Jesus comes** *Parousia* literally means “presence.” The word was commonly used in New Testament times to describe the visitation of royalty or of some other important person. Thus the word signals no ordinary coming. The New Testament writers used the word to describe Christ’s second coming, when He will return to earth in His ultimate, glorious visitation as the King over all.

The Lord will be coming **with all his holy ones**. Those are the Christians who have gone to be with Christ. This could also refer to the angels, in which case it would mean both His saints and His angels.

**1 Thessalonians 4:1 Brothers and sisters, we taught you how to live in a way that will please God, and you are living that way. Now we ask and encourage you in the Lord Jesus to live that way even more.**

Paul moved this beyond a simple prayer to an urging / **encourage**. It's not a call to "obey" or "do the right thing." We aren't going to please God by keeping all the rules and saying all the right words. The only way we will ever please God is by surrendering our life to Him completely. Make the whole purpose of your life to be pleasing to Him. That means you're no longer living to please yourselves, your parents, your teachers, your families or your pastors. You are living only to please God.

Notice that Paul was not telling them they had to change and do something new. In fact he commended them for doing exactly that. Just do so even more.

**Galatians 6:9** We must not become tired of doing good. We will receive our harvest of eternal life at the right time if we do not give up.

Spiritual complacency contradicts a believer's confession.

**live** – this is the practical aspect of the hope of the coming of the Lord. We like to look forward to the day when we shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. But in the meantime our feet are down here on the ground and we need to do some walking. We are to walk in a way that will please God.

**1 Thessalonians 4:2 You know what we told you to do by the authority of the Lord Jesus.**

Too often Christians want to hear *new* truths. Paul urged them to keep working on the old truths (the gospel of Jesus Christ). We need to go deeper, and press on to greater application of the truths we have already learned, but only partially applied.

**John 14:15** If you love me, you will obey my commands.

**1 Thessalonians 4:3 God wants you to be holy and to stay away from sexual sins.**

holiness means to be set apart for God's use: holy. Holiness is a process.

**Sexual sins** *porneia* is a broad term and includes any form of sexual practice that is outside of God's revealed will, including lust, adultery, premarital and extramarital intercourse, incest, homosexuality, bestiality, and other perversions. The Thessalonians lived in a pagan environment in which sexual looseness was not only practiced openly, but was also encouraged.

In Greek religions prostitution was considered a priestly privilege, and extramarital sex was sometimes an act of worship. To a Christian the will of God is clear: holiness and sexual sin are complete opposites.

**1 Thessalonians 4:4-5 He wants each of you to learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable. <sup>5</sup> Don't use your body for sexual sin like the people who do not know God.**

This is the same truth expressed in a positive way. If you **control your own body** with all its passions, you will be able to avoid sexual sins.

Self-control is part of the fruit of the Spirit. (Galatians 5:22-23) We don't have to be controlled by our lust. We can choose to be controlled by the Spirit of God. That is a demonstration that we are living a holy life which will bring honor to God.

**1 Thessalonians 4:6 Also, do not wrong or cheat another Christian in this way. The Lord will punish people who do those things as we have already told you and warned you.**

In verses 4 and 5, Paul urged sexual purity for the sake of your own relationship with God. Now he is appealing on the basis of the other person involved in the immorality. (**another Christian** could refer to either male or female partners). Dishonest sexual involvement affects not only the consenting parties. Spouses are wronged and families, friends, and fellow Christians shamed. Ultimately, these sins like all others are sins against God.

**Do those things** most likely refers to all the various forms of sexual uncleanness not specifically mentioned here in the context, but included in the general category of **sexual sins**.

**The Lord will punish** – He is the one who punishes. It might look like your sins are being covered up, but I've lived long enough to see it often. The secret sins which we have tried to conceal, God has placed in the revealing light of His presence.

**Psalm 90:8** You have put the evil we have done right in front of you; you clearly see our secret sins.

Apparently Paul had taught them about living a pure and holy life on his first visit with them. Even though he didn't get a chance to finish all his teachings, it is unimaginable he would have taught anything about living for Christ without warning them about the consequences of sexual sins – especially in light of the widespread sexual sin among the pagan population of Thessalonica.

**1 Thessalonians 4:7 God called us to be holy and does not want us to live in sin.**

Another reason to avoid sexual sin is that it goes against God's calling for us as Christians. **4:6** warns of judgment to come. **4:7** looks back to the very purpose for which God created us: to call us to Himself, created in His likeness.

A holy life demonstrates God's supernatural power at work in us to overcome what is natural, and give glory to God. We might be like the prodigal son, and live in the pigpen for a season, but a true Christian won't stay there.

**1 Thessalonians 4:8 So the person who refuses to obey this teaching is disobeying God, not simply a human teaching. And God is the One who gives us his Holy Spirit.**

The commands to sexual purity did not come from human invention. They are from God Himself. Rejecting sexual purity is not just rejecting certain aspects of Paul's message; it is rejecting God.

"But I'm only human." That's why **God ... gives us his Holy Spirit.**

**Philippians 4:13** I can do all things through Christ, because he gives me strength.

**1 Thessalonians 4:9 We do not need to write you about having love for your Christian family, because God has already taught you to love each other.**

Refusing to be involved in sexual sin points out something that believers are *not* to do. **love for your Christian family** is something believers *are* supposed to do.

Brotherly love is taught directly by God to His children. Christians quickly learn that there is a real kinship between believers, and they relate to other Christians in a way they do not relate to those outside God's family.

The Thessalonians had already learned to **love each other** even though they were new Christians.

**1 Thessalonians 4:10 And truly you do love the Christians in all of Macedonia. Brothers and sisters, now we encourage you to love them even more.**

Paul didn't need to remind them to love one another – they were already doing that. But he urged them to super abound; go beyond all measure.

This is an important aspect of evangelism. In a world that is filled with self-serving individuals, the genuine love of Christians should attract others to the faith.

J. Vernon McGee told of a poem which expresses the need for Christians to increase their love for one another:

To dwell above with saints in love  
Oh, that will be glory.  
But to stay below with the saints I know—  
Well, that's another story.

The true measure of a Christian is not how well he knows the Word, but how well he demonstrates the love of God to his brethren.

**John 13:35** All people will know that you are my followers if you love each other.

**1 Thessalonians 4:11 Do all you can to live a peaceful life. Take care of your own business, and do your own work as we have already told you.**

**A peaceful life** means quiet in the sense of restfulness rather than quiet as opposed to talkativeness. This is an inner quietness. Paul was telling the Thessalonians to be less frantic, not less exuberant.

**Take care of your own business** – mind your own business. Don't be nose-y or gossipy. Do nothing to tear down your brethren.

**Do your own work** – be self-supporting so you are not a burden on your brethren. A man who is willing to work with his hands demonstrates his love for his brethren by being willing to humble himself to provide for his own needs so that he does not depend on others but provides for himself.

**1 Thessalonians 4:12 If you do, then people who are not believers will respect you, and you will not have to depend on others for what you need.**

When we do these things, we win the respect of non-Christians, and glorify God. People appreciate those who do not take advantage of them.

Paul discouraged believers from expecting financial support from your brethren simply because you are Christian. But he was also not promoting self-sufficiency. We are bound to one another as fellow-believers, but we must accept personal responsibility. That is a manifestation of mature Christian love for the brethren.

**1 Thessalonians 4:13 Brothers and sisters, we want you to know about those Christians who have died so you will not be sad, as others who have no hope.**

4:13-5:11 are devoted to instructions and exhortations dealing with Christ's return.

The rest of chapter 4 addresses the relationship of the Lord's return to believers who have died. This is the classic passage in the Bible on the rapture of the church.

Paul taught that the rapture was soon, meaning it is the next event on God's agenda. That does not mean it will happen today or tomorrow – though it could.

The main focus of this passage is not teaching about the rapture. Apparently Paul had already done that in the less than a month that he was in Thessalonica. The focus is on encouraging them that even those who are dead in Christ will be part of the rapture.

Today, we are nearly 2,000 years after Paul's lifetime, and there are literally millions of believers who have already gone before us. But for the Thessalonians, there were more believers still alive than already dead in Christ. This section is an encouragement that the dead in Christ will not be left out.

**Those Christians who have died.** This is not some kind of "soul sleep." Paul taught us that to be absent from the body means we are present with the Lord.

**2 Corinthians 5:8** So I say that we have courage. We really want to be away from this body and be at home with the Lord.

**Philippians 1:23** It is hard to choose between the two. I want to leave this life and be with Christ, which is much better,

This is the body "asleep" in the earth until it is resurrected, changed into a glorious body, and reunited with the soul.

**2 Corinthians 5:1-9** We know that our body—the tent we live in here on earth—will be destroyed. But when that happens, God will have a house for us. It will not be a house made by human hands; instead, it will be a home in heaven that will last forever. <sup>2</sup> But now we groan in this tent. We want God to give us our heavenly home, <sup>3</sup> because it will clothe us so we will not be naked. <sup>4</sup> While we live in this body, we have burdens, and we groan. We do not want to be naked, but we want to be clothed with our heavenly home. Then this body that dies will be fully covered with life. <sup>5</sup> This is what God made us for, and he has given us the Spirit to be a guarantee for this new life. <sup>6</sup> So we always have courage. We know that while we live in this body, we are away from the Lord. <sup>7</sup> We live by what we believe, not by what we can see. <sup>8</sup> So I say that we have courage. We really want to be away from this body and be at home with the Lord. <sup>9</sup> Our only goal is to please God whether we live here or there,



The **others who have no hope** are the unbelievers. This does not mean Christians are not supposed to grieve over the loss of someone. Grief is a normal human emotion which even Jesus experienced.

**John 11:35** Jesus cried. [Over the death of Lazarus]

But our grief is different from the unbelievers', because we have hope of the resurrection.

**1 Thessalonians 4:16** 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 those who have died believing in Christ will rise first.

**1 Thessalonians 4:14** We believe that Jesus died and that he rose again. So, because of him, God will raise with Jesus those who have died.

The death and resurrection of Jesus are among the best-attested facts of history. Since we know these events took place, we can be equally certain that the dead in Christ will accompany Jesus on His return.

**1 Thessalonians 4:15** What we tell you now is the Lord's own message. We who are living when the Lord comes again will not go before those who have already died.

**The Lord's own message** – not from Paul's own imaginings. How Jesus got this information to Paul is not known.

This truth brings us comfort. Evidently the Thessalonians were concerned that believers who had died would miss the glory associated with the coming of the Lord.

**1 Thessalonians 4:16** 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 those who have died believing in Christ will rise first.

**For the Lord himself will come down** – He sent angels to announce the birth of Christ, but the rapture won't be the ministry of angels. It will be the Lord Himself.

**With a loud command...with the trumpet** these words are difficult to interpret. Who will shout? Who will blow the trumpet? Will it be Jesus' voice, or Michael's? or is God figuratively describing the call of God that will announce His coming? These events could be references to the same event, or they could be separate simultaneous announcements.

One thing is sure: Christ's return for His saints will be announced from heaven forcefully and dramatically.

**Those who have died believing in Christ** could include all the righteous dead since creation, or the righteous dead before Christ might not be raised to life again until the end of the Great Tribulation (Daniel 12:2). Though it appears that Paul's immediate concern was to reassure the Thessalonians that their recently-dead brethren will not be forgotten.

There has been some concern about the dead who were cremated, lost at sea, or had their bodies scavenged by animals. How will they be raised? The God who created everything in the universe out of nothing will surely be able to reassemble our bodies!

**1 Thessalonians 4:17 After that, we who are still alive will be gathered up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And we will be with the Lord forever.**

Immediately after the dead in Christ are raised, the living in Christ will be caught up. By using the word **we**, Paul thought he would still be alive at the time of the Rapture.

After both the dead and the living are caught up, **we will be with the Lord forever**. The "where" is not important. The important thing is that we are **with the Lord**.

We are not given a lot of clear information about where we will be after death or rapture. That hasn't stopped many people from speaking with absolute certainty about what it will be like. I believe the fact that we are not told much about it is to keep our focus on the important consideration, which is that wherever we are, we will be with the Lord. Nothing else will matter!!!

The events described here and in the parallel passages in 1 Corinthians 15 are significantly different from the events of the second coming – Christ's return to the earth to set up His earthly kingdom. (Revelation 19:11-21). The Rapture is a separate event from the Second Coming. Some have described it as if we were caught up, and then immediately came back down in Christ's Second Coming. Those are separate events, and it appears there is a great battle (Armageddon) in between the events.

**1 Thessalonians 4:18 So encourage each other with these words.**

Not only do Christians not grieve like unbelievers, but we can actually look forward eagerly to that great day. This is our hope: to be united with Him forever.

**Encourage** also indicates to instruct and to exhort one another and to talk about these things.