

NOTES ON THE EPISTLES TO THE THESSALONIANS

* * * **LETTERS ELABORATING THE BLESSED HOPE** * * *

S.L.H.
Soli Deo Gloria!

"And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, who delivered us from the wrath to come."
1 Thessalonians 1:10

AUTHOR: The Apostle Paul (c. 50 AD)

AUTHORSHIP AND DATE. 1 Thessalonians may have been Paul's first inspired epistle, with 2 Thessalonians following not long after in response to questions that arose following receipt of the first letter. Paul founded the church at Thessalonica on his second missionary journey, recorded in Acts 17:1-10; it was comprised of some Jews and many Gentiles (Act17:4). After having preached to the Jews in the synagogue on "three sabbath days" (Act17:2), and to the Gentiles in the community for an undisclosed (but presumably short) period of time after that, unbelieving Jews forced Paul to leave the city (Act17:5-9). Paul went from Thessalonica to Berea (Act17:10), then to Athens (Act17:16), then to Corinth (Act18:1). While in Athens, Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to "establish" the believers there (1Thess3:1-2). Timothy rejoined Paul in Corinth (Act18:5), bringing questions from the Thessalonians; Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians was sent from Corinth (c. 50 AD).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND. The city of Thessalonica had been founded by Cassander (c. 315 BC), one of Alexander the Great's four generals who divided his empire after his death (cf. Dan8:8); Cassander named the city after his wife, who was a sister of Alexander. Because the city aided Anthony and Octavius in their conflict against Brutus and Cassius, Thessalonica was made a free city by Octavius (i.e., Caesar Augustus). In the 1st century, Thessalonica was a thriving Aegean seaport and capital of the Roman province of Macedonia (Act27:2). The Egnatian Way, the Roman road from Rome to Byzantium, passed through Thessalonica. Mount Olympus, where the gods of the Greek pantheon were purported to dwell, could be seen from Thessalonica.

KEY WORD/THEME. A key word in the epistles is "**sanctification**" (cf. 1Thess4:3,4; 5:23; 2Thess2:13). In the exposition of the text of the epistles, it will be important to understand the various ways "sanctification" is used in Scripture (see the CHART: THE THREE TENSES OF SALVATION). The theme of the epistles is the return of the Lord, which is prominent in every chapter of both epistles (1Thess1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:13-17; 5:1-10; 2Thess1:7-10; 2:1-12; 3:5). The Thessalonian believers were experiencing persecution¹ for their faith in Jesus (cf. 1Thess1:6; 3:3-4; 2Thess1:4) up to and including death, and in the context of their

¹ The persecution of the believers at Thessalonica was incited by unbelieving Jews (Act17:5; cf. 1Thess2:14; Rev2:9). The particular sensitivity of the rulers of Thessalonica, inflamed by the Jews, was a fear of losing their status as a free city if it appeared that their loyalty to Rome was in question (perhaps raised by Paul's premillennial, eschatological teaching; cf. Act17:7-8).

tribulation/suffering (cf. Jn16:33; 2Tim3:12) Paul emphasized the hope of Christ's return (1Thess2:19). Thus, the connection: the progressive sanctification of the believer is motivated by his belief in the imminent return of the Lord (cf. 1Jn3:2-3), and his perfect sanctification (i.e., glorification) will be realized at the time of the rapture (1Cor15:51-53; 1Thess4:16-17).

OUTLINE OF 1 THESSALONIANS. (FOCUS: The Hope of Christ's Return)

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|---|----------------------------|
| I. REFLECTIONS ON THE THESSALONIANS | 1 Thessalonians 1-3 |
| A. Commendation of Their Conversion/Growth | 1Thess1:1-10 |
| B. Paul's Founding of the Church | 1Thess2:1-16 |
| C. Timothy's Strengthening of the Church | 1Thess2:17-3:13 |
| II. INSTRUCTIONS TO THE THESSALONIANS | 1 Thessalonians 4-5 |
| A. Sanctification Relative to Sexual Purity | 1Thess4:1-12 |
| B. The Rapture of the Church | 1Thess4:13-18 |
| C. The Day of the Lord | 1Thess5:1-11 |
| D. Exhortation for Holy Living | 1Thess5:12-28 |

OUTLINE OF 2 THESSALONIANS. (FOCUS: The Day of the Lord)

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| I. ENCOURAGEMENT IN CONTEXT OF PERSECUTION | 2 Thessalonians 1 |
| II. ELABORATION ON THE DAY OF THE LORD | 2 Thessalonians 2 |
| III. EXPECTATIONS WHILE WAITING FOR THE LORD'S RETURN | 2 Thessalonians 3 |

DISPENSATIONAL NOTE. In the N.T., allusions to the return of the Lord can refer to either: 1) the rapture of the Church before the Tribulation, or 2) the second coming of Christ at the end of the Tribulation (to rescue Israel and establish His Kingdom on earth). References to the return of the Lord in Scripture must be "rightly divided" (2Tim2:15) between these two future events based on context.

1 THESSALONIANS

CHAPTER 1

SALUTATION

Paul's epistles² follow the common format of the 1st century Greco-Roman world. The opening always begins with three elements: 1) the name of the writer, 2) the name of the recipient, and 3) a formal greeting.

- [1] "Paul" authored the epistle, but he included "Silvanus" (the Latin form of Silas) and "Timothy" due to their close association with the establishment of "the church of the Thessalonians" (cf. Act17:10,14-15; 18:5; 1Thess3:1-2). Paul makes explicit mention of the believers' position "in the Lord Jesus Christ" (cf. Rom8:1; 2Cor5:17), of particular relevance to a church that is suffering great persecution; irrespective of what might happen in this world, the Thessalonian believers' position in Christ (i.e., salvation) can never be lost (cf. Rom8:35-39). "Grace" and "peace" (in that order) are Paul's standard greeting. "Peace" is the equivalent of the Hebrew *shalom*, which is made possible by the gospel of "grace" (Rom5:1).

Historical Background. In organizing the second missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas disputed over the issue of taking John Mark, who had abandoned them on the first missionary journey; this led to a split between Paul and Barnabas in their subsequent ministry activities, with Barnabas taking Mark and Paul taking Silas (cf. Act15:36-40). Paul met Silas at the council at Jerusalem following his first missionary journey; Silas was among the "chief men" at Jerusalem (Act15:22) who had "hazarded their lives for the name of ... Christ" (Act15:26). Timothy was a younger "disciple" from "Derbe and Lystra" who joined Paul and Silas as they passed through that region; Timothy had a Greek (presumably unbelieving) father, but a devout Jewish mother and grandmother who had raised him with a knowledge of "the holy scriptures" from childhood. Timothy became an indispensable partner in ministry with Paul for the remainder of his life, with Paul acting as his spiritual father (Act16:1-3; cf. 1Cor4:17; 2Tim1:5-6; 3:14-15).

- [2] Paul expressed gratitude for the Thessalonian believers. Their perseverance in the faith during a period of "affliction" and "tribulation" (1Thess3:3-4) undoubtedly encouraged Paul, who often found himself in similar situations (cf. 2Cor11:23-27).
- [3] The nouns in the genitive case are causative. That is, "faith" produces "work", "love" produces "labor", and "hope" produces "patience" (i.e., perseverance). Note that the object of their "hope" was the "Lord Jesus Christ" (Cp., Jn16:33); "God" sees their "hope" and has committed to honor it, since "hope maketh not ashamed" (Rom5:5).
- [4] Addressing the Thessalonians as "brethren", Paul considers them to be saved (i.e., genuine believers). Their "work", "labor", and

² The exception to this pattern is the Epistle to the Hebrews, which was addressed to Jewish, rather than Gentile, recipients. In addition, Paul's name carried a unique apostolic authority with the Gentiles (cf. Rom11:13; 15:16; Gal2:7-9).

"patience" (v3) had not merited salvation, but they were evidences of salvation. Paul can "know" of their "election of God" because of their position in Christ (v1; cf. Isa42:1; Eph1:4-6).

THE CONVERSION AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH OF THE THESSALONIANS

- [5] Paul called the message they preached "our gospel" (Cp., Rom2:16; 16:25; 1Tim2:8), by which he emphasized the exclusive gospel of unadulterated grace that had been revealed to him directly by the risen Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Gall:6-12). The conversions of the believers at Thessalonica "came not ... in word only", meaning it was not the result of an eloquent sermon delivered by gifted orator (Cp., 1Cor2:1-5); the "power" associated with the "word" came from "the Holy Ghost", not Paul. Note that the conversion of these believers was accompanied by an "assurance" of salvation (Cp., 1Jn5:13) that is only possible if it is wholly by grace (cf. Eph2:8-9; Gall:6; 2Tim2:13). Such "assurance" was reinforced, in part, by the "manner of men" (i.e., lifestyle) displayed by Paul, Silas, and Timothy "among" the Thessalonians (cf. 1Thess2:5-10).
- [6] The believers became "followers ... of the Lord" after the pattern exhibited for them by Paul, Silas, and Timothy (Cp., 1Cor11:1; 1Tim1:16). Though their conversion resulted "in much affliction" (Cp., Act17:5; 1Thess2:14; 3:3-4), yet they experienced the supernatural fruit of "joy of the Holy Ghost" (Gal5:22). Note that "the word" was "received" not because of any prospect of deliverance from their present "affliction"; rather, it was "received" in spite of the "affliction" it brought (cf. 2Tim3:12).
- [7] In turn, the believers in Thessalonica became "examples" to "all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia" (i.e., northern and southern Greece, respectively; Cp., Deut4:6).
- [8] Paul did not have to "speak anything" concerning the believers in Thessalonica and their fervent testimony to the gospel since their reputation had already "spread abroad" even beyond Greece, likely because of Thessalonica's strategic location on the Egnatian Way which brought them into daily contact with travelers coming/going from far abroad (both east from Byzantium and west from Rome).
- [9] In evangelizing pagans, who worship many gods, the danger is always that they merely accept the "God" of the Bible as yet another "idol" and add it to their existing pantheon³ (Cp., Act14:6-15). The conversion of the Thessalonians resulted in genuine repentance, in that they "**turned to God from idols**, to serve the living and true God", as Abraham had (cf. Josh24:2). Note that, in contrast to the pagan gods represented by "idols", "God" is characterized as "living" and "true" (implying that all pagan representations are lifeless and false; cf. Isa41:21-24; Jer10:2-6).

³ Note that the city of Thessalonica was situated in the shadow of Mount Olympus, where the gods of the Greek pantheon were purported to dwell.

[10] Having "turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God" (v9), the believers' present hope was the imminent⁴ return of Christ (Cp., 1Cor15:19; Tit2:13). "Jesus" is referred to as the "Son [of God; v9]", an implicit reference to His deity; that God "raised [Him] from the dead" emphasizes Jesus is a living Savior in contrast to lifeless idols. That the coming of "Jesus" in view is for the purpose of deliverance "from the wrath⁵ [of God] to come" indicates the Thessalonians expected the rapture of the Church to occur before the Tribulation⁶ (cf. Luk21:34-36).

Greek Notes. The Greek verb translated "wait" is in the present tense, which expresses continuous action; this is consistent with an imminent rapture. Furthermore, it includes the prefix *ἀνα*, which when used in conjunction with an accusative ("Son") adds the sense of *waiting up* (i.e., remaining awake in anticipation; e.g., 1Thess5:6). The Greek word translated "delivered" is *ῥυομαι*, meaning *to draw to one's self, to rescue, to deliver*, is very likely an explicit reference to the rapture of the Church (Cp., Jn14:3; 1Thess4:17). It is used proleptically⁷; that is, the believer's deliverance at the rapture is yet future, but its certainty is so sure it is spoken of in the past tense. Finally, the preposition "from" is the Greek *εκ*, meaning "from" in the sense of *out of*; the rapture will deliver the believer "out of" the very time of the Tribulation, which means it must occur before the Tribulation (Cp., Rev3:10).

CHAPTER 2

PAUL'S FOUNDING OF THE CHURCH AT THESSALONICA

In Chapter 2, Paul gives a concise review of how the church at Thessalonica was established as a result of his ministry to them. The emphasis is on the fact that Paul did not minister by means of "flattering words" (v5), nor sought he personal "glory" (v6), nor did he take any financial support from them (vv6,9); rather, their response was based on a "bold" preaching of the "gospel" (v2) and the conviction of the Holy Spirit (1Thess1:5). The necessity for this defense seems to have been a context in which his adversaries in Thessalonica (cf. Act17:5-9) accused Paul and his associates of being charlatans, a charge he also had to answer in Corinth (Cp., 1Cor2:1-5; 2Cor4:1-2).

[1] Paul's "entrance" into Thessalonica had not been in "vain"; his ministry had produced genuine conversions among the citizens of the city (cf. 1Thess1:9-10; 2:13).

⁴ Imminency means that the return of Christ to rapture His Church could happen at any moment. According to Walvoord, "Many things *may* happen before He comes, but nothing must transpire before He can come".

⁵ The entire 7-year Tribulation period, most frequently called "the day of the LORD" in Scripture, is an outpouring of the wrath of God upon the earth (cf. Isa13:6-9; Zeph1:14-18).

⁶ The alternative to a pre-tribulational rapture, namely that God intends to supernaturally protect/preserve the Church while it remains present on the earth during the Tribulation, makes no sense given that Revelation 6-19 (i.e., the 7-year Tribulation period) records the wholesale martyrdom of believers (e.g., Rev6:9-10; 7:9-17; 14:13; 20:4).

⁷ Especially in Bible prophecy, the proleptic usage is commonly termed the *prophetic past tense*.

- [2] Immediately prior to coming to Thessalonica, Paul had been "shamefully treated ... at Philippi" (Cp., Act16:19-24); Philippi was a Roman colony, whereas Thessalonica was a free Roman city. And yet, his personal affliction at the hands of the Roman government did not deter his "bold[ness]" in preaching "the gospel" to the Thessalonians, even though it resulted in "much contention". Thus, when Paul exhorts believers to stand fast in Christ in the face of persecution, he does so from personal experience; this is not the behavior of a charlatan.
- [3] Paul's motivation was not an intent to deceive (as a charlatan), nor was it motivated by "uncleanness" (i.e., sexual impurity); this latter charge may have resulted from the fact that women were responding to Paul's ministry in disproportionate numbers (Cp., Act17:4).
- [4] Paul was uniquely entrusted with "the gospel" of pure and unadulterated grace to be taken directly to the Gentiles (Cp., 1Thess1:5; Rom11:13; 15:15-16; Gal2:7-9; Eph3:1-2; 1Tim1:11). His preaching of this gospel was vehemently resisted, by both Jews and Romans⁸.
- [5] Paul's preaching was not with "flattering words" (Cp., 1Cor2:1-5); it is the "words", not their delivery, that have intrinsic power (Rom1:16), which serves as a scriptural rebuke to modern, seeker-sensitive strategies and homiletic methodologies that are presumed to be more effective (Cp., 2Tim4:2). Nor did Paul minister out of "covetousness", desiring some personal gain; his desire was to benefit his hearers. Although the Thessalonians could not know the desires of Paul's heart, Paul appealed to "God" as his "witness".
- [6] As "apostles⁹ of Christ", Paul, Silas, and Timothy (cf. 1Thess1:1) could have expected financial support from the Thessalonian believers (1Tim5:17-18); Paul did not assert that obligation so as not to "burden" them (Cp., 2Thess3:7). This may suggest that the Thessalonian believers were poor, which would be consistent with Paul's message that their hope should be in the age to come, rather than the present.
- [7] Paul cared for the Thessalonians as a "nurse cherisheth her [own] children", putting their needs ahead of his own.
- [8] Paul did not simply "impart" to the Thessalonians "the gospel of God", but he spent his "own soul" upon them. This is probably a reference to his time spent in physical labor to support himself and his companions, in addition to that spent ministering to the believers.
- [9] Paul "labor[ed]" during the "day", presumably as a tentmaker (cf. Act18:3), and during the "night" in ministry to the Thessalonians. This would have been physically taxing, but Paul did not want to be

⁸ Paul's gospel was offensive to Jews because it was directed toward Gentiles and offered justification apart from obedience to the Law of Moses (Act15:1-5); it was offensive to Romans because it proclaimed Jesus Christ to be a coming earthly king greater than Caesar (Act17:7).

⁹ Note that Silas and Timothy are reckoned as "apostles" (also Barnabas; Cp., Act14:14).

"chargeable" to them. This ministry approach also undermined the accusation of "covetousness" (v5).

- [10] Paul's behavior among the Thessalonian believers was "holy", "just", and "unblameable", as expected of "ministers of Christ" (1Cor4:1-2); these attributes become requirements for "elders" (cf. Tit1:5-6,8).
- [11] Paul compares his relationship with the believers at Thessalonica to that of a "father" and "his children".
- [12] A believer's position in Christ (1Thess1:1) is granted "by grace", "through faith", and is "not of works" (Eph2:8-9), after which he is "sealed" by the "Holy Spirit of God ... unto the day of redemption" (Eph4:30). While the believer is secure in his salvation irrespective of subsequent behavior, he is called to "walk worthy of God" (Cp., Eph4:1); this walk will be evaluated and rewarded at "the judgment seat of Christ (cf. 1Cor3:10-15; 2Cor5:10; Rev22:12). The destiny of the believer is the "kingdom [of God]"; to properly understand the kingdom of God as used by the Apostle Paul, see the CHART: RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE KINGDOM OF GOD.
- [13] Paul's writings to the Thessalonians (i.e., his two epistles to them) are "the word of God". Although this revelation was penned/delivered by a man, it is not "the word of men"; God was its author (cf. 2Pet2:19-21), and God gave the words by inspiration (2Tim3:16). The inspiration of the scriptures is a mystery, but it is "truth"; as "truth" (cf. Isa8:20; Jn17:17), the scriptures are absolutely authoritative on every subject upon which they speak¹⁰. Furthermore, God's word produces an "effectual work" in all "that believe", which is the new birth (cf. 1Pet1:23). The Thessalonians are commended for receiving Paul's words as "the word of God".
- [14] Paul compares the church in Thessalonica to the "churches" in "Judea", in that both are "suffer[ing]" persecution for their faith "in Christ" at the hands of their "own countrymen"; in both cases, the persecutors were unbelieving Jews (Cp., Act17:5-8).

Christian Suffering and the Will of God. For the Christian, trials, tribulation, and persecution often come, not because the believer is outside the will of God, but rather because he is squarely in the will of God (2Tim3:12). The source of such suffering is Satanic attack (Eph6:11-12).

- [15] Paul charges unbelieving Jews with the following crimes: 1) they "killed the Lord Jesus" (Act2:36), 2) they "killed their own prophets" (Matt23:33-35), and 3) they "persecuted" the early Christians, a crime of which Paul was himself also guilty (Gall1:13; 1Tim1:13).

¹⁰ The presuppositional apologist Cornelius Van Til wrote, "The Bible is authoritative on everything of which it speaks. Moreover, it speaks of everything". The Bible speaks on much more than merely religious issues; it speaks on matters of history, government, economics, education, science, etc., and it is authoritative in all these areas. This is the failure of modern, government (i.e., public) education; it teaches all these subjects without consideration for what the Bible says concerning them—thus, it is incomplete at best, and more often foundationally in error. For this reason, Noah Webster asserted that, "Education is useless without the Bible".

- [16] The opposition of unbelieving Jews to the ministry of the Apostle Paul was a particularly heinous offense, in that it served to prevent "Gentiles" from hearing the gospel such "that they might be saved" (Cp., Rom11:28). Such heinous sin serves to hasten the "wrath" (i.e., the righteous judgment of God; Cp., Gen15:16) that will "come upon them" guilty of hindering the gospel.
- [17] Paul was forced to leave Thessalonica after a "short time", perhaps as short as three weeks (Act17:2), but it was his "great desire" to see them again.
- [18] In fact, "Paul" had endeavored to return to Thessalonica "once and again" (i.e., repeatedly), but "Satan hindered" him from doing so. Scripture is clear that Satan is active in opposing God's work in churches (Cp., Act5:3; 2Cor2:11; 1Tim3:6-7; Rev2:9-10,13,24; 3:9). This instance of Satanic obstruction was permitted by God, but it was used by Him for our ultimate good (Rom8:28); namely, because Paul was unable to personally journey to see the Thessalonians, he penned two inspired letters to them which we have in Scripture today!
- [19] Although Paul likely never saw the Thessalonian believers again in his physical life, his "hope" (i.e., confident expectation) and "joy" was to see them again "in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming". Cross-referencing this with 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14, it is clear that this is a reference to the **rapture**. Finally, Paul expects to receive a "crown of rejoicing" (i.e., reward at the judgment seat of Christ; 2Thess5:10) for having led the believers at Thessalonica to faith in Christ; presumably this is a reward available to all soul-winners (Prov11:30).
- [20] The source of Paul's "glory" and "joy" in the life to come will be reunion with those he led to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER 3

SANCTIFICATION BY MEANS OF SUFFERING

In Chapter 3, Paul expounds on the role of suffering (to a church experiencing persecution; cf. 2Thess1:4) in the process of progressive sanctification of the believer.

- [1] After Paul was forced to leave Thessalonica, he first went to Berea. However, the unbelieving Jews of Thessalonica followed him there, so he was soon compelled to leave Berea for "Athens" (Act17:10-15).
- [2] Paul had spent perhaps as few as three weeks in Thessalonica (Cp., Act17:2). To "establish" and "comfort" the fledgling church, Paul "sent Timothy" back to Thessalonica to "minister" to the saints. Note that their need for "comfort" will result in God's revelation of the **rapture** of the Church as its ultimate "comfort" (cf. Jn14:1; 1Thess4:18) and hope (cf. Tit2:13).
- [3] Paul does not offer believers the promise of freedom from "afflictions" (Greek, **θλίψις**; often translated *tribulation*, as in v4) in this present life; in fact, he asserts that "we" (i.e., all Christians) are "appointed to these things" (cf. Jn16:33; 2Tim3:12).

Trials and the associated suffering are part of the process of sanctification of a Christian: 1) to demonstrate the reality of our faith (1Pet1:7), 2) to cause our faith to grow (Rom5:1-4), and 3) to equip us to comfort others (2Cor1:3-4).

- [4] When Paul was with the Thessalonians, "before" they began to "suffer tribulation", he warned them that it would come. Believers are to expect suffering, affliction, and tribulation because of their faith in Jesus Christ (2Tim3:12).

Tribulation under Law vs. Grace. Under the Mosaic covenant, Israel suffered tribulation for covenant unfaithfulness resulting in the LORD's chastisement of the nation (Lev26:14-39; Deut28:15-68); such tribulation could be relieved by repentance and a return to covenant faithfulness (Lev26:40-46). During the Dispensation of Grace, the Body of Christ has been "appointed" to suffer "affliction" and "tribulation" (1Thess3:3-4; cf. Jn16:33; 2Tim3:12) with no expectation of temporal relief. The hope of the Body of Christ is not to be found in this world, but in the **rapture** of the Church (Tit2:13) out of this world (Cp., Col3:1-4).

- [5] In the Greek text, "faith" is articulated (i.e., "the faith"); when articulated, it is the content of what is believed that is in view, not the action of believing it. Paul is concerned to "know" what the Thessalonians believe (i.e., do they still believe what he taught them?; this will also be an issue in 2Thess2:2). He feared that false doctrine introduced by "the tempter" (i.e., Satan; 2Thess2:18) had "tempted" them to forsake his teachings.

The Power of Faith. There is no power in faith, per se. The power of faith is entirely resident in its object (Cp., Mk11:22-23). Thus, it is not sufficient to merely believe, even fervently/sincerely, if that belief is placed in a powerless object. Thus, what one believes is as important, if not more so, as the act of believing. Biblical faith always has God and His promises as its object (cf. Mk11:22; Act16:31; Rom4:20-21; 1Cor15:1-4). Biblical faith has power because God is all-powerful and His promises are sure. If it is placed in anyone/anything other than God and what He has said, one's "faith is vain" (1Cor15:2,17).

- [6] Here, "faith" is again articulated. Paul was encouraged when "Timothy" brought "good tidings" concerning "[the] faith" of the Thessalonians, having "good remembrance" of Paul and his teachings. Timothy noted the Thessalonians' "faith" and "charity" (i.e., love), but not hope (Cp., 1Cor13:13); the remainder of Paul's epistles to the Thessalonians will be dedicated to the subject of hope (i.e., Christ's return; 1Thess1:3; 2:19).
- [7] Whereas it had been Paul's intent to "comfort" the Thessalonian believers by the mission of Timothy to them, Timothy's report of "[the] faith" (again, articulated) of the Thessalonians in the midst of "affliction and distress" had the effect of greatly "comfort[ing]" the apostle Paul.
- [8] To "stand fast" is a military command meaning do not retreat when experiencing an enemy assault (Cp., Eph6:13-14; Phil4:1), it is a command to remain exactly where you are, which is "in the Lord".

Paul characterizes the Christian life as a war, and elsewhere exhorts Timothy to "war a good warfare" (1Tim1:18) and to "fight the good fight of faith" (1Tim6:12). Soldiers that quit in battle are a great discouragement to their brothers (Cp., Deut20:8).

- [9] Paul's question is rhetorical. The faith and conduct of the Thessalonian believers are a source of great "joy" to the apostle, for which he thanks "God".
- [10] Paul desires to return to Thessalonica and complete his teaching of the believers there, not possible in the brief time he had with them. Again, "faith" is articulated, meaning the content of what the Thessalonian's believed. Paul says that the content of their "faith" is "lacking" (i.e., incomplete), and he desired to "perfect" (i.e., mature or complete) it; this he does, at least in part, through his two inspired epistles to the Thessalonians.
- [11] Verses 11-13 are a prayer of Paul. Paul desires to be allowed to return to Thessalonica, which was apparently unfulfilled.

Greek Note. The subject of this sentence, "God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ", is compound (i.e., plural), yet the verb "direct" is singular. This is analogous to the multitude of sentences in the O.T. having *Elohim* as the subject, which always take a singular verb. This is not a grammatical error, but a theological assertion of the essential unity of the Godhead (1Jn5:7). In this case, it is an implicit assertion of the deity of Christ.

- [12] The Thessalonians were noted for their "love" (v6), but Paul prays that it might "increase and abound". Love is a virtue that cannot be carried to an inappropriate excess.
- [13] Paul prays for the sanctification of the believers, expressed as a desire for them to be "unblamable in holiness"; this refers to their practical or progressive sanctification, as they are already sanctified positionally by their faith in Christ (see the CHART: THE THREE TENSES OF SALVATION).

In context, the "coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" is a reference to the **rapture** of the Church, not the Second Coming, even though references to these two distinct events are described in similar terms (Cp., Jude14). It is at the rapture that members of the Body of Christ will receive their resurrection/glorified (i.e., perfectly sanctified) bodies (cf. 1Cor15:51-57), as well as being reunited with loved ones who "sleep in Jesus" (1Thess4:14); these are the "saints" that Jesus will "bring with him".

CHAPTER 4

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE THESSALONIANS

Chapter 4 transitions from Paul's reflections on the Thessalonians to his specific instructions to them. This chapter begins with the issue of the importance of sexual purity for the believer (vv1-12) and ends with the most detailed description in the N.T. of the **rapture** of the Church (vv13-18), which is presented as a source of "comfort" and "hope" for the Christian.

SANCTIFICATION RELATIVE TO SEXUAL PURITY

- [1] Paul opens this section with, "we beseech you, brethren". By addressing them as "brethren", Paul indicates they are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ (i.e., positionally sanctified). The verb "beseech" is an *urgent* but *gracious appeal*. Thus, the Apostle is not putting Christians under the Law of Moses (Rom6:14), but "exhort[ing]" us to "walk to please God", which is the goal of our progressive sanctification.
- [2] This is a call for the Thessalonians to remember Paul's teaching when he was with them.
- [3] In the N.T., the English noun "will" is a translation of one of two Greek words: **θέλημα** (meaning *desire*) or **βούλη** (meaning *decree*). In this verse, "the will of God" is **θέλημα**, meaning God's desire for every believer is their progressive "sanctification" in this life, but this desire is not realized equally in every believer; however, every believer is "predestinated to be conformed to the image of [God's] Son" (Rom8:29) at the rapture/resurrection, which is ultimate sanctification (i.e., glorification). A major element of our progressive "sanctification" is to "abstain from fornication". The word "fornication" can be used denotatively to mean sex outside of marriage, or connotatively to encompass every form of sexual impurity; it is used connotatively in this verse. Thus, adultery, pre- and extra-marital sex, homosexual behavior, forbidden sexual unions (cf. Lev18:1-30; 20:10-23), etc., are all in view.
- [4] Verse 4 is a positive reiteration of v3. The Christian should "know" (or learn) how to "possess" (i.e., control) his "vessel" (i.e., body; Cp., 2Tim2:21) in "sanctification"; he must do so in way(s) that "honor" the Lord.
- [5] The Gentile (especially Greek) world of the 1st century was saturated with sexual licentiousness and perversion, much like today. In the midst of "Gentiles¹¹", "who know not God" (i.e., unbelievers), Christians must not yield to the "lust of concupiscence". Here, the KJV provides a translation that is exactly faithful to the Greek text, but is often misunderstood because modern English dictionaries incorrectly define "concupiscence" as simply *strong sexual desire* (making it a synonym for "lust"). Noah Webster's 1828 Dictionary correctly defines "concupiscence" as *unlawful or forbidden sexual desire*. The Bible never forbids sexual desire/passion between a man and a woman within marriage (Cp., Heb13:4). The "lust of concupiscence" is *strong sexual desire for that which is forbidden [by God]*. **All modern versions translate this prohibition incorrectly.**
- [6] "That no man go beyond" is a reference back to "concupiscence" (v5), sexual behaviors that are forbidden by God. In view here is especially adultery, which "defraud[s a] brother"; thus, adultery is not merely a sexual sin, but also theft. The "Lord" is said to be an "avenger of all such" sins against one's brother (Cp., Rom12:19).

¹¹ Note that the Thessalonian believers, members of the Church, are no longer reckoned as "Gentiles" (cf. 1Cor10:32).

- [7] All sexual sin falls under the Biblical category of "uncleanness", whereas God calls the believer to "holiness" (i.e., sanctification; Cp., Lev19:2; 1Pet1:16).
- [8] This refers to one who "despiseth" the sexual boundaries "God" has established. "God", who not only set those boundaries, "that also given unto us his Holy Spirit" to empower the believer to "abstain from fornication" (v3; Cp., 1Cor6:18-20).
- [9] The restrictions God has set on sexual behavior do not preclude "brotherly love" (Greek, *φιλαδελφία*), which should be readily shown to "one another"; thus, "brotherly love" is a non-sexual expression of "love".
- [10] Paul commends the Thessalonians for showing "brotherly love" (v9) to "all the brethren who are in all Macedonia" (i.e., northern Greece), but exhorts them to "increase more and more".
- [11] To avoid temptations to "fornication" (v3), believers are commended to: 1) "study to be quiet" (i.e., stay out of the limelight; 1Tim2:2), 2) "[mind] your own business" (Prov25:17), and 3) "work with your own hands" (i.e., stay busy, especially in physical labor, and avoid excessive leisure time; "idle hands are the Devil's workshop").
- [12] Also at issue relative to sexual purity is one's reputation "toward them that are without" (i.e., outside the faith, unbelievers; cf. 1Tim3:7; 1Pet2:12).

THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 is the most detailed passage in the N.T. on the **rapture** of the Church. It is at the time of the rapture that all members of the Church will be glorified (i.e., **perfect sanctification**). The rapture is presented as a doctrine that should be a source of comfort and hope for believers during the present dispensation. Although the rapture was a mystery revealed in full by the Apostle Paul (1Cor15:51-52), it was first introduced by the Lord Jesus to His disciples in the Upper Room (Cp., Jn14:1-3). The rapture of the Church is an event distinct from the second coming of Christ.

- [13] Paul introduced the subject of the rapture as a doctrine about which believers should not be "ignorant". It is apparent that Paul had instructed the Thessalonians about the rapture when he was with them (Cp., 2Thess2:5). However, since that time some believers had died (perhaps as a result of the persecution the church faced); would they miss out on the rapture? In vv13-14, "sleep" is used as a euphemism for a believer who has died (Cp., Jn11:11; 1Cor11:30). Though death always brings "sorrow", there is "hope" (i.e., confident expectation; cf. Rom4:18) for the believer; in contrast, the unbeliever who has died has "no hope".
- [14] When Jesus returns at the time of the rapture, God will "bring with him" those who "sleep in Jesus". The propositional phrase "in Jesus" is a technical term, equivalent to "in Christ" (cf. Rom8:1; 2Cor5:17), for believers during the Church Age who have been baptized into the Body of Christ (i.e., the Church; Rom6:3-4; 1Cor12:12-

13,27). Thus, the rapture only involves the Body of Christ (both living and dead members), not saints from other dispensations¹².

- [15] In saying revelation concerning the rapture comes "by the word of the Lord", Paul simply means the Lord Jesus Christ had Himself introduced the doctrine (Cp., Jn14:1-3; see Table below). Those believers who are alive at the time of Christ's return for His Church will not "precede [in glorification] them who are asleep". That is, dead believers brought with Christ will be resurrected (v16) before living believers are raptured/transformed (v17; cf. 1Cor15:51-52). Note that by putting himself into the category of believers who are alive at the Lord's return (i.e., "we who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord"), Paul implicitly asserts the imminency of the rapture.

Points of Correspondence in Rapture Passages

John 14:1-3	1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
v1 "troubled"	v13 "sorrow"
v1 "believe"	v14 "believe"
v1 "God", "me"	v14 "Jesus", "God"
v2 "told you"	v15 "say unto you"
v3 "come again"	v15 "coming of the Lord"
v3 "receive you"	v17 "caught up"
v3 "unto myself"	v17 "to meet the Lord"
v3 "where I am, there ye may be"	v17 "ever be with the Lord"

- [16] At the rapture "the Lord [Jesus]" will "descend from heaven", but He does not come all the way to the earth; He stops "in the clouds ... in the air" (v17). This is an important distinction from the second coming of Christ (cf. Zech14:4). By "the dead in Christ shall rise first" is meant the resurrection of members of the Body of Christ (i.e., the Church) who have died before the rapture; they are "first", relative to living believers, to receive glorified bodies.

Associated with the rapture are: 1) "the voice of the archangel" (i.e., Michael; Jude9; Cp., Rev4:1), and 2) "the trump of God" (Cp., 1Cor15:52; Rev4:1). Many have attempted to connect the "trump of God", or the "last trump" (1Cor15:52), heard at the time of the rapture to either the Feast of Trumpets (Lev23:24) or the 7th trumpet judgment in the Book of Revelation (Rev11:15) as a means of establishing either the date of the rapture or its position in the chronological sequence of events relative to the Tribulation; however, such connections cannot be sustained¹³.

- [17] "Then", following the resurrection of dead believers, living believers will be "caught up" (Greek, *ἄρπάζω*; cf. Act8:39). This catching up is the **rapture**¹⁴. Thus, the entire generation of believers alive on earth at the time of the rapture will not

¹² For example, O.T. saints from the nation of Israel and Tribulation saints will be resurrected at the end of the Tribulation (cf. Dan12:1-2; Rev20:4-5).

¹³ If the rapture must occur on the Feast of Trumpets, or associated with the 7th trumpet judgment (at the midpoint of the Tribulation), it is not imminent.

¹⁴ The English word **rapture** is derived from the Latin (n. raptus, v. rapio), which means a *seizing by violence* (Noah Webster, 1828). Many detractors of the doctrine of the rapture make much of the fact that "rapture" does not appear in the Bible; it does not appear in the English Bible, but it does appear in the Latin Bible.

experience death; they will receive their glorified bodies by means of an instantaneous transformation (cf. 1Cor15:51-53).

Since the rapture results in a meeting "in the air" of all dead and living members of the Body of Christ, it is in effect a reunion of Christians with their believing loved ones. After the rapture event, Christians will "ever be with the Lord", which is a promise made only to the Church; this aspect of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ is for the purpose of collecting His Bride (cf. Rom7:4; 2Cor11:2; Eph5:25,30-32; Rev19:7).

- [18] The doctrine of the rapture of the Church is intended to "comfort" believers (Cp., Jn14:1-3) and give them "hope" (v13; Cp., Tit2:13).

The Rapture and Imminency. Paul taught the Thessalonians that the rapture of the Church was an imminent event. Imminency means the rapture might happen at any moment; thus, every believer during the Church Age lives with an expectation of the rapture happening during his lifetime (Cp., Tit2:13). In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, the concept of imminency is supported by: 1) the Thessalonians feared their believing loved ones who had died had missed out on the rapture (v13), 2) Paul included himself in the generation that would experience the rapture (vv15,17), and 3) for the rapture to be a "hope" (v13) and "comfort" (v18) to the Thessalonians, it must have been a possibility for them. Only a **pre-tribulational rapture** is consistent with imminency (see the CHART: THE TIMING OF THE RAPTURE).

CHAPTER 5

THE DAY OF THE LORD

The hope of an imminent rapture of the Church that concluded Chapter 4 is contrasted in the opening of Chapter 5 with the "sudden destruction" associated with "the day of the Lord" (v2; cf. Dan9:27) that will come upon all those left behind. The order in which these two monumental events are addressed by the Apostle Paul, first the rapture (1Thess4:13-18) and then the day of the Lord (1Thess5:1-11), is consistent with a pre-tribulational rapture of the Church.

- [1] The expression "times and seasons" are used three times in Scripture (also Dan2:21; Act1:7), always in a context in which God sovereignly determines the timing of major epochs according to His plan (Cp., Isa46:9-11). In this context, the timing of the rapture and "the day of the Lord" (v2) are determined by God alone.
- [2] The expression "the day of the Lord" refers to any time when God intervenes in human history for the purpose of judgment. Sometimes it refers to a local judgement, as in the locust plague experienced by Judah (Joel1:15), but more often (as here) it refers to the world-wide judgment experienced during the 70th Week of Daniel (i.e., Dan9:27; cf. Zech1:14,15,18; 2Pet3:10). The expression "so cometh as a thief in the night" indicates that the timing of "the day of the Lord" cannot be known in advance with any certainty (cf. v1); Daniel 9:27 reveals it will start when the Antichrist makes a peace treaty with the nation of Israel and will last for 7 years (culminating with

the second coming of Christ), but the time of its beginning is known only to God (cf. Matt24:37; Mk13:32)¹⁵.

- [3] In vv3-10, note Paul's use of contrasting pronouns. Use of "we", "us", and "ye" refer to **believers**, whereas "they", "them", and "others" refer to unbelievers. As "the day of the Lord" (v2) approaches, unbelievers will think "they" are living in a world characterized by "peace and safety", not realizing that "sudden destruction" is about to break forth upon the world, which is likened to "travail upon a woman with child"; "travail" are the birth pangs associated with childbirth (cf. Gen38:27), which are often used as an analogy¹⁶ for the Tribulation (Cp., Matt24:8; Mk13:8). Unbelievers, who have been left behind after the rapture, "shall not escape" the Tribulation; though unstated, the obvious implication is that **believers** will escape the Tribulation (by means of the pre-tribulational rapture).
- [4] In contrast, **believers** "should" not be "overtake[n] ... as a thief" (i.e., surprised) as "that day" (i.e., the day of the Lord; v2) approaches; although unable to predict its arrival exactly, **believers** should recognize its approach (Cp., Matt16:2-3; Heb10:25). Whereas the rapture is a signless event, signs associated with the approach of the Tribulation necessarily imply the nearness of the rapture (see the CHART: THE RAPTURE WINDOW).
- [5] **Believers** are associated with "light" and "the day" (i.e., God/Christ, illumination and understanding; cf. Ps119:105; Jn1:5,7-9; 1Cor2:12-13), whereas unbelievers are associated with "darkness" and "the night" (i.e., Satan, ignorance; cf. Act26:18; 1Cor2:14).
- [6] Here, "sleep" (and an implied [drunkenness]; v7) associated with an unbeliever is contrasted with "watch" and "sober" associated with a **believer**. To "sleep" is to be unwatchful (thus, unaware) concerning prophetic issues: namely, the approach of "the day of the Lord" (v2) and the return of Christ. A watchfulness (thus, awareness) concerning these things should have a purifying effect in the life of a believer (Cp., 2Pet3:14; 1Jn3:2-3).
- [7] Unbelievers who "sleep" are likened to being "drunken"; they are controlled by external forces (cf. 2Tim2:26) and are unable to properly comprehend reality (cf. 1Cor2:14; 2Cor4:4).
- [8] **Believers** are "sober" and able to properly comprehend reality. Paul exhorts believers to put on "faith", "love", and "hope" (Cp., 1Cor13:13), likened to a soldier's armor (i.e., "breastplate" and "helmet"; cf. Eph6:11,14,17). In context, the "hope of salvation" is the "hope" of *deliverance* "from the wrath to come" (1Thess1:10; Cp., v9), which is a confident expectation of a pre-tribulational rapture (Cp., Tit2:13).

¹⁵ In context, the uncertainty expressed in Matthew 24:37 and Mark13:32 relates to the start of the Day of the Lord, not the rapture of the Church per se. However, since the rapture precedes the Day of the Lord by an unknown period of time, the uncertainty associated with it necessarily extends to the rapture as well.

¹⁶ Scripture's analogy of the destruction during the Tribulation with the travail of childbirth is fitting; just as a woman's pains increase in frequency and intensity as the delivery of the child draws near, so God's judgments upon the earth during the Tribulation increase in frequency and intensity as the return of Christ draws near.

- [9] As in v8, "salvation" is being used in the sense of *deliverance* from the "wrath" of God (1Thess1:10). This is not the "wrath" that damns an unbeliever, but the righteous judgment of God that will be poured out upon the earth during the Tribulation¹⁷ (Rev6:17; 11:18). Since "God hath not appointed us to wrath", the removal of the Church from earth "by our Lord Jesus Christ" in a **pre-tribulational rapture** is required; indeed, this promise of God to spare the Church from His wrath is a key tenet (along with imminency; cf. 1Thess4:18) supporting the doctrine of the pre-tribulational rapture (cf. Rev3:10).
- [10] The concluding phrase, "we should live together with [Christ]", is an allusion to the rapture (1Thess4:17). But to what does Paul refer in his contrast of "wake" vs. "sleep" in this verse; does he mean *alive* vs. *dead*, or *watchful* vs. *unwatchful*? While it is true that both living and dead members of the Body of Christ will be included in the rapture event (cf. 1Thess4:16-17), the context (cf. vv2-8) seems to better support an understanding of *watchful* vs. *unwatchful* believers. Thus, the rapture of the Church will include all its members (living and dead); even apathetic and unwatchful Christians will be included in the rapture, which is a refutation of the concept of a so-called **partial rapture**¹⁸. That being said, there is a reward promised to those who watch and "love [Christ's] appearing" (2Tim4:8).
- [11] Once again, Paul's teaching on the rapture of the Church was intended to provide "comfort" to believers, which is only true if it is pre-tribulational (Cp., 1Thess4:18).

EXHORTATION FOR HOLY LIVING

Paul concludes the epistle with an exhortation, in light of the imminent return of the Lord, to holy living (Cp., 2Pet3:14; 1Jn3:2-3).

- [12] To "beseech" is to make a gracious appeal. By "them" (plural) "who labor among you", and are "over you in the Lord", and "admonish you", Paul means elders (i.e., pastors) and teachers (cf. Act20:28; Eph4:11; Col3:16; 1Tim5:17; Tit1:5ff).
- [13] All elders (v12) are to be "esteem[ed]" by believers "for their work's sake", even though Paul qualifies this elsewhere as "elders that rule well" (1Tim5:7). Thus, elders do not occupy an anointed/untouchable office, but are held accountable for "their work" for the Lord. The exhortation to "be at peace among yourselves" in this context seems to have in view discord based on preferred leadership (Cp., 1Cor1:10-13).
- [14] Whereas vv12-13 directed believers to esteem their leaders, this verse appears directed at the leaders and their obligations within the congregation. First, "warn them that are unruly"; the "unruly"

¹⁷ Though disputed by some, Scripture is clear that the entire 7-year Tribulation period, the 70th week of Daniel (Dan9:27), also known as "the day of the Lord" (1Thess5:2), is a time of God's wrath (cf. Isal3:6-9; Zeph1:14-18; Rev6:17).

¹⁸ The partial rapture view holds that only faithful Christians actively watching for the Lord's return will be included in the rapture. This view was somewhat mainstream in the late 19th century, although few if any advocate for it today.

among the believers in Thessalonica are described in 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12. Second, "comfort the feeble-minded"; the "feeble-minded", or fainthearted, are those who need repeated exhortation to persevere in their walk with the Lord (1Cor15:58; Gal6:9). Third, "support the weak"; the "weak" are those that are "weak in the faith" and require constant reassurance (Cp., Rom14:1ff). Fourth, "be patient toward all men"; that is, demonstrate toward others the gracious long-suffering of God toward us (cf. Gal5:22; Eph4:32).

- [15] During the Church Age (i.e., the Dispensation of Grace; Eph3:2), grace and mercy are magnified. On a personal level we are not to "render evil for evil" (Cp., Rom12:17); rather we are to "take [the] wrong" and "allow [ourselves] to be defrauded" (1Cor6:7), especially among believers. It has been said that a Christian's life consists in doing good and suffering evil. However, that does not preclude the government's obligation to enforce righteousness and "execute wrath upon him that doeth evil" (Rom13:4); and ultimately, "vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (Rom12:19).
- [16] "Rejoice evermore" means to rejoice at all times (not in all things; Cp., Philip4:4) since joy is "the fruit of the Spirit" (Gal5:23) which is independent of circumstances (cf. Philip4:11-12).
- [17] To "pray without ceasing" does not mean to pray constantly without interruption, but to never cease to turn to God in prayer. Elsewhere Paul describes this as "continuing instant in prayer" (Rom12:12), where "instant" means *immediate*, or *without delay*. The idea is that the believer's first thought in every circumstance should be prayer (Cp., Neh2:4; Dan6:10).
- [18] "In [not for] everything give thanks", knowing that "this" (i.e., whatever trial a believer is experiencing) is "the will of God" for you (Rom8:29), and it is being used by Him for the purpose of progressively sanctify you (Rom5:3-5; 1Thess4:3).
- [19] The Holy Spirit permanently indwells the believer during the Church Age, both to "seal" him (Eph1:13; 4:30) and to "guide" him (Jn16:13). However, the "Spirit" can be grieved (Eph4:30), and His work in the believer can be "quenched", by sin. Progressive sanctification includes learning to increasingly yield to the Spirit's guidance (Rom6:13; Eph5:18).
- [20] The prophetic scriptures have been ignored, and often despised, by Christendom throughout most of the Church Age; that is as true today as ever. The Apostle Paul gave the Church prophecy (i.e., the **pre-tribulational rapture** of the Church) as its greatest source of "comfort" (1Thess4:13,18) and "hope" (Tit2:13).
- [21] "All things" (not merely so-called spiritual matters) must be tested and "prove[d]" by the scriptures (Act17:11), which are the absolute standard of truth (cf. Ps36:9; 119:105,160; Isa8:20; Jn17:17). The believer is to "hold fast" to only those things that are found to be "good" according to Scripture.
- [22] This exhortation is not merely to abstain from evil (which is a command), but from "all appearance of evil" (cf. 1Cor10:23; 2Cor6:3).

- [23] Man is a tri-partite creature, noted here as "spirit", "soul", and "body" (Cp., Heb4:12). Paul prayed that "God" would "sanctify" the believer "wholly" (i.e., every part). The believer is assured that he will be "preserved blameless" (i.e., positional sanctification) until "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (at **the rapture**), at which time he will receive a glorified body (i.e., perfect sanctification).
- [24] This is a fantastic assertion of the security of the believer during the Church Age, since the believer's salvation depends not on his own faithfulness, but God's (cf. 2Tim2:13; 1Pet1:3-5).

CONCLUSION

- [25] Paul prayed for those to whom he ministered, and he often requested their prayers for him, his companions, and their ministry needs (cf. Eph6:18-19; 2Thess3:1-2).
- [26] The "holy kiss" as a "greet[ing]" among "brethren" was an accepted cultural norm at that time; it should be understood as a description, not a prescription for all churches at all times and places. The charge is for genuine and intimate fellowship among believers.
- [27] Owing to its inspired nature (2Tim3:16), "this epistle" was intended to be "read" by "all the holy brethren" (including us!).
- [28] Paul always ended his epistles by commending his readers to the grace of God. No one understood the grace of God more than the Apostle Paul, who had benefited so uniquely from it (cf. 1Cor15:9-10; 1Tim1:12-15; note the principle in Luk7:47).

2 THESSALONIANS

Paul's second epistle to the Thessalonians was written shortly after his first epistle to them, perhaps only a few months later. The first was written to clarify some issues especially related to the rapture of the Church, yet Paul had received word that the believers in Thessalonica were still confused—so much so that because of the severe persecution they were experiencing, they actually believed they were in the Day of the LORD (i.e., the Tribulation, and had therefore missed the rapture). In his second epistle, Paul makes explicitly clear that the rapture of the Church will precede the entirety of the 7-year Tribulation, and that the Church will not be present on earth during the Day of the LORD.

CHAPTER 1

SALUTATION

- [1] As in 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians is an epistle from "Paul, and Silvanus, and Timothy". Paul reiterates from the opening of his former epistle that the position of the believers at Thessalonica was "in ... Christ"¹⁹ (cf. 2Cor5:17), which ensures the security of their salvation (cf. Eph1:12-14).
- [2] "Grace" and "peace" (in that order) are Paul's standard greeting. "Peace" is the equivalent of the Hebrew *shalom*, which is made possible by the gospel of "grace" (Rom5:1).
- [3] Paul was thankful for the Thessalonian believers because of their increasing "faith" and "love ... toward each other" (Cp., Jn13:35). In the Greek text "faith" is articulated, indicating that it was the content of their faith that "groweth exceedingly" (cf. 1Pet2:2).
- [4] Paul and his ministry companions boasted to other "churches" of the Thessalonians' "patience" (i.e., perseverance) and "faith", even in the midst of dire "persecutions and tribulations"; so dire, in fact, they actually believed the Day of the Lord had begun (cf. 2Thess2:2). Sadly, some believers respond to severe trials by blaming God and/or abandoning the faith (Cp., Job1:20-21; 2:9-10); in doing so, they do not risk loss of salvation, but rather rewards (cf. 1Cor3:11-15; 2Tim2:12). In contrast, the example of perseverance in the faith of believers undergoing severe trials was a great encouragement to the Apostle Paul and should be to all Christians (Cp., Deut20:4,8).

ENCOURAGEMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF PERSECUTION

- [5] In this context, "counted worthy" refers to receiving rewards (1Cor3:12-14) to be enjoyed in "the kingdom of God", not justification for salvation (1Cor3:15; Eph2:8-9). The Church will participate in "the kingdom of God" on earth, which will be a time of perfect peace and righteousness (Isa2:4; 11:4), and which will make

¹⁹ As used by the Apostle Paul, "in Christ" (and similar expressions, such as "in Jesus") is a technical term used for regenerate members of the Church, which is the Body of Christ (cf. 1Cor12:13,27-28; Eph1:22-23; Col1:24).

any suffering²⁰ experienced during the present life seem insignificant (Cp., Ps16:11; 1Cor2:9). To be "counted worthy" of rewards warrants present suffering (cf. 1Cor9:12; Philip3:8).

- [6] In this verse, "tribulation" is articulated. Thus, "it is a righteous thing" for God to avenge the Thessalonian believers by casting those who have "trouble[d]" (i.e., persecuted) them into "the tribulation" (Cp., Rev2:22).
- [7] For the believer, "rest" comes "when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed" (i.e., at the return of Christ), but not before (Cp., Jn16:33; 2Tim3:12). By using the plural pronoun "us", Paul puts himself into this same category, which presumes both he and the believers at Thessalonica will be alive on earth at the time of the rapture (Cp., 1Thess4:17); such a presupposition is justified by the doctrine of imminency (see inset comments at 1 Thessalonians 4:18).
- [8] When Jesus comes in judgment at the time of the Tribulation (i.e., the Day of the LORD), it will be for the purpose of "taking vengeance" on those who "know not God" and "obey not the gospel of [Christ]". Here, "obey ... the gospel" is not used in a legalistic sense, but is equivalent to believe (cf. Jn6:29; Act16:31; Rom1:16).
- Note, when the Lord "tak[es] vengeance", it is not vindictiveness, but the righteous recompense demanded by perfect justice (Rom12:19; Jud14-15; cf. Ezek18:32).
- [9] The ultimate "punish[ment]" of the wicked is not annihilation/ extinction, but "everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord" (i.e., separation from God forever; Cp., Rev14:11). "God is light" (1Jn1:5), and to be separated from God is characterized as being in "outer darkness" (Matt25:30).
- [10] Here, "that day" refers to the second coming of Christ at the end of the Tribulation. It cannot be a reference to the rapture, since no judgment (vv9-10) accompanies the rapture. However, the sheep and goat judgment of all Gentiles alive on earth accompanies Christ's second coming (cf. Matt25:31-46). At His return, the Lord Jesus Christ will be "glorified in his saints", for "we shall be like him" (1Jn3:2). The only condition to be one of Christ's "saints" is that "our testimony among you was believed" (i.e., faith alone; Act16:30-31; Eph2:8-9).
- [11] It is a privilege for "God" to "count [believers] worthy" to suffer for Christ (Cp., Act5:41; Philip3:10). Here, "faith" in the genitive is causative (Cp., 1Thess1:3), meaning that "faith" produces "work", and "faith" placed in "God" has "power".
- [12] The believer's purpose is the "glorify God" (1Cor6:20). In the Greek text of the final clause, "our God and the Lord Jesus Christ", "God" is articulated, not "Lord Jesus Christ", such that the Granville Sharp rule of Greek grammar demands that "God" and "Lord Jesus Christ" refer to the same Person; thus, this clause could justifiably be translated as: "our God and Lord, Jesus Christ" (Cp., Jn20:28).

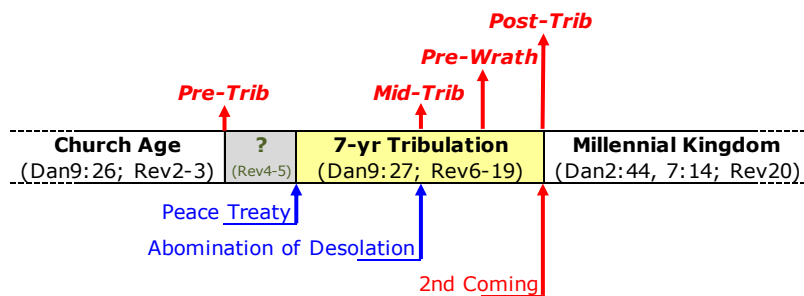
²⁰ For a member of the Church, "tribulation" (v4) is experienced during this present life (cf. Jn16:33), not during the day of the LORD (at which he will not be present).

CHAPTER 2

ELABORATION ON THE DAY OF THE LORD

In this chapter, Paul addresses a serious doctrinal error concerning the relationship of the rapture of the Church to the Day of the LORD that had been introduced into the church at Thessalonica by means of a counterfeit letter purporting to be from the Apostle Paul. 2 Thessalonians 2 includes important eschatological revelation contained nowhere else in Scripture and definitively asserts a pre-tribulational rapture of the Church.

- [1] To “beseech” is to make an urgent, but gracious, appeal; it introduces a subject the Apostle Paul considers profoundly important (Cp., Rom12:1; 16:17; Eph4:1). The subject introduced is “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and [by] our gathering together unto him”. These two clauses are connected by the conjunction “and” (Greek, **και**), but this is an exegetical use of the conjunction—which means that the latter clause is an explanation or an elaboration of the former clause²¹. Thus, the “coming” of Christ that Paul has in view is the one in which he and the Thessalonian believers will be “gathered unto him” (i.e., **the rapture of the Church**; Jn14:3; 1Thess4:17). In the Greek text this is explicitly clear, as the first substantive clause is articulated and the second is not, which by the Granville Sharp rule implies that the two substantives refer to the same thing.
- [2] The faith of the Thessalonians had been “shaken” by a “letter, as from [Paul]” that asserted “the day of Christ is at hand”. In a practical sense, “the day of Christ” as a period of time is equivalent to “the day of the LORD” (see the CHART: RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE DAY OF CHRIST). Furthermore, the Greek verb rendered “is at hand” is in the perfect, active, indicative (i.e., an action completed in the past with effects that endure into the present); thus, it should be understood to mean “has come” or “is present” (as it is rendered in Romans 8:38). Thus, the assertion of the counterfeit letter was that the Thessalonian believers were **in** the Day of the LORD!



Timing of the Rapture in the Pre-Trib, Mid-Trib, Pre-Wrath, and Post-Trib Views.

Consider the Figure. The four major views concerning the timing of the rapture relative to the 7-year Tribulation (i.e., the Day of the LORD) are shown in the figure above. The mid-tribulational, so-

²¹ Paul was a Hebrew (Philip3:5), and though he penned his epistles in Greek, he often used grammatical constructions that reflected Hebrew thought patterns; in this case, the construction is akin to Hebrew synthetic parallelism.

called pre-wrath, and post-tribulational views all understand the rapture of the Church to occur at some point during the second half of the Tribulation. If Paul had previously taught the Thessalonians any of these views, there is no reason why news that they were **in** the Tribulation²² should have "shaken" the faith of the Thessalonians; rather, they would have rejoiced to learn that the rapture was going to happen very soon. However, if Paul had taught that the rapture would occur before the Tribulation (i.e., pre-tribulational), news that the Tribulation had begun would mean the Thessalonians had missed the rapture and been **left behind!** Only a pre-tribulational rapture adequately explains why news that the Tribulation had begun would have "shaken" the Thessalonians.

- [3] The antecedent of "that day" is "the day of Christ" (i.e., the day of the LORD, or the 7-year Tribulation; v2). Paul asserts that the Tribulation cannot begin until two events that necessarily precede it occur: 1) "a falling away", and 2) the revelation of "the man of sin, the son of perdition" (i.e., the Antichrist).

Since the Tribulation begins when the Antichrist "confirm[s] the covenant with the many for one week" (i.e., implements a 7-year peace treaty with Israel; Dan9:26-27), it is necessary that he be on the geopolitical scene as the leader of the Revived Roman Empire before the Tribulation can begin.

Now consider "a falling away". First, the Greek text includes the article, so it is more properly translated "the falling away", which means a singular, particular event is in view. Second, "falling away" is a poor translation of the Greek noun *ἀποστασία* (*apostasia*, from which comes the English word apostasy). The English word apostasy means a *departure from the faith*²³, and many translators mistakenly presume the Greek word *apostasia*, from which it is derived, also means a religious departure; however, to presume the Greek word means the same thing as the English word is known as the etymological fallacy. In fact, the Greek word *apostasia* simply means *departure*, the nature of which must be understood from the context in which it is used. Thus, it can mean a religious departure, as in Acts 21:21 (**forsake Moses**), 1 Timothy 4:1 (**depart from the faith**), and Hebrews 3:12 (**departing from the living God**), but in such cases additional words (i.e., "Moses", "from the faith", "from the living God") must be appended to *apostasia* in order to communicate that the departure is religious in nature. When used alone, *apostasia* simply means a departure, often physical in nature (e.g., Luk2:37; 4:13; 13:27; Act12:10; 15:38; 19:9; 22:29). In 2 Thessalonians 2:3, *apostasia* is used alone, so it is most natural to understand it to mean a physical departure. Thus, Paul asserts that the Tribulation cannot begin "except there come the departure first"; it should be noted that most English Bibles that preceded the Authorized Version

²² Since the Thessalonian believers were experiencing considerable tribulation, persecution, and suffering, the suggestion that they were **in** the Tribulation was probably tempting to believe. However, this was a local phenomenon for the church in Thessalonica, whereas the Tribulation will be an "hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world" (Rev3:10).

²³ It is certainly the case that the Apostle Paul teaches elsewhere that the Church Age will end in a state of apostasy (e.g., 1Tim4:1; 2Tim3:1-5; 4:4-5), so it is perhaps tempting to read that understanding into one's interpretation of 2 Thessalonians 2:3; to do so, however, is eisegesis.

of 1611 translated apostasia in this way²⁴ (see the CHART: DEPARTURE IN EARLY ENGLISH BIBLES).

When translated as "the departure", it becomes obvious that: 1) it is a reference to the **rapture** (which was the subject introduced in v1), and 2) Paul asserts the rapture must occur before the Tribulation. Such an interpretation fits the context perfectly, since the subject of the return of the Lord occurs in every chapter of both Thessalonians epistles (e.g., 1Thess1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:13-17; 5:1-11; 2Thess1:7; 2:1-3; 3:5), whereas apostasy in the sense of religious defection is nowhere mentioned.

Finally, religious apostasy is not a singular event that could be definitively observed. Rather, the N.T. teaches that apostasy began even during the lives of the apostles (Jude3-4), and it will continue to "wax worse and worse" (2Tim3:13) throughout the course of the Church Age.

- [4] Now Paul proceeds to an event that will occur during the Tribulation (with the implication that had the Tribulation begun, the Thessalonians should be anticipating this event). At the mid-point of the Tribulation, the Antichrist will personally occupy "the temple of God" and demand the world's "worship", after which he will set up an image of himself in the Temple; this event is known as "the abomination of desolation" (Matt24:15; cf. Dan9:27; 11:31; Rev13:14-17; 14:9). While the Temple was still standing in Jerusalem when Paul wrote this letter to the Thessalonians (c. 50 AD), it was subsequently destroyed in 70 AD; it must be rebuilt and operational prior to the mid-point of the Tribulation in order to allow for the fulfillment of this prophecy.
- [5] Paul had taught the Thessalonians "[all] these things" when he was with them, but now commits them to writing to correct the confusion caused by the counterfeit letter (v2). Note that Paul had been in Thessalonica only a short period of time, perhaps as few as three weeks (Cp., Act17:1-2), but certainly no longer than a few months; yet, he taught these believers, converted under his ministry, about the rapture of the Church and the Tribulation; this implies these are not advanced subjects to be reserved for seasoned saints, but are vital truths for even new believers to understand.
- [6] Someone (note the masculine pronoun "he") currently "withholdeth" (i.e., restrains) the rise of the Antichrist (v3), thus preventing the start of the Tribulation. Various attempts to identify the restrainer have included human government (which does not comport with the use of the masculine pronoun) and the archangel Michael (who previously was unable to prevent Satan's agenda without assistance from "the Lord"; Jude9). The proper identification is **the Holy Spirit**; as the omnipotent 3rd Person of the Godhead, He has the power to restrain Satan and prevent his agenda of bringing the Antichrist to power (thus initiating the Tribulation). The Holy Spirit will only allow the Antichrist to be "revealed in [God's] time" (Dan9:24-27).

²⁴ The translational change began with the Bishop's Bible, which the translators of the Authorized Version (i.e., KJV) used as their base English text.

Greek Note. In Greek, the participial phrase "what withholdeth" can be constructed in any gender, but appears here as a neuter; yet, it is subsequently referenced using masculine pronouns (i.e., "he"; vv6-7). This is consistent with the identification of the restrainer as the Holy **Spirit**, which is neuter in gender, but who is often referred to using masculine pronouns (e.g., Jn14:17,26; 16:13; Rom8:26-27). Superficially this appears to be a solecism, but it is a construction of divine design having profound theological significance.

- [7] To understand the "mystery of iniquity", it must be contrasted with the "mystery of godliness" (1Tim3:16). The first occasion of "iniquity" was the sin of Lucifer (cf. Ezek28:15). Thus, as the "mystery of godliness" refers to Christ as "God manifest in the flesh", so the "mystery of iniquity" is a reference to Antichrist as **Satan manifest in the flesh**; taken in its most literal sense, this may suggest that the Antichrist will be the literal seed of Satan (i.e., a nephilim²⁵; Cp., Gen3:15; 6:2,4; Dan2:43).

Note that the mystery of iniquity "doth already work" (Cp., 1Jn2:18; 4:3). Satan wants to reveal the Antichrist (v5), but he is restrained from doing so by the Holy Spirit (v6). He will be free to do so once the Holy Spirit "be taken out of the way". Since during the present dispensation the Body of Christ (i.e., the Church) serves as "the temple of the Holy Spirit" (1Cor6:19), the removal of the Holy Spirit as the restrainer necessarily includes the removal of the Church from the earth (i.e., the rapture).

However, since the rapture is an imminent event unrevealed in Scripture (cf. Mk13:32; 1Thess5:2) and could occur at any moment (Jas5:8; Rev1:3), Satan must have a potential antichrist present on earth at all times. Indeed, this explains why the history of the Church Age is replete with men who appeared to have been legitimate candidates for the Antichrist (e.g., Nero, Constantine, Charlemagne, many of the medieval Popes, Napoleon, Hitler²⁶). These are examples of the "many antichrists" to which the Apostle John alludes, although they were not "the antichrist [who] shall come" (1Jn2:18) after the rapture; this also explains why Paul asserts in this verse that "the mystery of iniquity doth already work" (i.e., potential antichrists are always present on earth).

- [8] Only "then" (i.e., after the removal of the Holy Spirit as restrainer, which necessarily includes the rapture of the Church) will "[the Antichrist] be revealed" (v3). Thus, the Church should not expect to be able to definitively identify the Antichrist, although he will almost certainly be present on earth at the time of the rapture. The reign of the Antichrist will be short (i.e., somewhat more than 7 years; cf. Rev17:10), as he will be destroyed by "the Lord [Jesus Christ] ... at his [second] coming" (Rev19:20).

²⁵ Both Daniel and John refer to the Antichrist as a "beast" (Dan7:23; Rev13:1), which may be indicative of the fact that he is not entirely human.

²⁶ The common factors among historical antichrist figures during the Church Age are: 1) they were European political figures who reigned over the Roman Empire or labored to revive it after its disintegration, and 2) they hated/persecuted the Jews.

- [9] The "coming" of the Antichrist is empowered by "Satan" (cf. Rev13:2; Cp., Matt12:24; Mk3:22; Luk11:15); the "power and "signs" and "wonders" he will display will be entirely analogous to those of Christ (Cp., Jn4:48), although his purpose will be to "deceive" (cf. Matt24:24; Mk13:22; Revel3:14).
- [10] Note, those who "perish" do so because "they received not the love of the truth", where "truth" is the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ and His word (cf. Jn14:6; 17:17; Rev19:13; Cp., Jn1:11-12).
- [11] It will be possible for unbelievers who miss the rapture and are left behind to be saved; in fact, a "great multitude" will be saved during the Tribulation (cf. Rev7:9-14). However, one should not presume that the testimony of Scripture will be more obvious after the rapture than before, making it easier to be saved. Associated with the revelation of the Antichrist will be a "strong delusion" sent by "God", such that it will be more compelling to believe "the lie" than "the truth" (v10). Here, "the lie" is associated with Antichrist (i.e., a false Christ; Cp., Matt24:5; Mk13:6; Luk21:8; Revel3:14), whereas "the truth" is associated with Christ (v10).
- [12] Again, those who are "damned" are those "who believed not the truth" (Cp., v10). The fact that they "had pleasure in unrighteousness" is descriptive, not prescriptive; their damnation results from their unbelief (Cp., Mk16:16; 1Cor6:9-11; Rev22:15).

Note on Calvinism. Scripture never asserts the cause of a person's damnation as his reprobation by God, or his lack of election, as Calvinism teaches. Rather, damnation is always conditioned upon an individual's failure to receive/believe on the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Jn3:16-18; Act16:30-31; 1Cor15:1-4).

EXHORTATIONS IN LIGHT OF AN IMMINENT RAPTURE

- [13] Calvinists are guilty of eisegesis associated with this verse, reading into it that "God" has "chosen" individuals for "salvation", "from the beginning [of the world]" (note, "[of the world]" is not present in the text). A better understanding is that the Thessalonian believers, who are the "you" and the "brethren beloved of the Lord" that are the subject of this verse, were "chosen" by "God" to both "salvation" and "sanctification", "from the beginning" **of Paul's ministry**. Indeed, the Thessalonians were among the earliest converts of Paul's ministry, and they were the first church to receive an epistle from him; this understanding comports well with Paul's use of "in the beginning **of the gospel**" associated with "Thessalonica" in Philipians 4:15-16.

Note that God's choice of the Thessalonians for both "salvation" and "sanctification" was conditioned upon their "belief of the truth" (Cp., vv10-12).

Note on Calvinism. Calvinism's doctrine of Unconditional Election, which asserts that God's choice of individuals for salvation is based upon no condition outside of God Himself, is not scriptural. In Scripture, God's gift of salvation is always conditioned on personal faith (cf. Jn3:16; 1Cor1:21; Eph1:13-14).

- [14] Note the logical and chronological progression in the life of a believer: 1) "salvation" (v13), 2) "sanctification" (v13), and 3) "the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (i.e., glorification; see the CHART: THE THREE TENSES OF SALVATION).

Here, Paul refers to the gospel as "our gospel" (elsewhere, "my gospel"; cf. Rom2:16; 16:25), by which is meant the gospel of grace (Gall1:6) based on the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (1Cor15:1-4) which was uniquely revealed to the Apostle Paul (cf. Gall1:11-2; Eph3:2-3); this is in contrast to the "gospel of the kingdom" preached by Jesus and His disciples prior to the cross (cf. Matt4:23; 10:7; Mk1:14-15; Cp., Luk18:31-34).

- [15] To "stand fast" is a military command (Cp., Eph6:14-15); the Thessalonian believers are not to retreat from "the traditions" they had been "taught" by Paul, both when he was personally with them (i.e., "in word") as well as by the inspired "epistle[s]" he had sent to them (Cp., Rom6:17; Gall1:8; Jude3).
- [16] For the believer, both "our Lord Jesus Christ" and "God, even our Father ... hath loved us". That love was demonstrated by their work to make "everlasting consolation" and "good hope" available to us by "grace" (cf. Rom5:8; 1Jn3:16; 4:10), where "consolation" and "hope" are used as euphemisms for salvation (cf. 2Cor1:6; 1Thess5:8).
- [17] After salvation, Jesus and the Father (v16) endeavor to "comfort [our] hearts" and motivate believers to "good ... work[s]" (Eph2:10).

CHAPTER 3

EXPECTATIONS WHILE WAITING FOR THE LORD'S RETURN

Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians concludes with an exhortation to live in light of the prophetic truths revealed to them. Prophecy as revealed in the Bible is neither an irrelevant, nor an advanced, topic. God intends for prophecy to be studied and understood by all believers, and for the believer to live today in light of future promises.

PRAYER REQUESTS

- [1] In the N.T., only Paul and the writer to the Hebrews solicited prayer for themselves (Cp., Heb13:18). His first request is that "the word of the Lord" (i.e., the scriptures) would be widely distributed and "glorified" (i.e., received as by the Thessalonians; cf. 1Thess2:13). Among 1st century churches, the copying and transmission of the N.T. scriptures was a largely unorganized and organic process in comparison to that of the nation of Israel (cf. Col4:16), and for that reason its providential preservation is all the more miraculous (Ps12:6-7).
- [2] His second request was to personally "be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men"; recall, he had been driven from Thessalonica by such men (Act17:5-10). Paul characterizes those who oppose the proclamation of the gospel and the teaching of the scriptures as both "unreasonable" and "wicked".

- [3] In contrast to "not all have faith" (v2), "the Lord is faithful"; indeed, it is impossible for Him to be otherwise (cf. 2Tim2:13). Paul is confident "the Lord" will "stablish" (i.e., strengthen) the Thessalonians in their "faith" (Cp., Philip1:6) and "keep [them] from evil". In Greek, "evil" is articulated (i.e., "the evil") and connotes "the evil [one]" (i.e., Satan; Cp. Matt6:13; 2Cor4:4; Eph6:11-12; 1Thess2:18).
- [4] Paul had "confidence" the Thessalonian believers would follow his "command[s]"; being assured they were "in the Lord" (i.e., in Christ; 2Thess5:17).
- [5] Paul's prayer for the Thessalonian believers was that they would abide in "the love of God" (Cp., Jn15:9), and that they would persevere in "waiting for Christ". The blessed hope of the Church is the return of Christ for His Bride (i.e., **the rapture**; Cp., Philip3:20; 1Thess1:10; Tit2:13).

LABOR FAITHFULLY UNTIL CHRIST'S RETURN

- [6] Here, Paul "command[s]" the exercise of church discipline within the assembly. It is a requirement to "withdraw" from "every brother" (i.e., a believer within the assembly) who "walketh disorderly", by which he means "not after the tradition which he received of **us**", where "**us**" is Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy (2Thess1:1). The concern seems to be division within an assembly caused by an opposition to the unique doctrines revealed by the Apostle Paul (Cp., Rom16:17).

Pauline Dispensationalism. It is an unavoidable truth that Paul was raised up by the glorified Lord Jesus Christ to be "the apostle of the Gentiles" (Rom11:13; Cp., Gal2:8; Eph3:8), that he received unique revelation concerning the Church and "the dispensation of the grace of God" (i.e., the Church Age; cf. Rom16:25-26; Gall:11-12; Eph3:1-2; Coll:24-27), and that believers during the Church Age are instructed to follow the Apostle Paul as our "pattern" (cf. 1Cor4:16; 11:1; 1Tim1:16; 2Tim2:7). That is, the unique instructions for the Church during the present dispensation are found primarily in the epistles of Paul.

- [7] The Thessalonian believers were exhorted to "follow us" (i.e., Paul; cf. Pauline Dispensationalism at v6).
- [8] As Paul worked to support himself and his companions while he was at Thessalonica, so he commanded the Thessalonian believers to "labor".
- [9] As an apostle ministering to their spiritual needs, Paul could have expected the Thessalonian believers to provide for his physical needs (Cp., 1Cor9:6-14); in their case, he chose not to do so in order to be an "example" to them.
- [10] More than his mere example, Paul "commanded" the believers to "work" in order to provide for their own physical needs.
- [11] That some of the believers at Thessalonica were "working not at all" is an implicit confirmation that Paul taught them to expect an imminent, pre-tribulational rapture. Only a misapplication of the doctrine of imminency explains why a believer would cease to work

(i.e., an erroneous conclusion that imminent means soon). Even Jesus taught, to those who "thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear" (Luk19:11), "Occupy till I come" (Luk19:13).

- [12] By ceasing to work, these disorderly brethren created the necessity for the remainder of the assembly to support them. Paul's "command" to these brethren was: "work, and eat [your] own bread".
- [13] Paul exhorted the believers to persevere in good works (Cp., 1Cor15:58; Gal6:9). It is more important how a believer finishes a race than begins it; though salvation cannot be lost by failing to persevere, rewards can be (cf. 1Cor9:24-27).
- [14] Note that Paul's "word by this epistle" is to be the doctrinal priority for the Thessalonian believers, and by extension for all believers during the Church Age (cf. vv6-7). Separation from those believers who do not recognize the primacy of Pauline doctrine for the Church is commanded.
- [15] Such "disorderly" members of the assembly (Cp., vv6,11,14) are not to be considered "an enemy", but a "brother". That is, their salvation may be genuine, but the division they create within the assembly necessitates separation (Rom16:17).

BENEDICTION

- [16] The "Lord" Himself is characterized by "peace" (Isa9:6), and He gives "peace" to all believers (cf. Jn14:27; 16:33; Rom5:1).
- [17] While Paul often made use of an amanuensis, he made clear that the "salutation" was always written "with mine own hand" (Cp., 1Cor16:21); thus, it served as the "token in every epistle" by which its authenticity could be discerned. This was particularly relevant to the Thessalonians, as they had been deceived by a "letter" they mistakenly believed was from Paul (cf. 2Thess2:2).
- [18] Paul closed every epistle by commending his readers to the grace of God. No one understood the grace of God more than the Apostle Paul, who had benefited so uniquely from it (cf. 1Cor15:9-10; 1Tim1:12-15; note the principle in Lk7:47).

--- S.D.G. ---

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