

1 Thessalonians

Introduction

Read Acts 17:1-10. This incident took place in 49 or 50 A.D. on the Second Missionary Journey of the Apostle Paul, accompanied by Silas and Timothy. On this journey, Paul revisited the believers in Galatia, and then went on to Troas, and crossing the Aegean Sea, he arrived at the northern Greek province of Macedonia. There he led people to Christ in the city of Philippi (Acts 16:11ff). After Philippi, the missionary team went about 100 miles west to Thessalonica, a city of about 200,000 people in Paul's day.



Concerning Thessalonica, we read: *And some of them [Jews] were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large number of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women. Although the exact number is not given, there were a large number of new believers in Thessalonica after Paul spent 3 weeks there, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures (Acts 17).*

Paul and his friends apparently had been staying with a man named Jason. We know nothing else about Jason. But it is reasonable to suppose that either he was already a

believer, having been converted from Peter's initial ministry in Jerusalem (Acts 2:7-11), or he was one of these early converts who *were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas*.

When things heated up, as they usually did when Paul began to speak, the new believers hid Paul, Silas, and Timothy. The Jews *formed a mob and set the city in an uproar*. The mob went to Jason's, and when they did not find the missionaries, they forced Jason to appear before the city authorities. The Jews then publicly accused Jason of (1) harboring criminals who were upsetting the world and (2) violating the decrees of Caesar by declaring Jesus as another king. Apparently, some other believers (but not the missionaries) went with Jason to the authorities and made some sort of deal with them. It says: *And when they [the authorities] had received a pledge from Jason and the others, they released them*. We do not know what the pledge was. The Greek word simply means "something sufficient, or considerable." It probably involved some money and possibly a promise to get the missionaries out of town, since all three of them left right after that (Acts 17:10-14).

From Thessalonica, Paul, Silas, and Timothy went to Berea, where they had an experience similar to that in Thessalonica. They then went on to Athens (Acts 17:11-16), and from there Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica (1 Thess 3:1) because he was concerned for them, probably because of all the opposition they faced while he was there. He wrote, *For this reason, when I could endure it no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor would be in vain* (1 Thess 3:5).

Paul went on to Corinth, where he stayed for 18 months. Timothy joined Paul in Corinth, with an encouraging report about the Thessalonians, so Paul then wrote 1 Thessalonians, about 51 A.D. It is clear that Paul was thrilled with the report from Timothy, excited about their spiritual progress, and wanting them to know about his own circumstances. Paul wanted to be sure they were networked together with him and the other believers everywhere. Because of that, the first three chapters tell us a lot about Paul's ministry style, his motivation, and his methods. Chapters 4 and 5 read more like Paul's other shorter epistles, giving exhortations for the Thessalonians. These are new believers. They are growing and spiritual, but not mature. They have only been believers a short time, and Paul wanted them to be tied closely to himself and his team.

Having said that, it is not the primary reason Paul wrote 1 or 2 Thessalonians. Paul wrote these letters to tell them about the future. He wrote to warn of false teaching and clarify the truth about the Rapture, the resurrection of the body, and the events leading to the Second Coming of Christ. Every chapter of 1 Thessalonians ends with a focus on the future return of Christ.

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Content

I. Salutation and Greeting (1:1)

1:1—Paul—the author of the letter. Obviously absent is his title “apostle,” which Paul used in all his other epistles except 2 Thessalonians and Philippians. Perhaps it was because his apostolic authority was not questioned here as it was in other places. He and his message were attacked in Thessalonica, but not his apostleship.

—**and Silvanus**—the Roman form of Hebrew “Silas.” He was highly esteemed among the Jerusalem Christians (Acts 15:22, 32), he was a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37), and was chosen to accompany Paul on his second missionary journey (to replace Barnabas who was with him on his first journey). He endured cruel beatings and imprisonment (Acts 16:23-25; 17:5). He seems to later join in ministry with Peter (1 Peter 5:12).

—**and Timothy**—The young believer who joined the team after John Mark deserted them on the First Missionary Journey. Paul described him *...as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel* (Philippians 2:20-22). Paul left him in Thessalonica when he went on to Greece.

—**To the church of [the not in Greek] Thessalonians**—all the believers in the city. He is not addressing the Jews or the Greeks, but the believers, some of whom were Jews and some were Greeks. There is no distinction in Christ (Colossians 3:11).

—*in*—combining God the Father and Jesus under this one preposition shows the equality of the Father and Jesus, and consequently, the deity of Christ.

—*in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*—the sovereignty of “Lord,” the humanity of “Jesus,” and the Messiah of “Christ,” from the Old Testament, meaning “anointed One.”

—*Grace to you*—the selective favor of God, His gift—is not deserved and cannot be earned by works (Ephesians 2:8-9). Grace is the basis for and leads to peace.

—*and peace*—...*the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus* (Philippians 4:6-7).

II. Thanksgiving for the Thessalonians (1:2-10)

A. The Manner of Giving Thanks—Praying (1:2)

1:2—*We give thanks to God*—rather than being a source of grief (such as the Galatians), these believers brought thanksgiving to his mind. It is the present tense, continual action.

—*Always* shows this was continual, he kept on being grateful.

—*for all of you*—every single believer was a reason for which to be thankful to God

—*making mention of you in our prayers*—they expressed their thanksgiving in their prayers, not only to thank God for their progress but also to intercede for them.

B. The Circumstances of Giving Thanks—Remembering (1:3)

1:3—*constantly bearing in mind*—their progress was continually praise to God

—*your work* [what one has done] *of faith*—they *turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God* (v. 9).

—*and labor* [κοπου “hard work”] *of love* [αγαπη “agape love”]—giving without reciprocity

—*and steadfastness* [lit. “endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ”] *of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father.*

AN APPLICATION—The Thessalonians had exercised saving faith in Christ in the past when they had believed the gospel, they were loving Christ in the present, and they were hoping for His return in the future. Their lives were focused on Jesus Christ. Ours, too.

C. The Cause for Giving Thanks—Knowing (1:4-10)

1. The impressions of the missionaries (1:4, 5)

1:4—*knowing* [have information about], *brethren beloved by God*—Fellow Christians.

Paul used “brethren” 15 times in this one brief epistle (1:4; 2:1, 9, 17; 3:7; 4:1, 10, 13; 5:1, 4, 12, 14, 25-27) and 7 times in 2 Thessalonians (1:3; 2:1, 13, 15; 3:1, 6, 13).

—*His choice of you*—the proof of God’s love for them. “Election” is taught in Matthew 24:22, 24, 31; Luke 18:7; John 15:16; Romans 8:33; 11:5; Ephesians 1:4; Colossians 3:12; 2 Timothy 2:10; Titus 1:1.

AN APPLICATION—Both election (God choosing) and free will (man choosing—John 3; Romans 5) are taught in the Bible. We can understand that one is what God does, and the other is what man does. They are not opposites. But we do not have enough information to understand how both things happen. “*as many as had been appointed [election] to eternal life believed [free will]*” (Acts 13:48).

1:5—*for our gospel did not come to you in word only*—but the gospel did come in words. *How will believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a proclaimer? ...So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ* (Romans 10:14-17). Words are basic to intelligent communication. Creation is the revelation of God,

whereby mankind can understand that God exists (Romans 1:18f), but all humans need the words regarding the special revelation in Jesus Christ in order to be saved (John 14:6).

—**also in power**—although this particular Greek word can be used for supernatural miracles, the sense here is more the supernatural conviction. Jesus said, “*No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him*” (John 6:44).

—**and in the Holy Spirit**—who brought conviction in their hearts. Jesus said, “*I will send Him [the Holy Spirit] to you. And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment*” (John 16:7-11).

—**and with full conviction**—“assurance” or “persuasion.”

—**just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake**—the manner of life Paul, Silas, and Timothy lived among them were a testimony of their message.

AN APPLICATION—We do not know who is chosen. Therefore, we need to proclaim the gospel message every opportunity we have because if they are chosen, they will not be saved unless they believe in the gospel. Election does not equal salvation. Belief does. But salvation shows election.

2. The effect on the Thessalonians (1:6-10)

a. Their transformation (1:6, 7)

1:6—You also became imitators of us— Their lifestyle was completely different from what it was before the gospel came to them. This is often the normal Christian experience, a new Christian first looks to others as their example...

—**and of the Lord**—but then as they mature, they realize Jesus is the best model

—**having received the word**—John wrote, “*But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name*” (John 1:12).

—**in much tribulation**—Part of following Paul’s example was the persecution/tribulation (Acts 17:5-9; 1 Thess 2:14-16).

— **with the joy of the Holy Spirit**—Instead of the misery tribulation usually brings, the believers displayed a joy given by the Holy Spirit, that defies natural explanation.

AN APPLICATION—Paul did not hesitate to present himself as one to be copied, because he had patterned his own life after Christ’s (1 Cor 11:1). Our lives should also be examples to others around us (1 Cor 4:16; 11:1; Gal 4:12; Eph 5:1; Philippians 3:17; 4:9; 1 Thess 3:12; 2 Thess 3:7, 9). In fact, they are, whether we choose it or not.

1:7—so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia [northern Greece, where Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea were] **and in Achaia** [southern Greece, where Athens and Corinth were]—the pattern: Jesus is the example for Paul, Paul is an example for the believers in Thessalonica, and they are examples for the other believers in their countries. Paul used them as an example to the Corinthians: “*...in a great deal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. ...according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord...for the favor of participation in the support of the saints*” (2 Cor 8:1-5).

b. Their witness (1:8-10)

1:8—For the word of the Lord has sounded forth [“reverberated” like an amplifier] **from you**—it’s like Paul spoke the Word to the Thessalonian believers, and then it was received and repeated in many speakers, in places he could not reach. For example, in Romania,

we have a Bible conference in Bucharest with people from many villages. They leave the conference and take the Word they learned back to their villages—places to which we could never go.

—not only in Macedonia and Achaia—here they are viewed as a single territory
—but also in every place [i.e., where Paul went] **your faith toward God has gone forth**—being near the coast and on an ancient highway, word travelled fast.

—so that we have no need to say anything—Rather than Paul telling people he met in his travels about what God had done in that city, people were telling him what was becoming commonly known.

1:9—For they themselves—the people of Macedonia and Achaia who heard the news
—report about us what kind of a reception we had with you—how they welcomed Paul and his message to them

— and how you turned to God from idols (lifeless) **to serve a living and true God** (the Father). This would also be the language of the proselytes from paganism to Judaism, but the next verse tells us he is talking about Christianity.

1:10—and (1) to wait (expectantly) **for His Son from heaven**—from where Jesus had ascended (Acts 1)

—whom He raised from the dead—an historical reality, therefore His future reappearance is guaranteed by that very resurrection

—that is Jesus—the historical human person, whom Paul already described as Deity (v. 1)

—(2) who rescues (*ton rhuomenon*, a timeless substantive, denoting one of His characteristics—He is a rescuer) **us from the wrath to come**—that period right before Messiah’s kingdom on earth, when God will afflict the earth’s inhabitants with an unparalleled series of physical torments because of their rejection of His will, called the Tribulation (Matthew 24:21; Revelation 6:16-17).

AN APPLICATION—For Christians, we find an incentive to persevere because, for us, it will mean rescue rather than doom. “*For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ*” (1 Thess 5:9). Similar to believers in the Old Testament: Noah rescued from the Flood, Lot rescued from Sodom, the Israelites rescued with the blood on the doorposts, Rahab rescued from Jericho, the Israelites rescued from the Babylonian slaughter.

III. Reminders for the Thessalonians (2:1-3:13)

A. How the Gospel Was Delivered (2:1-12)

2:1—For you yourselves know, brethren—all of chapter 2 is an expansion of 1:9, *what kind of a reception we had with you*. Paul is not telling them something they don’t already know. They are witnesses to his visit and what he said and what he did. In chapter 1, Paul’s coming and the peoples’ response show a knowledge of election. In chapter 2, the same themes establish Paul’s defense against his alleged ulterior motives.

—that our coming to you was not in vain—not empty, or not worthless, or a failure. He did not come to merely give speeches but to present the gospel, in which they believed. And this was not from some secondhand report—what occurred was obvious and from their own firsthand involvement.

2:2—*but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi*—In Acts 16:16-24, we read that they had been “beaten with rods,” and “struck them with many blows,” in public, without a trial, and were thrown “into prison.”

—***as you know***—again, appealing to their first-hand knowledge (vv. 1, 2, 5, 9, 10, 11)

—***we had the boldness in our God***—Paul also wrote he was “*strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might*” (Ephesians 6:10).

—***to speak to you***—they didn’t let that mistreatment stop them from boldly speaking the gospel in Thessalonica. Proclaiming the gospel does not lead to popularity, but requires courage and renewed boldness.

—***the gospel of God***—this occurs in verses 8 and 9 and in Mark 1:14; Romans 1:1; 15:16; 2 Corinthians 11:7; and 1 Peter 4:17. It describes the gospel from the perspective of God as the source, as what He has done to redeem sinners through His grace and by His Son Jesus Christ.

— ***amid much opposition***— “*the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men...formed a mob and set the city in an uproar...*” (Acts 17:1-9).

2:3—*For our exhortation* (appeal) ***does not come from*** (1) ***error*** (not truth) ***or*** (2) ***impurity*** (filthy or immoral motives, even possibly meaning sexual immorality) ***or*** (3) ***by way of deceit*** (to trick or deceive someone).

2:4—*but just as we have been approved by God*—completing a process of testing, and then endorsed by God. After his call on the road to Damascus, Paul was subjected to many things that showed his capability and preparation for his task

—***to be entrusted with the gospel***—to put in someone’s care or protection, as a steward. Paul used “gospel” five times in 1 Thess. (1:5; 2:2, 4, 8; 3:2).

—***so we speak, not as pleasing men***—Paul also wrote, “*...If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ*” (Galatians 1:10).

—***but God who examines our hearts***—he viewed himself as under God’s constant scrutiny. “*It is the Lord Christ whom you serve*” (Colossians 3:24).

2:5—*For we never came with flattering speech*—to satisfy a person’s vanity, not motivated by truth. Saying nice things to gain influence over others for selfish reasons

—***as you know***—reminding them again that this was their experience, not the report of other people’s experience

—***nor with a pretext for greed***—Paul’s message was not aimed at making a favorable impression on them or to gain something for himself. It has to do with his inner motives, clearly something only God would know.

—***God is witness***—Paul well understood that he is accountable to God first and foremost. Only God could verify inner freedom from greed.

AN APPLICATION—Paul wrote, “*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths*” (2 Timothy 2:3-4). Sounds like today!!

2:6—*nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others*—glory is praise or good opinion or honor, the prestige of a good reputation

—***even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority***—the apostles are the only authority (outside of God, of course) in this church age. The church

“having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:20). They are the receivers of revelation from God and are the writers of the New Testament. But Paul always balanced that authority with accountability and humility. Instead, ...

2:7—But we proved to be gentle among you—tenderheartedness, caring, compassion, patience...

—as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children—if a nursing mother does not feed herself, she cannot feed her own baby. If she eats certain foods, her baby will get sick. How does she care for her own children? It means “gives to his own whatever is needed or necessary.”

2:8—Having so [fond affection—one word] for you—a rare Greek word, not found in other places in the NT. A “great love” or likeness.

—we were well-pleased—to take pleasure in, it was not work or obligation

—to impart to you not only the gospel of God—the gospel was not just a message but an expression of their love for the Thessalonians

—but also our own lives—inner self or mind, oneself

—because you had become [very dear—one word] to us—object of one’s love, or unique, or only, the one I love, with whom I am well-pleased

AN APPLICATION—The ones you invest in spiritually, you also invest in their lives. They are not just bodies in a meeting. They are individual people who become dear to you. You pray for them, you care about them and their families.

2:9—For you recall, brethren—another way to say they know this information is correct

—our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you—he also wrote to them, “*nor did we eat anyone’s bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you*” (2 Thess 3:8). Paul possibly worked at tentmaking (Acts 18:3). Paul also received some financial help from the Philippian believers while he was in Thessalonica (Philippians 4:15-16).

—we proclaimed to you the gospel of God—He gave the gospel “free of charge,” therefore eliminating charges of selfish motives.

2:10—You are witnesses, and so is God (who sees what human eyes can’t see)—he continues to ask them to look at the evidence that they themselves (and God) were witnesses to.

—how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers—their actions and their motives were unapproachable, able to stand their critics’ scrutiny.

2:11—just as you know how we were exhorting [to call alongside, related to *parakletos*] **and encouraging** [comfort and consolation in light of obstacles and failures] **and imploring each one of you** [singling them out personally]

—as a father would his own children—here his comparison is as a father with his children, in training them. Fathers are instructors, models, personal teachers, and motivators.

2:12—so that you would walk—live spiritually mature lives in their daily conduct. “so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Colossians 1:10).

—in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory—God’s call is to a person for salvation (not to a specific job description). “...His choice of you” (1 Thess 1:4). “saints by calling” (1 Corinthians 1:2).

AN APPLICATION—When imparting the gospel to them, Paul was gentle, like a nursing mother to her own children (vv. 7-8). But now that they are believers, they need instruction in correct behavior and encouragement from the Scriptures, such as would come from a father (vv. 11-12).

B. How the Gospel Was Received (2:13-16)

1. For the ready acceptance of the Word of God (2:13)

2:13—For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God—another reason for joy from Paul is that the Thessalonians received the gospel as the Word of God. They sensed the supernatural truthfulness of the gospel Paul proclaimed as the Holy Spirit brought this conviction home to their hearts. “Some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large number of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women” (Acts 17:4).

—which you heard from us—Paul wrote, “How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a proclaimer? ...So faith comes from hearing, and hearing, by the Word of Christ” (Romans 10:13-17). People can learn about God from creation (Romans 1:20), but they need to hear the words of special revelation (the Bible) in order to become saved.

—you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God—Someone has said that the gospel is not the kind of message that man would invent if he could, nor is it a message that he could invent if he would. Paul wrote, “For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ” (Galatians 1:11–12).

—which also performs its work in you who believe—the Word of God has the power to change a person—what they think, what they believe, what they do. “For the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit... and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

AN APPLICATION—When Christians share their faith, they do not merely give their particular viewpoint on life as one among the endless variety of human theories. They announce the divinely revealed truth of God, a word from God.

AN APPLICATION—We need to be careful that what we are trying to communicate is actually the Word of God. There are many today who are speaking their opinions, or their feelings, or their experiences. If it is not in the Bible, then it is not a word from God!!

2. For their endurance under persecution (2:14-16)

2:14—For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea—suffering did not mean God had abandoned them, rather, it is the

evidence of their belief, suffering which happened to the believers in Judea also.

Remember, Jesus said, “...*In the world you have tribulation*” (John 16:33).

—**for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen even as they did from the Jews**—Christianity was a threat to the Jewish tradition. See Acts 17:5-9. Of course, Paul himself was at one time one of those Jews who persecuted the Christians (Acts 7:54–8:4).

2:15—who both killed the Lord Jesus—John 19:16; 1 Corinthians 2:8

—**and the prophets**—Jesus said, “*in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you*” (Matthew 5:12).

—**and drove us out**—“*The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea*” because of the persecution (Acts 17:10).

—**They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men**—That hostility was not so much a racial prejudice as it was a religious prejudice. They resented, even hated, any religion but their own—and especially the gospel of Jesus Christ, whom they rejected as a satanic, counterfeit messiah (Matthew 12:24).

2:16—hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved—it wasn’t enough that the Jews did not want to become believers, they also wanted to hinder anyone else from believing—even if it was the Gentiles!! Jesus said of the Pharisees, “*you travel about on sea and land to make one convert; and when he becomes one you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves*” (Matthew 23:25).

AN APPLICATION—Sadly, we see that in our own culture right now. It’s not enough for some people to hate, they want others to also hate with them. It’s almost like a “conversion,” to a religion of hate.

—**with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins**—Lit. “They always heap up their sins to the limit.” There is a well-defined point at which people reach the limit of their sins. For example, the Flood (Genesis 6:3, 5-6), Sodom (Genesis 18:20-21), the Egyptians drowning in the Red Sea (Exodus 14), the Pharisees (Matthew 23:32), people rejecting God and following their lusts (Romans 1:18f). And, of course, the Tribulation, which Paul will describe in 2 Thessalonians 2.

—**But wrath has come upon them to the utmost**—There are various “wraths” of God in the Bible. We do not know to which Paul refers or if it is just in general. The curse of God on mankind because of sin, which is death (John 3:36). Various judgments in the Old Testament (against Babel, Sodom, the Egyptians, even the Israelites from time to time). THE WRATH is what is described by Jesus, “then there will be a Great Tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now...” (Matthew 24:21), described in Revelation 6–18).

C. Concerns for the Thessalonians (2:17–3:13)

1. Paul’s Plans (2:17-20)

2:17—But we (Paul, Silas, and Timothy), **brethren** (term of endearment), **having been taken away** [a Gk verb meaning “to be orphaned” and is used only here in the NT], i.e., he did not voluntarily leave, **from you for a short while**—because of the persecution he had to leave town

— **in person, not in spirit** —Paul is praying for them, he is writing to them, and he is sending Timothy to them. They were in his thoughts, even though he wasn’t there in person

—**were all the more eager with great desire to see your face**—implies there may have been rumors that he did not really care for them, and had no interest in coming back to them.

2:18—For we wanted to come to you — I, Paul, more than once — and yet Satan hindered us—we don't know to what this is referring. John Calvin once wrote, "Whenever the ungodly cause us trouble, they are fighting under the banner of Satan, and are his instruments for harassing us" (BKC). Yet, as we read about Job, Satan can only work within the boundaries allowed by God's own plans regarding the work Paul was to do. In 2 Thess 2:9, we read that the man of lawlessness is "in accord with the activity of Satan."

2:19—For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation?—What is the greatest reward Paul could receive at the bema seat of Christ (2 Cor 5:10)?

—**Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming?**—This is how great Paul's affection for them was. Paul always lived and taught others to live in the light of the return of Jesus Christ. It was his motivation for ministering.

AN APPLICATION—"coming" is the Greek word *Parousia*, meaning "presence." It can refer to all the end times events, or the Rapture, or the Second Coming. The context tells. Here, most likely Paul is meaning the Rapture, because that will be his topic in 3:13; 4:15; and 5:23.

2:20—For you are our glory and joy—the Thessalonian brethren are the source of both his eternal honor and happiness. What great joy is there when we get to heaven and see those we love also there.

2. Timothy's Visit (3:1-5)

3:1—Therefore when we could endure it no longer, we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone—i.e., Paul and Silas. Paul traveled from Berea (town west of Thessalonica) to Athens without Silas and Timothy. When he reached Athens (southern Greece), he sent word back via some Berean brethren who were with him, for Silas and Timothy to join him in Athens as soon as possible (Acts 17:15). And they did so. Then they sent Timothy to Thessalonica. Silas returned to Macedonia, then both of them rejoin Paul in Corinth, where he went after Athens (Acts 18:1, 5). [Refer to the map on page 1]

3:2—and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith—Paul first evangelized in a city, but as people became believers, he quickly moved to discipleship, teaching them and encouraging them in their faith, as they continued to mature in Christ.

3:3—so that no one would be disturbed by these afflictions—James wrote, "when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance, and let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete..." (James 1:2-4).

—**for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this**— Paul also wrote, "Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12)

3:4—For indeed when we were with you—Paul had already taught them these things in person when he was with them. Now he is reminding them. They probably did not have any written words to study and learn from, but they had the word spoken by Paul as he taught them while with them. But writing is so much better as the actual words can be studied and reviewed. It reduces the possibility of misunderstanding. Now they will have 1 and 2 Thessalonians to study and learn.

AN APPLICATION—After the miracle of the Passover in Egypt, God told Moses, “you shall observe this rite. And it will come about when your children will say to you, ‘What does this rite mean to you?’ That you shall say...” (Exodus 12:25-27). Better than repeating the miracle is remembering the miracle (they had a passover rite, we have the Scriptures) because then we can understand what it “means.” Miracles do not come with meanings. (Just as experiences do not come with meanings.) Meanings (understanding) have to be brought to those things.

—we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know—Here Paul is reminding them, giving them the understanding, that affliction and persecution are because they are believers not because God has abandoned them. The reminder would have helped calm them down. Given them assurance.

3:5—For this reason, when I could endure it no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith—not that they lost their salvation. They were brethren and continued to be brethren.

—for fear that the tempter [Satan] might have tempted you, and our labor would be in vain—that the persecutions they were undergoing might lure them away from what they knew to be God’s will—perseverance in the midst of trials. Paul said to the Ephesian elders: “I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them” (Acts 20:29-30).

3. Timothy’s Report (3:6-10)

3:6—But now that Timothy has come to us from you—quite soon after he returned from Thessalonica and met up with Paul in Corinth, in southern Greece

—and has brought us good news—Mostly “good news” refers to salvation, but only here and in Revelation 10:7 does it refer to anything other than salvation

—of your faith and love—the Thessalonians were strong in faith toward God and love of others

—and that you always think kindly of us—and love toward His apostles

—longing to see us just as we also long to see you—Paul had issues with the Galatian and Corinthian believers. But he had joy and a desire to see the Thessalonian believers

3:7—for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith—when facing adversity and sufferings, the faith and love of the Thessalonians comforted and encouraged him (2 Corinthians 7:4, 13; Philemon 7).

AN APPLICATION—Paul wrote, “that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other’s faith, both yours and mine” (Romans 1:12). When with other

believers, think of how you can encourage them in their faith, especially if they are suffering a time of trials and persecution.

3:8—*for now we really live*—it gave him a renewed zeal in ministry —*if* [Gk. “when,” “whenever,” “as often as”] ***you stand firm in the Lord***—a military term meaning, “to not retreat in the face of an attack.”

3:9—*For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account*—Paul thanked God for the Thessalonians’ behavior, he did not take credit for it. Their endurance was a tribute to the work of God in their lives. He commended them, but also recognized and acknowledged what God had done in them.

3:10—*as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face*—Paul is praying that he may once again visit the Thessalonians. —***and may complete*** [“supply”] ***what is lacking in your faith?***—(The word for “supply” is καταρτίσαι; cf. Eph. 4:12 where πρὸς τὸν καταρτισμὸν is rendered “to prepare” [NIV] and “for the equipping” [NASB].) The Thessalonian believers were still young in the Lord. They needed to grow and mature—as a child is deficient in comparison with an adult.

4. Paul’s Prayer (3:11-13)

3:11—(1) *Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you*—Paul’s first prayer request—Paul’s efforts to revisit them are useless until God clears the way. Here God the Father and Jesus are a compound subject of a singular verb (“may direct”), indicating the unity of the Godhead.

3:12—(2) *and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you*—Paul’s second prayer request. Already Paul commended them for their love, but there is always room to grow!! Paul wanted them to love even unbelievers, to lead them to Christ, as Paul had done with them.

3:13—(3) *so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father*—He isn’t praying for them to be sinless. That is impossible in this life. But without blame in holiness, i.e., that in their hearts they would be holy, separated to God. To “establish” is to resolve, to decide and to refuse to change one’s mind.” When your heart is right with God, your actions will be right with God, too.

—***at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints***—This is referring to the Rapture, which he will describe in detail in 4:13-18, when Jesus comes with the spirits of those who have died who join those still alive, and all receive their new eternal bodies.

III. Practical Instructions and Exhortations (4:1–5:24)

A. Christian Living (4:1-12)

1. General Conduct (4:1-2)

4:1—*Finally then, brethren*—this doesn’t mean Paul is at the end of the epistle, he still has two chapters to go. Rather, this is the final major section of the letter that deals with “what is lacking in your faith” (3:10), that is, to move them on in their spiritual growth.

—***we request*** [friendly ask] ***and exhort*** [authoritative apostolic plea] ***you in the Lord Jesus***—Paul was writing them with the authority of Jesus.

—*that as you received from us instruction* [when Paul was with them] *as to how you ought to walk* [live your life] *and please God (just as you actually do walk)*, [just as they were already doing], *that you excel still more*. Paul also wrote, “so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Colossians 1:10).

AN APPLICATION—Wherever you are along the line of spiritual maturity, you can always “excel still more.” A person may make a good spiritual decision (even if they are young in the faith), but maturity takes time. “...by this time...you have come to need milk and not solid food...he is an infant...But solid food is for the mature...” (Hebrews 5:12-14). There is no end to maturity. We are to be motivated to learn and grow our whole lives on this earth. Each area of our lives, each age we are, what people we are with, all present new opportunities to excel in spiritual maturity. We continue to bear fruit and continue to increase in the knowledge of the Word of God—a book written by an infinite God!!

4:2—For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus—the message of salvation was announced to them in person, with the authority of Jesus, and now this message of maturity is with that same authority.

AN APPLICATION—“Sometimes Christians want to hear new truth when what they need is exhortation to excel still more, to press on to greater experiencing of old truths which they are already practicing to a limited degree” (BKC).

2. Sexual Purity (4:3-8)

4:3—For this is the will of God—the desire God has for you, the believer —**your sanctification**—to be set apart from sin to God, the process of daily becoming conformed to the image of Christ by proper responses to the Word and the Holy Spirit. —**that is**, (1) **that you abstain** [keep on completely avoiding doing something] **from sexual immorality**—Greek *porneias*, a broad term meaning all types of sexual sins.

AN APPLICATION—God gave boundaries on sex. “*Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled*” (Hebrews 13:4a). “*for fornicators and adulterers God will judge*” (Hebrews 13:4b). “*But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints*” (Ephesians 5:3). “*Flee immorality*” (1 Corinthians 6:15-20).

4:4—(2) that each of you know how to possess [“to save oneself from grave danger,” “to protect oneself”] **his own vessel** [your own body] **in sanctification and honor**—holiness requires one to learn to control his or her own body. When a person becomes a believer, their attitude towards sex changes. God gives us the ability to act toward sexual temptation differently than was possible before as an unbeliever.

“*For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ*” (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

4:5—*not in lustful passion* [overpowering urges], *like the Gentiles who do not know God*—unbelievers indulge their lustful passions.

4:6—*and* (3) *that no man transgress* [“to sin against”] *and defraud* [“to take advantage of someone, to exploit”] *his brother* [fellow believers] *in the matter*—sexual immorality wrongs the partner, the fellow believer, in the forbidden act by involving him or her in behavior contrary to God’s will.

—*because the Lord is the avenger* [punisher] *in all these things*—sexual immorality is sin, and God will judge all sin (Romans 6:23). Much sin has its own consequences. For example, it can destroy marriages and families in this life, and it will cancel rewards in the next life (1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 1 Corinthians 10; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

—*just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you*—this truth was taught to the Thessalonians when Paul was personally with them.

4:7—*For God has not called us* [to salvation—2 Thess 2:14] *for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification*—When God called us to salvation, He also called us to live a life of holiness. A purpose of impurity is incompatible with holiness.

4:8—*So, he who rejects this*—abstaining from sexual immorality, controlling our own bodies in sanctification and honor, not sexually sinning against another

—*is not rejecting man* [Paul’s background or personal preferences] *but the God*—who saved us

—*who gives His Holy Spirit to you*—God is not asking you to do this alone. He has given His Holy Spirit to dwell in you. He has the power to enable any Christian to learn how to control his or her own body. Peter wrote, “His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence” (2 Peter 1:3).

3. Brotherly Love (4:9-12)

4:9—*Now as to*—A frequent way Paul uses to introduce a new subject (1 Cor 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12).

—*the love of the brethren* [*phileo*]—“brotherly love”

—*you have no need for anyone to write to you*—the Holy Spirit within believers leads them to care for one another in the family of God (a positive), so they don’t need written instruction, such as Paul just wrote about immorality (concerning sin).

—*for you yourselves are taught by God to love* [*agape*] *one another*—Christians quickly learn that there is a kinship between believers, and they can relate to each other in a way they do not relate to those who are not believers. *Agape* love is helping others without reciprocity.

4:10—*for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia*—believers in the towns of Berea, Philippi, etc.

—*But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more*—Gk. to have such an abundance as to be more than sufficient. As with all the virtues, there is always room to excel still more. Our example is Jesus Christ Himself, whose love was infinite.

4:11—*and to make it your ambition*—a strong desire to do, usually requiring determination and hard work

—*to lead a quiet life*—less frantic, quiet peaceful living

—**and attend to your own business**—beyond staying out of other people’s affairs, it also implies keeping one’s own affairs in order. He was advocating personal responsibility.

—**and work with your hands**—a quiet life and attending to your own business does not mean to sit around and do nothing. Paul also wrote, “*if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either*” (2 Thess 3:10). Work keeps one from being a burden to others, and actually helps one to have the ability to help others. Paul also wrote, “*he must labor...so that he will have something to share with one who has need*” (Ephesians 4:28).

—**just as we commanded you**—it must have been when he had been with them

4:12—so that you will behave properly toward outsiders—believers who have a good work ethic and live a peaceful life, respecting others’ privacy, have good conduct toward unbelievers.

— **and not be in any need**—while believers are to help other believers (*agape* love), we should also strive to not be in any need, by working hard. We work to meet the needs of our family and to have some to give to others who are in need.

B. The Rapture (4:13–18)

Pretribulationists base their belief (that the Rapture will occur before the Tribulation) on 1 Thessalonians 4 more than on any other one passage of Scripture. This passage also contains more detail about the Rapture than any other Scripture. Conservative interpreters agree that the translation of living Christians and the resurrection of dead Christians into their eternal bodies will take place at the same time. On this there is agreement, regardless of when the Rapture will occur in relation to the Tribulation (Pre-, Mid-, or Post-).

4:13—But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren—Paul considers it important that believers be informed about the future. Again, he mentions he is writing to “brethren,” i.e., believers. This is NOT information about unbelievers. This is describing events for believers of the church age, not the Old Testament saints nor the Tribulation saints, who will receive their rewards and eternal bodies at the Second Coming of Christ (Daniel 12:1; Revelation 20:4). Teaching prophecy to new believers is important.

AN APPLICATION—Knowledge of prophecy is NOT an option. The information is in the Word. Know it!! We have no excuse for being “*uninformed.*” John even wrote, “*Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it for the time is near*” (Revelation 1:3).

—**about those who are asleep**—The figure of sleep for death was common in the New Testament (e.g., Mark 5:39; John 11:11). This metaphor is appropriate because just as the sleeper does not cease to exist while his or her body sleeps, so the dead person continues to exist. Sleep has its waking, and death will have its resurrection.

It seems like these believers were waiting for Christ’s coming, an imminent event (1:10; 1 Corinthians 7:29; Philippians 4:5). But in the meantime, some of them had died. So they want to understand how the living and the dead come together. Have those who died missed His coming?

AN APPLICATION—When a believer dies, he or she is absent from the body but their spirit is immediately with God in heaven. “*...to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord*” (2 Corinthians 5:8). “*Having the desire to depart and be with Christ*” (Philippians

1:23). “Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He should depart out of this world to the Father” (John 13:1). “Stephen, as he called upon the Lord and said, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!’” (Acts 7:59). Jesus said to the thief on the cross, near the moment of their deaths, “Today you shall be with Me...” (Luke 23:43). “God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus” (1 Thess 4:14).

—**so that you will not grieve**—there will be grieving, of course, as we miss those we love —**as do the rest who have no hope**—but our grieving is not like the grieving of the unbelievers who grieve with no hope of seeing their loved one again, or of their loved one even being in heaven. Paul wrote of the unbelievers, “having no hope and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12).

AN APPLICATION—As believers, we have “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27).

AN APPLICATION—There are no signs for the Rapture. It is an imminent event—it could happen at any moment. The Second Coming, though, has the whole of the Tribulation as signs of that event (Daniel 9:27; Matthew 24; Revelation 4–18).

| Distinctions between the Rapture and the Second Coming | |
|---|---|
| The Rapture | The Second Coming |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All believers are removed from the earth. • Christ never appears on the earth. • The saints are caught up into the air. (The action is up.) • Christ comes to claim a bride. • The Tribulation is about to begin. • It is an imminent event. • It brings a message of comfort. • It is related to the church. • It is a mystery (not revealed in the Old Testament). • Believers are rewarded. • Creation is unchanged. • The Gentiles as a group are unaffected. • Israel’s covenants are unaffected. • It takes place before the Day of Wrath. • The expectation of the church is that <i>the Lord is at hand</i> (Phil. 4:5). • The church is taken into the Lord’s presence. • It’s a blessing for believers. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All unbelievers are removed from the earth. • Christ appears to all the earth. • Christ returns to the earth. (The action is down.) • Christ returns with a bride. • The Millennial Kingdom is about to begin. • It is preceded by a multitude of signs. • It brings a message of fear and judgment. • It is related to Israel and the world. • It is revealed in both Testaments. • Gentiles and Israel are judged. • Creation is changed. • The Gentiles are judged. • Israel’s covenants are fulfilled. • It follows the Day of Wrath. • The expectation of Israel is that <i>the Kingdom is at hand</i> (Matt. 24:14). • Israel is taken into the Kingdom. • It’s a judgment for unbelievers. |

4:14—For if—first-class condition in Greek text, meaning “since”

—**we believe that Jesus died and rose again**—notice that the death of Jesus is not called “fallen asleep” because Jesus really did die and experience actual separation from God for the world’s sins.

—**even so**—with just as much certainty as the death and resurrection of Jesus

—**God will bring with Him**—this is what believers are looking forward to—being with Jesus. Jesus promised, “I will come again and receive you to Myself...” (John 14:3).

—**those who have fallen asleep**—the souls/spirits of those believers from the church age who have died

—**in Jesus**—this would not apply to saints from the Old Testament. They are not “in Jesus” as we in the church age are. Of course, Jesus paid for their sins, but they have no knowledge of being “in Jesus” in the Old Testament. And at this writing, the tribulation (and tribulations saints) has not yet happened.

4:15—For this we say to you by the word of the Lord—not just Paul’s opinion. It was most likely direct revelation to Paul from God, as Paul received before (Acts 16:6; 18:9; 1 Corinthians 2:10; 2 Corinthians 12:1-4; Galatians 1:12, 16; Ephesians 3:3).

—**that we who are alive and remain**—i.e., who have not physically died

—**until the coming** [Gk. *parousia*, lit. “appearing”] **of the Lord**—this is NOT His Second Coming, at which time He will remain on the earth, set up His earthly kingdom, and reign for 1000 years (Matthew 24:30-31; Revelation 19:11-21). There is no reference to the Rapture in the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24).

—**will not precede those who have fallen asleep**—those who are still alive are not given preferential treatment, i.e., they do not precede those who have died.

AN APPLICATION—First are the souls of those who died, coming with Jesus, then they receive their new eternal bodies, then those who are still alive receive their new bodies. Of course, all this happens quickly, in the twinkling of the eye (1 Corinthians 15:51-52).

4:16—For the Lord Himself—This emphasizes that it will be the same Jesus who ascended through the clouds (Acts 1:11). He will not send angels to do it, in contrast to the gathering of the elect at the Second Coming (Mark 13:26-27).

—**will descend from heaven**—Now Jesus sits at the right hand of God in heaven (Romans 8:34; Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3).

—**with a shout**—Similar to when Jesus raised Lazarus, and He said, “*Lazarus, come forth*” (John 11:43). This is the hour “*when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live*” (John 5:25).

—**with the voice of the archangel**—the only archangel mentioned in Scripture is Michael (Daniel 10:13; Jude 9). There could be other archangels. Definitely of a higher rank than other angels. It must be a commanding voice.

—**and with the trumpet of God**—with the shout, the voice, and the trumpet, Christ’s return for His saints will be announced from heaven forcefully and dramatically—but only believers see and hear them.

—**and the dead in Christ**—believers of this church age who have died. God who created the universe out of nothing with a word is fully able to reassemble the decayed bodies of His saints in a moment of time. Remember, God made Adam from the dust (Genesis 2:7).

—**will rise first**—“*...the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality*” (1 Corinthians 15:53-54).

4:17—Then we [Paul seems to think he will be one of those alive at this event] **who are alive and remain**—who have not died at that moment. “*we shall not all die, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye...this mortal will have put on immortality*” (1 Corinthians 15:50-56).

—**will be caught up**—the Latin word is *rapturo*, from which we get the English “rapture”

—**together with them**—at this point, all believers from the Day of Pentecost until the moment of the rapture, will be united in their new immortal bodies

—**in the clouds**—neither in heaven nor on the earth. Jesus “*was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight*” and angels appeared and said, “*This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven*” (Acts 1:9-11).

—**to meet the Lord in the air**—Paul also wrote, “*looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus*” (Titus 2:13).

—**and so we shall always be with the Lord**—Jesus said, “*I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepared a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also*” (John 14:3).

AN APPLICATION—Jesus comes to earth in three ways: (1) as a human baby (Luke 1:26-38), (2) in the clouds (1 Thess 4:16-17), and (3) as a king on a white horse (Revelation 19:11-16).

4:18—Therefore comfort one another with these words—that those who have died will actually precede those who are alive in that day, and those who have died will be united with them, and they will all be with the Lord. It is the blessed hope for which all believers in this age anticipate.

AN APPLICATION—Use these words to comfort believers whose loved ones have died. This is our comfort and hope, so we don’t grieve like the unbelievers.

C. Personal Watchfulness (5:1-11)

1. The day of the Lord (5:1-3)

5:1—Now as to the times [ages] and the epochs [times], brethren [believers]

—There are 3 views of history: (1) cyclical—popular in Hinduism, and in the New Age beliefs that what I do now I have done in a previous world cycle and will do again in the future cycle (such as reincarnation). (2) Atheistic naturalism (evolution)—sees history as linear but there is no meaning in history and there is no ultimate goal or purpose in the future. Man is just a chance order of atoms in meaningless chance history. (3) Christianity shows history as the outworking of the purposeful plan of the sovereign Creator God. Everything is moving towards the Day of the Lord when God will act in judgment on evil and bring in His kingdom control.

—Remember, this epistle is written before God’s revelation of the details of the tribulation given in the book of Revelation, but they would probably have Matthew 24–25, which was the teaching of Jesus about His Second Coming. So the details here of the day of the Lord are more general.

—**you have no need of anything to be written to you**—Jesus talked about it (Matthew 24–25) and Paul had taught about it in person with them (2 Thess 2:5).

5:2—For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord—this is the time right after the Rapture—it would include the tribulation and Second Coming

—**will come just like a thief in the night**—the wording is “just like,” so the thief in the night is an illustration (Matthew 24:43). It represents an unexpected calamity.

5:3—While they [unbelievers] are saying, “Peace and safety!”—the tribulation begins with the antichrist making a peace treaty (Daniel 9:27; Revelation 6:1-2).

—**then destruction** [God’s wrath] **will come upon them** [unbelievers]—notice Paul mentions these people as “they,” and “them,” and he doesn’t include himself, as he did with the believers at the Rapture, “**we**...will be caught up” (4:17).

—**suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child**—unpredictable suddenness and great personal discomfort. The day of the Lord begins with sudden destruction.

—**and they will not escape**—a double negative, to stress that no one in any way can escape it. It’s not for a certain person, or a certain country. It’s a worldwide destruction. There is no getting away from it. Much like the Flood at the time of Noah.

AN APPLICATION—His point seems to be that believers are to be waiting and expecting the Rapture but God’s wrath on the unbelievers takes them by surprise and is not expected and there is no escaping it.

2. Consequent Preparedness (5:4-11)

5:4—But you, brethren—believers, in contrast to the unbelievers of verse 3 who will not escape the coming destruction

—**are not in darkness** [of those unbelievers who will be destroyed in the day of God’s wrath], **that the day would overtake you** [believers] **like a thief**—the surprise the unbelievers have

5:5—for you [believers] **are all sons of light and sons of day**—believers who are Raptured, so we are not even there during the tribulation and when the people experience the wrath of God and Jesus returns as king. There is as big a difference between believers and unbelievers as the difference between day and night. The light could be referring to our spiritual light in Jesus Christ (1 John 1:7), who is the Light (John 8:12), or it could be referring to our knowledge of the future as it has been revealed to us.

—**We** [believers] **are not of night nor of darkness**—moral darkness of evil and intellectual ignorance of impending doom

5:6—so then let us [believers] **not sleep as others** [unbelievers] **do**—Paul uses a different word for “sleep” here than in 4:13-15, where “asleep” means death. Here, the Greek word means spiritual lethargy and insensitivity.

—**but let us be alert and sober**—don’t have the same lifestyle as those who are caught unaware.

AN APPLICATION—Believers are to know prophecy so that they have comfort and hope of the Rapture. But some believers live like they are unbelievers—in ignorance and moral evil.

5:7—For those [unbelievers] **who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night**—night, darkness, moral evil. Both in sleeping and in being drunk, the person is unaware of situations so as to make good judgments.

5:8—But since we [believers] **are of the day**—the light of Jesus and scriptural prophecy
—**let us be sober**—self-control, knowledgeable

—**having put on the breastplate of faith and love**—faith in God protects inwardly and love for other believers protects outwardly. These two go hand-in-hand (1 John).

—**and as a helmet, the hope of salvation**—armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-18). This prophecy knowledge protects our minds from attacks on our thinking. Paul began this section saying, “We do not want you to be uninformed...” (4:13).

AN APPLICATION—Why does a major segment of Christianity remain ignorant of prophecy? Fulfilled prophecy is one of God’s ways of confirming that what He said is true (John 14:29), so we know He keeps His promises. Amillennialism (no 1,000 year kingdom) sees itself in Old Testament terms, making efforts to bring the kingdom of God to this earth, so they understand their mission in temporal terms (anti-abortion, involvement in politics, etc.). Premillennialism recognizes that in the Old Testament, God had a dual commitment to both the individual and to the institution of Israel. In the New Testament, He only has a commitment to His elect saints, not to the institution of the church. God has no covenant with the institutional church. So the emphasis is on the individual believer being Raptured and God’s wrath then poured out on the earth, and Jesus Himself will then miraculously bring in His kingdom on earth.

5:9—*For* [“because”] **God has not destined** [“to bring upon”] **us** [believers] **for wrath**—the wrath is for the destruction of the day of the Lord on the evil in the unbelievers. Earlier he described Jesus as One **who rescues** (*ton rhuomenon*, a timeless substantive, denoting one of His characteristics—He is a rescuer) **us from the wrath to come** (1:10).
—**but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ**

AN APPLICATION—John wrote, “*He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him*” (John 3:36). The wrath of God is on every person—UNLESS they believe in Jesus. It is the only way to escape the wrath of God. If a person does not have *salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ*, then there is no escaping the wrath. So salvation is protection against these wraths of God: eternal wrath in the lake of fire and the tribulation wrath.

5:10—**who died for us** [believers], **so that whether we are awake or asleep, we** [believers] **will live together with Him**—Paul uses the same word for “asleep” as in verse 6 in this section. Notice the pronoun “we” again. So whether a believer is spiritually alert or spiritually lethargic, believers can be assured of life together with Jesus. God has destined believers for salvation, not His wrath.

AN APPLICATION—As much as understanding prophecy is crucial for the sanctification of believers, the distinguishing mark is “salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Jesus will Rapture His own people, whether they know and believe in the Rapture or not. It’s salvation that determines whether a person will be Raptured or experience the wrath of God.

5:11—**Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you** [believers] **also are doing**—We can encourage one another as believers because we have hope and comfort of the Rapture. Unbelievers will only experience the wrath of God.

D. Exhortation Regarding Various Needs (5:12-15)

1. Attitude toward leaders (5:12-13)

5:12—**But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate** [“know by experience”] **those who diligently labor** [one word—work hard, diligently] **among you, and have charge** [Gk. “to be active in helping”] **over you in the Lord and give you instruction** [instruction to correct behavior and belief]

AN APPLICATION—Most commentaries take the view of the local institutional church, and that these leaders are pastors, who have charge over us. However, the “church” is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23), and Jesus said, “*You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not so among you*” (Matthew 20:25-26; see also 23:1-12). There are believers practicing their gifts among us (v. 14), and we should...

5:13—*and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work*—we benefit from each other. One might have mercy when we are ill. Another may have helps when we need help. As we learn from Scripture, we teach and encourage others. Appreciate that in one another.

—*Live in peace with one another*—We are at war with our sin nature and with the things of Satan’s domain in the world, but with other believers, we are at peace. We should both be focused on eternity and not on the things of the earth.

2. Relationships among themselves (5:14-15)

5:14—*We* [apostles] *urge* [more authoritative than “ask”] *you, brethren,*

Focusing on those who are hurting.....

—*admonish* [provide instruction as to correct behavior and belief] *the unruly* [lazy, refusing to work,

—*encourage* [give support, help] *the fainthearted* [discouraged, losing heart]

—*help* [hold firmly to] *the weak* [helpless condition]—

—*be patient* [tolerate delays without becoming annoyed] *with everyone.*

Focusing on those who hurt others.....

5:15—*See that no one repays another with evil for evil*—this is also found in Matthew 5:38-48; Romans 12:17-21; 1 Peter 3:9. Nonretaliation for personal wrongs is maybe the best evidence of personal Christian maturity. For Christians, the severest, most painful disappointments come not from the wickedness of the unbelieving world but from other believers, in slanderous words and gossip, influencing someone toward sinful behavior.

—*but always* [at all times] *seek after that which is good* [positive, generous] *for one another*—other believers. Paul wrote, “*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good* (Romans 12:20-21).

—*and for all people*—even for those who are not believers (Acts 17:1-9).

E. Holy Living (5:16-24)

1. Personal living (5:16-18)

5:16—*Rejoice always*—This is one of about 70 New Testament commands to “rejoice!” The Christian who remains in sadness and depression breaks a commandment. They are mistrusting God. From a human perspective, there may be every reason to not be rejoicing, but in Christ we are to *always* be rejoicing. Christian joy constantly flows from what the believer continually knows to be true about God and about our eternal, saving relationship to Him—regardless of circumstances. We should rejoice that we can come to God, who loves us and gave His Son for our salvation.

5:17—*pray without ceasing*—Having an attitude of prayer, whatever the circumstances, wherever we are, whoever we are with. Talking with God should be a characteristic of a believer. We pray when anxious (Philippians 4:6). We pray for wisdom (James 1:5). We

pray for forgiveness (1 John 1:9). We pray with thanksgiving (1 Thess 5:18). We pray for someone's salvation (2 Peter 3:9). We pray for understanding of God's Word (2 Timothy 2:15)We would rejoice more if we prayed more!!

5:18—*in everything give thanks*—not necessarily thanks for everything, but “*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus*” (Philippians 4:6-7).

—for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus—Want to know God's will? Here it is: always rejoicing, praying without ceasing, and in everything give thanks. It's not the totality of God's will, but it is a large part of it.

2. Living with Other Believers (5:19-22)

5:19-21—Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophetic utterances. But examine everything carefully—with no exceptions!!

—hold fast to that which is good—At the time when Paul was writing, the Scriptures were still being written by the apostles. In 2 Thessalonians 2:2, Paul wrote, “*that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.*” The believers in Thessalonica had to examine everything they were hearing, to determine if it was revelation from God or not. If, after carefully examining a “spirit or a message or a letter,” they determined it was indeed from the apostles (Paul) and the revelation from God, they were not to quench it or despise it. For example, the revelation of the Rapture (1 Thess 4:14-18). However, after examining it, if they determined it was not revelation from God, they were to not hold it fast, and not be disturbed or shaken from their composure.

AN APPLICATION—How to apply that today? We know the Holy Spirit authored the Scriptures (2 Peter 1:21). So we also need to examine everything we hear or read carefully to determine if it is consistent with what the Bible says. If so, hold fast to it and do not quench the Spirit who is giving you understanding according to the Scriptures. If is not according to the Scriptures, do not be disturbed or shaken by the message. Do not hold fast to it. It is not true. Spiritual discernment is the ability to distinguish divine truth from error and half-truth. Be like the Berean believers, who “*received the Word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so* (Acts 17:11; see also 1 Timothy 4:1-6, 13, 16; 6:20-21; 2 Timothy 4:1-5; Titus 1:9).

5:22—abstain [“to hold oneself away from”] **from every form of evil**—this includes lies and distortions of the truth as well as moral perversions. It appears in many forms. It is the opposite of “holding fast to that which is good.”

3. Divine enablement (5:23-24)

5:23—Now may the God of peace Himself—God is the giver “of peace” through Christ's death.

—sanctify you entirely—set apart believers to Christ in every area of their lives

—and may your spirit—the highest and most unique part of humans that enables them to communicate with God. This includes morality (to discern good and evil), purpose and destiny (to know your body will die), and creativity. Animals do not have these.

—and soul—this is personality (intellect, emotion, and will). Animals do have these.

—**and body**—our new eternal body

—**be preserved** [to cause to continue, to keep, to retain] **complete**—As a complete person: spirit, soul, and body will all be united in our eternal bodies. You will not lose your identity. For example, Moses (after 1500 years) and Elijah (after 750 years) were complete and the same people at the Mt. of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:3).

—**without blame**—we leave our sin nature behind

—**at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ**— For believers in this age, that happens at the Rapture.

5:24—Faithful is He who calls you and He also will bring it to pass—Paul also wrote, “For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect [complete] it until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6). “these whom He predestined, He also called [to salvation], and these whom He called, He also justified, and these whom He justified, He also glorified” (Romans 8:28-30).

V. Conclusion (5:25-28)

A. Personal appeals (5:25-27)

5:25—Brethren, pray for us—This is the first of 15 times in 1 Thess that “Brethren” occurs at the beginning of a sentence in the original. It is emphatic in this position. It is only the prayers of brethren in Christ that God hears. And Paul wants prayer for his fellow workers as well as himself.

5:26—Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss—an outward physical expression of true Christian love. This is practiced in different ways in different cultures. In Romania, the brethren do greet one another with a kiss. In America, it may be an embrace or handshake.

5:27—I adjure [“charge”] **you by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brethren**—probably not all of the believers could read, and each person would not have a copy of this letter, so it was important that it be read out loud to all the believers, so there would be no misunderstanding of its contents and there would be spiritual accountability of all the people of God.

B. Benediction (5:28)

5:28—The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you—all that we have in Christ is due to His gracious gift.

2 Thessalonians

This epistle gives evidence that Paul had recently heard news about conditions in the church. Probably this information came to him from the messenger who delivered 1 Thessalonians and returned to Corinth. Perhaps other people who had news of the church informed the three missionaries (Paul, Silas, and Timothy) also. Some of the news was good: the Thessalonians were continuing to grow and to remain faithful to Christ in spite of persecution. But some was bad: false teaching concerning the day of the Lord had entered the church and was causing confusion and leading some of the Christians to quit their jobs in expectation of the Lord's return.

In view of these reports Paul felt constrained to write this epistle. He commended his children in the faith for their growth, corrected their doctrinal error about the day of the Lord, and warned of its consequences [BKC].

Outline

- I. Salutation (1:1-2)
- II. Commendation for Past Progress (1:3-12)
 - A. Thanksgiving for growth (1:3-4)
 - B. Encouragement to persevere (1:5-10)
 - C. Prayer for success (1:11-12)
- III. Correction of Present Error (2:1-12)
 - A. The beginning of the day of the Lord (2:1-5)
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- IV. Thanksgiving and Prayer (2:13-17)
 - A. Thanksgiving for calling (2:13-15)
 - B. Prayer for strength (2:16-17)
- V. Exhortations for Future Growth (3:1-15)
 - A. Prayer for the apostles (3:1-2)
 - B. Confidence of the apostles (3:3-5)
 - C. Treatment of the disorderly (3:6-10)
 - D. Commands for the idle (3:11-13)
 - E. Discipline of the disobedient (3:14-15)
- VI. Conclusion (3:16-18)

Content

I. Salutation (1:1-2)

1:1—Paul and Silvanus and Timothy—Paul is the author (he speaks of himself in the singular in 2 Thess 2:5 3:17), but Silas and Timothy joined him in sending this letter. They are also the senders of 1 Thessalonians (1:1).

—**To the church of the Thessalonians**—The letter is addressed to the same believers, in Thessalonica, as is 1 Thessalonians. But the problem seems to be worse, as they have received some deceptive information that Paul has to clear up.

—**in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**—Jesus is Deity, an equal level with God the Father. By adding the personal possessive pronoun “our,” he emphasizes that God is the Father of believers.

1:2—Grace [“be”] **to you**—unmerited gift of God on all who accept Christ as their Savior—**and peace**—God and believers are reconciled as a result of God’s gift of grace—**from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**—it is God’s initiative and God’s provision and Christ’s payment on the cross that make grace and peace possible.

II. Commendation for Past Progress (1:3-12)

A. Thanksgiving for growth (1:3-4)

1:3—We ought [obligation] **always to give thanks to God for you, brethren**—God deserved all the apostle’s gratitude because it was God’s grace that made the Thessalonians what they were.

—**as is only fitting**—worthy, pertaining to having a relatively high degree of merit

—**because your faith is** [**greatly enlarged**—one word]—increased beyond measure, or grown beyond what could be expected (e.g. Romans 4:20; 2 Corinthians 10:15). In 1 Thess 1:8, Paul wrote of the Thessalonians, “...*in every place your faith toward God has gone forth.*”

—**and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater**—to have more than enough, an excess of love [*agape*—give without reciprocity] toward other believers

1:4—therefore, we ourselves speak proudly [exceptionally noteworthy] **of you among the churches of God**—“pride” is value independent of God, and sadly the translators have used this English word. Paul has already said that He gives thanks to God for what God is doing in the lives of these believers. Their growing faith and love for one another and perseverance in persecution are good examples to other believers. It is not independence of God but what God is doing in their lives.

—**for your perseverance**—to continue to bear up under difficult circumstances

—**and faith**—trusting God

—**in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions** [sufferings] **which you endure**—This was not the basis of their salvation but the evidence of it.

B. Encouragement to persevere (1:5-10)

1:5—This is a plain indication [evidence] **of God’s righteous judgment**—the Bema (2 Corinthians 5:10). “...*the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. If any man’s work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward*” (1 Corinthians 3:11-15).

—**so that you will be considered worthy** [valuable] **of the kingdom of God**—all believers will enter Christ’s kingdom at His Second Coming, but only those who faithfully follow Him in this life will reign with Him (Matthew 5:11-12; Luke 6:22-23).

—**for which indeed you are suffering**

Suffering is not thought of as something which may possibly be avoided by the Christian. For him it is inevitable. He is ordained to it.... He must live out his life and develop his Christian character in a world which is dominated by non-Christian ideas. His faith is not some fragile thing, to be kept in a kind of spiritual cotton wool, insulated from all shocks. It is robust. It is to be manifested in the fires of trouble, and in the furnace of affliction.... The very troubles and afflictions which the world heaps on the believer become, under God, the means of making him what he ought to be. Suffering, when we have come to regard it in this light, is not to be thought of as evidence that God has forsaken us, but as evidence that God is with us. [Leon Morris, “*First and Second Thessalonians*,” pp 197-198]

1:6—For after all it is only just—justice demands that in the future...
—**for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you**—“leave room for the wrath of God, ‘...Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord” (Romans 12:19).

1:7—and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well—relief for believers will be eternity in the presence of Jesus Christ.
—**when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire**—not the Rapture, which is a comfort and hope for the believer, but this is the Second Coming of Christ in power and great glory, “and He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet...” (Matthew 24:31).

1:8—dealing out retribution—deserved punishment, such as the Tribulation martyrs who cry out in heaven: “O Lord, holy and true, will Thou refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth...” (Revelation 6:10).
—(1) **to those who do not know God**—they are ignorant, “without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12; see also Romans 1:18-32).
—(2) **and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus**—their guilt is greater because they have rejected greater knowledge of God, i.e., the gospel of Jesus. “How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God...it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:29-31).

1:9—These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction—not annihilation, which cannot be eternal, but conscious eternal death
—**away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power**—Jesus said it would be a place of darkness (Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 25:30). They will share hell with the devil and his angels. It will be a place of “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30), where “the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night” (Revelation 14:11). Words do not adequately express the misery of this reality.

AN APPLICATION—Today on earth, all people are in the presence of the Lord in that “in Him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:17). “He upholds all things by the word of His power” (Hebrews 1:3). “...Father in heaven; for He...sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matthew 4:45).

1:10—when He comes to be glorified in His saints—not glorified “by” His saints, as He is today on earth. Daniel described it, “and those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever” (Daniel 12:3). God’s glory will be reflected in us.
—**on that day**—This is not the Rapture, for no judgment accompanies the Rapture. The Second Coming, however, is a time of judgment, “from His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may smite the nations...and the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat upon the horse” (Revelation 19:15, 21).
—**and to be marveled at among all who have believed**—at the Second Coming, the church-age believers in their glorified bodies (Revelation 19:8, 14), the Old Testament saints (Daniel 12:1-3), and the tribulation saints (Revelation 20:4) all will be resurrected and translated into their new eternal bodies.

—**for our testimony to you was believed**—this future would encourage the Thessalonian believers who are currently undergoing persecution, and encourage believers in their trials today.

C. Prayer for success (1:11-12)

1:11—To this end also we pray for you always—Paul said, “*having a fond affection for you [Thessalonian believers], we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us*” (1 Thess 2:8). So, of course, he was always praying for their maturity in Christ, so that they would not be *quickly shaken or be disturbed* by false teaching regarding the day of the Lord (2:2).

—**that our God will count you worthy of your calling**—“calling” is to salvation. Paul already wrote to them, “*exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you...so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory*” (1 Thess 2:11-12). Paul prayed that God would enable them to show the spiritual virtues that would make them worthy to be called Christians.

—**and fulfill every desire for goodness**—the desire of believers is for goodness, as defined by God. God’s desire is that we would “*become conformed to the image of His Son*” (Romans 8:29) and “*be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect*” (Romans 12:1-2).

—**and the work of faith with power**—with every act being motivated by their faith in God. Salvation is by faith alone, apart from any human works (Romans 3:20-30). But works are the fruit of faith (James 2:14-26). That power is only through the filling of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 3:16) and the indwelling of the Word of God (Colossians 3:16).

1:12—so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you—the ultimate purpose is for Jesus to be glorified in the believer. Jesus said, “*Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven*” (Matthew 5:16).

—**and you in Him**—believers will share the future moment of glorification at His coming. John wrote, “*It has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is*” (1 John 3:2).

—**according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ**—it is not “out of” His grace but “according to the grace,” and His grace has no bounds. *His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence* (2 Peter 1:3).

III. Correction of Present Error (2:1-12)

A. The beginning of the day of the Lord (2:1-5)

2:1—Now we request you, brethren—a transition between two sections

—**with regard to the coming** [Gk παρουσια, *parousia*] **of our Lord Jesus Christ**—to come, to arrive, to come to be present. Sometimes it refers to the whole end times, sometimes just the Second Coming. It is determined by the context. It would begin with the Rapture and end with the Great White Throne Judgment, after the Millennial Kingdom. In this passage, Paul is talking about the tribulation and the antichrist.

—**and our gathering together to Him**—this would be the Rapture, which Paul described in 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17.

2:2—that you not be quickly [emphasis upon the relatively brief interval between two points of time] **shaken**—to cause something to move back and forth rapidly, often violently,

“to shake”—in this case, it seems they vacillated between what Paul had told them and what the false teachers were telling them about Christ’s coming.

—**from your composure** [reasoning, thinking, understanding]

—**or be disturbed**—to be in a state of fear associated with surprise, to be startled

—**either by a spirit**—probably a false prophet who supposedly received divine revelation

—**or a message**—spoken authority, teaching

—**or a letter**—written authority

—**as if from us**—somehow this teaching was claiming to originate with Paul and Timothy.

Paul also wrote, “...*false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ...his [Satan’s] servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness...*” (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

—**to the effect that the day of the Lord has come**—whereas the *Parousia* refers in general to the Lord’s coming, the *Rapture* is a church event, and the *day of the Lord* is an Israel event, which resumes the chronology of Daniel’s seventy weeks, which begins when the antichrist signs a covenant with Israel (Daniel 9:27).

AN APPLICATION—Paul had taught them (1 Thess 4) that the Rapture would precede the final wrath of the tribulation. Yet they were experiencing severe persecution, which, in addition to false teaching, seemed to lead them to think they missed the Rapture and were currently in the tribulation, all of which caused them to vacillate in their thinking and belief, and led to confusion, fear, and distress.

2:3—Let no one in any way deceive you—don’t be deceived, forgetful, ignorant, unbelieving, insecure, or weak. Deception easily leads to anxiety and fear. Paul wrote, “*by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting*” (Romans 16:18).

AN APPLICATION—Deception is a constant threat to believers. Part of the deception is usually a bit of truth, to make it more believable. It’s your responsibility to not be deceived. You have been warned...be on the alert, be prepared (with true knowledge—your best defense!).

—**for it will not come** —the day of the Lord, i.e., the tribulation (from verse 2)—it’s the non-arrival of these events that show the day of the Lord has not come yet.

—(1) **unless the apostasy comes first**—a specific worldwide revolt, a departure, an abandoning a position once held. A rebellion will take place in the professing church. It will be a departure from the truth of the Word of God. Not just a drifting into apathy but setting themselves up in opposition to God. With the Rapture of true believers, the human race will totally abandon the Word of God. Many have done that already (the NAR, for example).

—(2) **and the man of lawlessness is revealed**—since the first coming of Jesus, Satan, of course, has had a man in the world ready to step into that role. But that man will not be revealed as the antichrist until after the Rapture. So even the man himself would not know he is the one until then. It seems from Daniel 9:27 that he comes to power through a peace treaty with the Jews and then he breaks that treaty, and he is unmasked for who he really is, **the man of lawlessness**.

—**is revealed**— “to uncover,” “to take out of hiding,” “to make fully known”

AN APPLICATION—It’s interesting that in the last year, riots, protests, bombings, killings, de-funding the police, etc., i.e., lawlessness, seems to characterize so many cities in America (and even in the world). These certainly prepare the minds of the people to accept lawlessness as a way of life. There will be no laws to control the desires of men’s hearts. The sin nature and Satan’s world system will have free reign.

—**the son** [“offspring”] **of destruction** [to ruin, destroy]—to cause destruction of persons, objects, or institutions. This same phrase is used one other time, in describing Judas (John 17:12). The word “destruction” is the Greek word *απολλυμι* *apollyon*, who John named the king over the demons imprisoned in the abyss, who are let out during the tribulation (Revelation 9:11), to inflict horrible destruction on the people on the earth. The antichrist’s destruction is described as something the offspring of this horrible demon would do.

2:4—who opposes—to show hostility toward, to speak against
—**and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship**—also described in Revelation 13:12, “*the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast [the antichrist].*” He takes away the worship of all the gods (Buddhism, Hinduism, Greek, Islam, etc.). He takes away the objects of worship (Mary statues, Buddha, Mecca, Dome of the Rock, Greek gods, etc.).

—(3) **so that he takes his seat in the temple of God**—from here and Daniel 9:26-27; 11:31, 36-37, 12:11; Matthew 24:15; Mark 13:14; Revelation 11:1, we know there is a Jewish temple in operation during the tribulation. So we would look for any news of its establishment as something prophesied for the tribulation time [which would mean the Rapture is nearer.] It may or may not be built before the Rapture.

AN APPLICATION—The Jews of the Third Temple Institute have the implements of the temple, have trained priests for the temple, and have practiced sacrificing a sheep for Passover. These Orthodox Jews grow in numbers every year. The temple on the temple mount is more and more of a possibility (the site where the Dome of the Rock is today).

—**displaying himself as being God**—Jesus said this was “*the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place...*” (Matthew 24:15). In the inter-testament time, this abomination was when Antiochus IV Epiphanes offered a pig on the altar in the Temple. In the tribulation, the antichrist will set himself up in the temple to be worshipped as God.

2:5—Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things?—For the first time in this epistle, Paul wrote that he personally had taught them. Paul did not regard prophetic truth as too deep or unimportant or controversial for new Christians. It seems he may be a bit upset with them. If they would have remembered what he had taught them, they wouldn’t be deceived or shaken by the false teaching.

B. The mystery of lawlessness (2:6-12)

2:6—And you know what [a force] restrains him now—prevents him from being revealed as who he is. The antichrist will be destroyed at the Second Coming of Christ (v. 2:8), and he will be revealed as the antichrist during the tribulation (v. 2:3), but right now, in our church age, he is being restrained, he is prevented from unleashing all his evil. Only one being has that much power—God Himself is restraining him. Neither Satan nor the antichrist can gain any control God has not planned to allow them to have and when.

—**so that in his time he will be revealed**—God has a specific time planned for the revealing of the antichrist. It’s interesting that he cannot do anything until God allows it. And God already has that time planned. Then he will be revealed (even if he did not want it). God is even controlling the time by when He has the Rapture. Until then, evil is restrained.

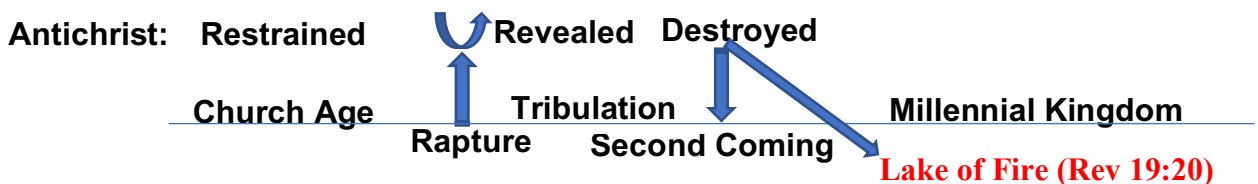
2:7—For the mystery—a mystery in the New Testament is a new truth previously unknown before its revelation. Here, the mystery is the revelation of a future climax of lawlessness in the world.

—**of lawlessness is already at work**—John wrote, “every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; and this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world” (1 John 4:3). The Thessalonian believers were already suffering persecution for being believers. But this was in a local area, and with a few people. But in the tribulation, it will be worldwide, and over everyone.

—**only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way**—now we read that “He” God the Holy Spirit is doing the restraining. How is He doing that? One way is by indwelling believers today in the world. When the church-age believers are Raptured (1 Thess 4:13-18), then the **restraining** force of the Holy Spirit will be removed, so evil can flourish.

AN APPLICATION—Some say the Holy Spirit Himself is removed. But the Spirit does other things besides restraining sin. He “convict[s] the world concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment” (John 16:7). People will become believers during the tribulation time because of the conviction of the Holy Spirit. But many of those believers, instead of restraining sin, will be martyred for their belief (Rev. 6:9-11; 20:4).

2:8—Then that lawless one will be revealed—after the Rapture, the antichrist will come to power as the evil ruler of the world, a continuation of Daniel’s 70th week (Daniel 9:26f). —**whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming**—At the Second Coming of Christ, “the beast [antichrist] was seized and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone...” and after the 1,000 year kingdom, “the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire, where the beast [antichrist] and false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever” (Revelation 19:20; 20:10).



2:9—that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan—In Revelation 13:2 we read that “the dragon [Satan, 12:9] gave him [antichrist] his power and his throne and great authority. The antichrist’s miracles will reveal his supernatural power and create wonder, shock, and astonishment, leading to false conclusions about who he is.

AN APPLICATION—Paul’s use of “*parousia*” for the antichrist’s “coming” suggests a deliberate imitation or version of something that falls far short of the real thing—Imitating the *parousia* of Christ’s coming (v. 8).

—with all power and signs and false wonders—Jesus said, “For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect” (Matthew 24:24). They are not false in the sense that they are not real. They will be doing real supernatural things as signs, for people to believe what is false, to not believe the truth of Jesus (v. 12), to follow the antichrist, and therefore, Satan. They will be evidence to people and they will stand in awe of him (Rev. 13:2b-4; 17:8).

2:10—and with all the deception of wickedness—every deceit of unrighteousness to appear as “righteous.” In their eyes, unrighteousness becomes righteousness. Isaiah wrote, “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!” (Isaiah 5:20).

—for those who perish—It’s the unbelievers who will believe these deceptions. “he performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform...” (Rev. 13:13).

—because they did not receive the love of the truth [God’s Word] so as to be saved—Unbelievers are lost, not because they did not hear or understand the truth, but because they did not love it, they did not choose it. Their own choice brings about their condemnation. Everything the antichrist does will mislead people. It’s not that everything he does will be perceived as evil by people, but that it will be evil in its essence because it misrepresents the truth and leads people away from worshipping God.

AN APPLICATION—True believers will not take the mark of the beast. “And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years” (Revelation 20:4).

2:11—For this reason—because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. When they reject the truth of God to be saved, there is only one other option—to be completely defenseless to the false claims of the lawless one.

—God will send upon them a deluding influence—to cause someone to believe a deception, to mislead, to cause to be mistaken, i.e., the deceptive message and miracles of the antichrist. God gives the antichrist the power to do signs and false wonders to mislead the people. See Revelation 13:5-8, 13-15.

—so that they will believe—everyone believes something—either the truth of God or the lie. There comes a day that those who persistently reject the truth will be unable to believe it. God will harden their hearts and fix them in the path they have chosen. God did a similar thing with Pharaoh. “For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, ‘For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you’...He hardens whom He desires” (Romans 9:17-18).

—what is false—that the antichrist is god

AN APPLICATION—Romans 1 also illustrates this. “Even though they knew God [vv. 19-20], they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened” [v. 21]. Because of that, three times it says that “God gave them over” (vv. 24. 26. 28) to the consequences of their own sinful choices.

2:12—in order that they all may be judged—Mankind has a free will choice. They are deceived by the antichrist but they are responsible for choosing to be deceived. They could not be judged unless they had the free will to choose to believe what is false.

— (1) **who did not believe the truth**—If they believed what is false, and do not believe and loved (chose) the truth of Jesus (eternal life). Whether they believe the truth of Jesus or not determines where their judgment will happen.

—**but (2) took pleasure** [to take pleasure in something that fulfills one's desires] **in wickedness**—Their choice is not intellectual but moral. [Believers should not be characterized by a love of wickedness. If it is an abomination to God, it should be an abomination to us. For example, homosexuality is an abomination to God!]

AN APPLICATION—The choice to believe or not believe the truth about Jesus determines one's eternal destiny. Once that destiny is determined, then one's works are judged.

- A believer in Jesus goes to the Bema judgment for works and rewards (1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10).
- An unbeliever goes to the Great White Throne for works and punishment (Rev 20:11-15).

IV. Thanksgiving and Prayer (2:13-17)

A. Thanksgiving for calling (2:13-15)

2:13—But we should always give thanks to God for you—In contrast to the unbelievers just mentioned, who do not love the truth, Paul is thankful for these Thessalonians who did believe the truth.

—**brethren beloved by the Lord**—the initiative in salvation comes from God, not man (1 Thess 1:4).

—**because God has chosen you from the beginning** (“before the creation of the world”—Ephesians 1:4) **for salvation**—although God loves the world enough to send His Son to die for them (John 3:16), and “not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9), God does not choose all “for salvation.” (See also Matthew 22:14; 24:22, 24, 31; Mark 13:20, 22, 27; Luke 18:7; Romans 8:33; 11:7; Colossians 3:12; 2 Timothy 2:10; Titus 1:1; 1 Peter 1:1.)

—**through sanctification by the Spirit** (God's sovereignty)—Romans 15:16; 1 Corinthians 6:11-12; 1 Thess 4:7-8; 1 Peter 1:2. Sanctification, sometimes called the spiritual life, is the process after salvation of being “transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12:2).

—**and faith in the truth** (human responsibility/choice). “For by grace are you saved, through faith...” (Ephesians 2:8-9). Without free-will choice, mankind would be robots.

AN APPLICATION—Remember—both things are true. Sovereignty is what God does. Free will is what man does. One does not trump the other. We do not have enough information to know how these can both be true. [If you think you understand it, you probably do not understand it!!]

2:14—It was for this He called you through our gospel—the Thessalonian believers became saved when the apostolic missionaries brought the gospel to them.

—**that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ**—in contrast to the judgment that awaits those who do not believe in the truth of Jesus (see John 6:37-44).

AN APPLICATION—God’s choice (in eternity past) was carried out in history with the gospel to the Thessalonians, that the future might bring them a share “*in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (the *parousia*). Past, present, future.

2:15—So then—in light of their calling, **brethren**, believers in the truth of Christ
—**stand firm**—Gk. one word (1 Corinthians 16:13; 1 Thess 3:8). We are in danger of being swept away by an ungodly culture. Or we may let the truths of God grow cold. “*We must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, let us drift away from it*” (Hebrews 2:1).
—**and hold to the traditions** [lit. teaching, instruction] **which you were taught**—Paul said, “*Do you not remember that while I was with you, I was telling you these things?*” (2 Thess 2:5). There is a difference between the revelation received by the apostles directly from God and the teaching received by the people directly from the apostles. Paul, for example, taught the Thessalonian believers when he was with them, but what he wrote in these two letters is direct revelation from God.
—**whether by word of mouth or by letter from us**—Paul goes on to say, “*Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition [teaching] which you received from us*” (2 Thess 3:6).

AN APPLICATION—This was their issue that caused Paul to write 2 Thessalonians. They were “*quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed...*” because they were not standing firm and holding to the teachings of Paul, which is why he had to write to them.

AN APPLICATION—It’s too bad this Greek word is translated “traditions” in English when it means teaching or instruction. The RC use these verses to say that Paul was giving them traditions in addition to the Scripture, which, of course, are the RC traditions, which have equal weight as the Scripture. A false belief. Jesus warned, “*you leave the commandment of God, and hold fast the tradition of men*” (Mark 7:8).

B. Prayer for strength (2:16-17)

2:16—Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father—The Father who chose us and called us to salvation, Jesus who provided the salvation by His death on the cross and the hope of future glory at His *parousia*, and the Holy Spirit who sanctifies us. All three persons of the Godhead are involved in us being believers.

—**who has loved us and given us**—Paul could not alone persuade these believers. It will take God the Father and Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

—**eternal comfort**—encouragement, with eternity in view

—**and good hope**—beneficial confidence in the future, especially because of the distress the false teachers brought about the future (v. 2).

—**by grace**—God’s selective favor of those He chose

2:17—comfort—encouragement to face their present persecution and distress

—**and strengthen your hearts**—to decide and to refuse to change one’s mind, to resolve (belief)

—**in every good work**—out of the encouragement and resolution of the heart comes good works and good words (actions)

—**and word**—spoken in defense and confirmation of the gospel

V. Exhortations for Future Growth (3:1-15)

A. Prayer for the apostles (3:1-2)

3:1—Finally, brethren—introduces the last major part of the letter to the believers
—**pray for us**—Since Paul depended on the Lord for every aspect of his ministry, he often asked people to pray for him (Romans 15:30-32; Ephesians 6:19-20; Colossians 4:3; 1 Thess 5:25; Philem 22). Present tense = continually pray.

—**that the word [logos] of the Lord**—meaning, from the context, either the written Word or the Living Word (Jesus Christ—John 1:1),

—**will [spread rapidly]**—one word, “keep on running,” to make progress

—**and be glorified**—keep on deserving honor or praise, i.e., victorious

—**just as it did also with you**—see 1 Thess 1:5, 6, 8; 2:13. Paul is praying for more people to become believers, and to grow in the Lord.

3:2—and that we will be rescued—so there would not be any hindrance to the preaching of the gospel. “Rescued” implies a severe danger.

—**from perverse** [not according to what is right] **and evil** [one who personifies evil, aggressively wicked] **men**— these are the opposite (of v. 1) response to the gospel.

—**for not all have faith**—evil men exist because they are unbelievers. Jesus said, “...*the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it*” (Matthew 7:13-14). The majority of people will not believe. Believers are in the minority (even in the tribulation and the millennial kingdom).

B. Confidence of the apostles (3:3-5)

3:3—But the Lord is faithful—God’s character should be the basis for a Christian’s confidence.

—**and He will strengthen** [to cause someone to become stronger and unchanging in attitude or belief, spiritually, v. 2:17] **and protect** [to keep from] **you from the evil [one]**—probably the evil men of verse 2, who are motivated by Satan.

AN APPLICATION—It seems that it is spiritual protection from evil, as physical evil in the world is often victorious, which is why Paul prayed that he be rescued from the evil men and he has just described the physical victory of the antichrist during the tribulation.

3:4—We have confidence [confidence of the certainty of something, to be convinced] **in the Lord** [concerning you, not in the text]—Paul’s confidence is in the Lord, not the Thessalonian believers, and what the Lord will do spiritually in their lives.

—**that you are doing**—the Thessalonian believers were off to a good start as believers

—**and will continue to do**—Paul is confident they will continue to grow spiritually

—**what we command**—what the apostles’ commanded are written in the Scriptures. Jesus said in the Great Commission, “*teaching them to observe all that I commanded you*” (Matthew 28:20). Paul had already written them, “...*when you received the Word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the Word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe*” (1 Thess. 2:13).

AN APPLICATION—Peter wrote, “*like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the Word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation*” (1 Peter 2:2). You only grow from the Bible, God’s own holy words. David wrote, “*The unfolding of Your words gives light; it gives understanding...*” “O Lord, give me understanding according to Your Word” (Psalm 119:130, 169).

3:5—*May the Lord direct* [to guide, to lead] ***your hearts*** [thoughts, inner self, mind]—***—into the love of God***—this can be translated either objective or subjective genitive, i.e., it can mean either God’s love of them or their love of God. Probably a deliberate usage to mean both things.

—and into the steadfastness of Christ—Again, this could be either Christ’s patience with them or believers’ endurance in Christ’s strength.

C. Treatment of the disorderly (3:6-10)

3:6—*Now we command* [an order, not a suggestion] ***you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ***—commands come only from God, through the apostles/writers of the Bible.

—that you keep away [separate from] ***from every brother who leads an unruly*** [lit. refusing to work, idle, lazy] ***life***—in his first letter, Paul warned them, “*admonish the unruly*” (1 Thess 5:14). Apparently, this first warning now required harsher discipline. Now the believers were to not associate with the person who leads an unruly life.

—and not according to the tradition [teaching, instruction] ***which you received from us***—this behavior was in direct disobedience to the apostles’ teaching.

3:7—*For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example*—because Paul himself imitated Jesus. Paul had lived among them so they had firsthand knowledge of how he lived

—because we did not act in an undisciplined [lazy, referring to “unruly”] ***manner among you***—

3:8—*nor did we eat anyone’s bread without paying for it*—not that he never accepted a gift or a meal from others, but that they were self-supporting

—but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you—It seems that he chose to work in Thessalonica so that those who refused to work could not point to his not working as justification for their idleness.

3:9—*not because we do not have the right to this*—in fact, the Philippians twice sent him a gift during his stay in Thessalonica (Philippians 4:16).

—but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would follow our example.

AN APPLICATION—Be constantly mindful that we and the life we lead, the decisions we make, what we enjoy, etc. are all examples and models for those around us—especially children and grandchildren!!

3:10—*For even when we were with you*—not only had Paul given them an example of working, he also taught the Thessalonian believers about it, so they were not ignorant of this command.

—we used to give you this order—this was a command, not merely a suggestion

—if anyone is not willing to work—it’s not that they were unable to work, they were not willing to work.

—then he is not to eat, either—the believers were not to support them, in the sense of Christian charity, but were to let them go hungry so that they would be forced to do the right thing and go to work. If there are not consequences to not working, they will never change.

It's interesting that early Jewish traditions stated that a person could visit for two days or even three, but after that, they must work.

AN APPLICATION—Paul also wrote, “*But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever*” (1 Timothy 5:8). As soon as God created man, He put him in a garden to cultivate and keep it (Genesis 2:15). Work was created for man before there was sin in the world.

AN APPLICATION—Perhaps because of the false teaching about the coming of the Lord, they decided there was no point to work. They should just sit and wait for His coming to happen. This was not only the wrong belief but the wrong conclusion. They went from Jesus could come to Jesus would come, so they sat and waited.

D. Commands for the idle (3:11-13)

3:11—*For we* [continue to] *hear*—probably from the same ones who told him about the issues the Thessalonian believers were having with information about the *parousia*.

—*that some among you are leading an undisciplined* [same Gk. word as “unruly” in verse 6] *life*—to do nothing, refusing to work. Paul had given them his own example of working, he had taught them they were to work, he wrote to them to work (1 Thess 4:11-12), yet he continued to hear of some who were still not working.

—*doing no work at all*—which gave them plenty of time to meddle in other people’s lives

—*but acting like busybodies*—to meddle in the affairs of someone else, telling others how to live and what to do. Some languages say, “one who puts his spoon in someone else’s cup.” Or, “neglecting their own business to mind other people’s.”

3:12—*Now such persons*—these unruly persons—Paul does not call them “brethren,” a term of affection for them. They are disobedient to Paul and to Jesus.

—*we* (1) *command and* (2) *exhort* (3) *in the Lord Jesus Christ*—Paul is using the strongest language: an order, an earnest request, from Jesus Himself, not just Paul.

—*to work* [steadily] *in [quiet fashion]* (one word)—emphasis on the attitude involved, to work calmly, focusing on their own personal behavior, as opposed to being busybodies in other people’s behavior.

—*and eat their own bread*—that work with their own hands to earn, “quit sponging.”

3:13—*But as for you, brethren*—i.e., those who were the faithful majority, those beloved by Paul. This implies that those who disobeyed this word from God were separating themselves by their behavior.

—*do not grow weary of doing good*—we might grow weary, but don’t grow weary of doing good—part of that good may be trying to get lazy people to work!

E. Discipline of the disobedient (3:14-15)

3:14—*If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him*—social pressure should influence this person, but sadly, today, a person would just change churches/associations, and be welcomed there.

—*so that he will be put to shame*—this has to be done by close associates. Strangers would have no impact.

3:15—Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother—there is a line—their laziness must have consequences and be discouraged, yet contact should continue for continued warnings about his or her behavior.

AN APPLICATION—One reason for this action is the testimony believers have with unbelievers. Another reason is the idea of leaven. If other believers (especially younger believers) observe this, they will be encouraged to be that way themselves (1 Corinthians 5:6).

VI. Conclusion (3:16-18)

3:16—Now may the Lord of peace Himself—Peace originates in Jesus and in our relationship to Him. Jesus said, “...in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation” (John 16:33).

—**continually grant you peace in every circumstance**—peace is granted to believers as they live in obedience to God’s commands. We can have peace even in the knowledge that the world is heading for the reign of the antichrist.

—A wonderful promise we have from our Lord: *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus* (Philippians 4:6-7).

—**The Lord be with you all!**—i.e., all the believers, even those who refused to work and were disobedient to the command to work.

3:17—I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand—common during Bible times was for the author to dictate to an amanuensis (scribe)—Romans 16:22; 1 Corinthians 16:21; Colossians 4:18.

—**and this is a distinguishing mark in every letter** (Galatians 6:11; 1 Corinthians 16:21; Colossians 4:18)

—**this is the way I write**—But sign it with his own hand, and possibly also with a sentence or two.

—This was especially important in light of the false letters the Thessalonians had received, supposedly coming from him (2:2).

3:18—The grace [God’s favor] of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.