



THE BOOK OF 1 THESSALONIANS



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INTRODUCTION

Thessalonians are wonderful letters to Christians to remind them and us that the Lord will return one day as He promised when He ascended into heaven.

“After saying this, he was taken up to heaven as they watched him, and a cloud hid him from their sight.”

They still had their eyes fixed on the sky as he went away when two men dressed in white suddenly stood beside them and said, “Galileans, why are you standing there looking up at the sky? This Jesus, who was taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way that you saw him go to heaven.” **Acts 1:9-11**

With this promise in mind, this should encourage us and motivate all Christians to live holy and godly lives until the Day of His return.

One of the questions asked within the letter to which Paul responds to is how should we live in the meantime? In every single chapter, there is some mention of the Lord’s return along with very practical direction about how we should live until that time. **1 Thessalonians 1:10 / 1 Thessalonians 2:19 / 1 Thessalonians 3:13 / 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 / 1 Thessalonians 5:23.**

The Thessalonian epistles are unique in many aspects. The letters are inspired of God and are, therefore ‘the word of the Lord’ **1 Thessalonians 4:15**

They are among the earliest, if not the earliest, of the New Testament epistles written by Paul. The emphasis in the letters is profound: Christ is coming! The accession of Jesus Christ to heaven is recorded in Acts chapter one. Upon this momentous occasion, an announcement was made: Christ is coming again!

In fact, the first thing said about the ascending Saviour was: He is coming again. The angels said to the Lord’s apostles: ‘This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.’ **Acts 1:11**

The Thessalonian epistles echo this theme: “Christ is coming! These inspired epistles answer many questions concerning the Lord’s return. The truth of these books refutes many baseless speculations about the Lord’s return.” (Thomas H. Holland)

THESSALONICA, THE PLACE AND PEOPLE

Paul with Silas and Timothy came to Thessalonica from Philippi on his second missionary journey, stopping in Amphipolis and Apollonia before arriving at Thessalonica, **Acts 17**. He preached in the city’s synagogue, the chief synagogue of the region, for at least three weeks. His ministry was strong, and he established a Jewish-Gentile church, although it was more heavily Gentile, **1 Thessalonians 1:9**. When Paul faced great persecution at the hands of the mob, he fled to Berea, but the Thessalonians eventually forced him to leave there also, **Acts 17:13-14**.

The city of Thessalonica was the capital and largest city of the Roman province of Macedonia, located on the Ignatian Way, which was a major road from Rome to the eastern provinces. The city was named after the wife of Cassander, who built the city. Those in Thessalonica adored many gods, particularly Jupiter, as the father of Hercules, the alleged founder of its ancient royal family.

The city also boasted a celebrated amphitheatre, where gladiatorial shows were exhibited for the amusement of the citizens, and a circus for public games. Thessalonica’s location and use as a port made it a prominent city. In 168 B.C., it became the capital of the second district of Macedonia and later it was made the capital and major port of the

whole Roman province of Macedonia (146 B.C.). In 42 B.C., after the battle at Philippi, Thessalonica was made a free city.

Thessalonica was the capital of one of the four Roman districts of Macedonia. The church of the Thessalonians was established, **Acts 17:1-9**, on Paul's second journey, where he and his fellow workers had just left Philippi. Travelling through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they arrived at Thessalonica where Paul immediately located the synagogue and used their Sabbath gathering as an opportunity for evangelism.

For three weeks, he reasoned with the Jews, converting some and several prominent Gentiles but some unbelieving Jews soon caused a disturbance, forcing him to leave. But despite all threats by God's grace a good strong congregation was planted and established. The church quickly gained a good reputation, **1 Thessalonians 1:8** and was made up mostly of Gentiles, **1 Thessalonians 1:9**. Some of its members included Jason, **Acts 17:9**, Aristarchus, and Secundus, **Acts 20:4**.

Archaeology Very little has been uncovered at ancient Thessalonica because Thessaloniki sits atop the remains. Excavators found a bathhouse and mint dating to the 1st century A.D. below pavement surrounding an odeum. An inscription (30 B.C. to 143 A.D.) from the Vardar gate bears the word politarches, the word Luke used in reference to the officials of the city before whom Jason was brought by the mob, **Acts 17:6**. The word does not appear in any other Greek literature but does match the archaeology of the site.

The Politarch Inscription can be viewed in the British Museum in London. Discovered in 1835 this is a Greek inscription from a Roman gateway in Thessalonica. It lists officials of the town in 2nd century A.D. beginning with six Politarchs. In **Acts 17:6-8** the author, Luke, refers to the "politarchs," translated in the ESV as the "city authorities" of Thessalonica. Acts record Paul and Silas in Thessalonica being brought before the politarchas – 'rulers of the city' accused of being troublemakers.

THE AUTHORS

There is no doubt as to the authors of the letters. "From Paul, Silas, and Timothy..." **1 Thessalonians 1:1 / 2 Thessalonians 1:1**

Both letters are from Paul, Silas (also known as Silvanus) and Timothy. Of these three, the apostle Paul was the main author. We do not know how much of the letter Silas and Timothy wrote, but all three of them were in agreement with what the letter contained.

Paul who was formally known as Saul of Tarsus was a 'persecutor of the church', **Acts 9:1-2** and became to be known as the 'apostle to the Gentiles', **Acts 9:15**.

He was an educated man who is credited as being the author of half the New Testament books.

Silvanus is also known as Silas was originally a messenger from the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, **Acts 15:22 / Acts 15:27**. He was recognized as a prophet, who encouraged the brethren in Antioch, **Acts 15:32**. He stayed in Antioch until he became Paul's travelling companion, **Acts 15:34. Acts 15:40-41**. He suffered with the apostle Paul whilst they were in prison in Philippi, **Acts 16:19-25**, and together with Paul established the church in Thessalonica, **Acts 17:1-4**.

Timothy, also known as Timotheus was a young disciple who travelled with Paul, **Acts 16:1-3**, and is mentioned in many of Paul's letters. He received two letters from Paul, **1 Timothy 1:1 / 2 Timothy 1:1**. Just like Paul and Silas he suffered being in prison, **Hebrews 13:23**. He has just returned from a trip to Thessalonica himself, **1 Thessalonians 3:1-2 / 1 Thessalonians 3:6**.

Both Silvanus (Silas) and Timothy (at least by inference) appear in the records of Acts as Paul's companions during his first visit to Thessalonica, **Acts 17:1-9**. For a short time after Paul departs from Thessalonica the three were separated, but they were reunited in Corinth, **Acts 18:5 / 2 Corinthians 1:19**. Corinth thus suggests itself as the place from which the letters to the Thessalonians church were sent.

Since Paul, Silvanus and Timothy are named together as joint authors of the letters, it is, at first sight, conceivable that Silvanus and Timothy played a responsible part along with Paul in the composition. Timothy indeed was Paul's personal assistant and is named along with Paul in the precept of some other letters, 2 Corinthians, Philippians Colossians, Philemon, certainly because he was in Paul's company when these were written and possibly because he served Paul as amanuensis.

Silvanus, on the other hand, occupied a more independent status in relation to Paul. He was not a convert of Paul's (as Timothy was); he was a member of the church of Jerusalem, enjoying the confidence of the leaders of that church, being himself one of the "leading men among the brethren" there, **Acts 15:22**. The a priori likelihood that such a man would be joint-author of the letters in which he is named as one of the senders, in a substantial and not a merely nominal sense is borne out by internal evidence.

When Paul in other letters expresses his thanks to God for those to whom he writes, he usually does so in the first person singular "I give thanks ..." even when others are associated with him in the prescript, **1 Corinthians 1:4 / Philippians 1:3 / Philemon 4**.

(Colossians, sent in the name of himself and Timothy to a church not personally known to him, is an exception. **Colossians 1:3** begins, We always thank God..." in both the Thessalonian letters the first-person plural is used: "We give thanks to God always ..." **1 Thessalonians 1:2**. "We are bound to give thanks to God always..." **2 Thessalonians 1:3**

The use of the first-person plural is maintained throughout both letters, apart from certain places where the singular suddenly appears, **1 Thessalonians 2:18 / 1 Thessalonians 3:5 / 1 Thessalonians 5:27 / 2 Thessalonians 2:5 / 2 Thessalonians 3:17**. In two of these five places, the first personal pronoun is accompanied by the name "Paul", **1 Thessalonians 2:18 / 2 Thessalonians 3:17**.

All of them are best explained by the supposition that they are Paul's personal additions, whether inserted by him orally as the letters were being dictated or appended, possibly in his own hand, when they were being read over after completion. The inclusion of his name in the prescripts and especially his signature at the end of the second letter would provide evidence enough that the contents as a whole were approved by him, whoever was responsible for the actual composition. (F. F. Bruce Word Biblical Commentary Volume 45 1&2 Thessalonians)

THE AUTHENTICITY OF 1 THESSALONIANS

1 Thessalonians claims to be from Paul, **1 Thessalonians 1:1 / 1 Thessalonians 2:18**, and its Pauline both in language and in ideas. The author's associates, Silas and Timothy, we know from Acts to have been with Paul on his second missionary journey. The letter must be early for various reasons. Church organisation is apparently in a very early stage.

It is difficult to think of anyone writing after Paul's death putting forth in Paul's name a statement that might be understood as meaning that the Parousia (second coming of Christ) would take place during the Apostle's lifetime, **1 Thessalonians 4:15**. The question of the fate of believers who died before the Parousia must have been answered fairly early in the church's life. Yet it is impossible to think of anyone but Paul putting it out in early times.

How could it possibly gain a circulation while the Apostle was still engaged in vigorous work, travelling among the churches and well able to denounce it? (Yet we must bear in mind that the possibility of forgery seems to be implied by **2 Thessalonians 2:2**, and the explanation of the autograph in **2 Thessalonians 3:17**.)

Moreover, the letter is as well attested as we could reasonably ask. It is not the kind of letter which would be quoted often. This explains its absence from the sub-apostolic writings that have come down to us (though there are some similarities in language which may be more than coincidence). But it was accepted as sacred Scripture by Marcion (c. 140 A.D.) it is included among the canonical books in the list given in the Muratorian Fragment (a list of the books accepted as canonical some time after the middle of the second century, probably at Rome). The Epistle is definitely quoted by Irenaeus (c. 180 A.D.) and later writers.

It hardly seems the kind of letter which would be forged. Why should anyone produce a letter like this? What did he aim to do thereby? The letter reads naturally as the reaction of Paul to the situation we outlined earlier. But it seems completely out of character as a forgery foisted on the church to serve some devious purpose of the forger.

Nothing very considerable can be set over against all this. Some of the Tübingen school regarded the Epistle as unauthentic, but they stand practically alone. Their reasons for rejecting the Epistle fail to commend themselves. Thus, we find the objection that it is not doctrinal enough, or again, that it shows too close dependence on 1 and 2 Corinthians. These two surely cancel each other out, for the former means it is not Pauline enough, and the latter that it is too Pauline! Neither carries conviction nor do others that are alleged.

No more convincing is the suggestion that the letter cannot be an authentic writing of the Apostle because there are a series of discrepancies between it and Acts. For example, **1 Thessalonians 2:7ff** gives us a picture of Paul working at his trade, and this is said to be incompatible with the statement of **Acts 17:2** that he preached in the synagogue at Thessalonica on three Sabbaths.

We have already considered the circumstances of the first preaching in the city, and we have seen no necessary contradiction. Paul may have stayed in Thessalonica no longer that Acts indicates. Or, if we feel that a longer period is required, Acts may give us the length of his synagogue preaching.

It is the same with the allegation that the two contradict each other since **Acts 17:4** speaks of the converts as both Jews and Gentiles, while **1 Thessalonians 1:9** / **1 Thessalonians 2:14** refers to Gentiles only. Or that **Acts 18:5** speaks of Silas and Timothy as coming to Paul at Corinth, whereas **1 Thessalonians 3:1f** shows that Timothy was with Paul for a time in Athens.

As B. Clogg says, "Discrepancies of this nature prove little except that the authors of Acts and of 1 Thessalonians wrote independently of each other."

Neither is giving the complete story, and we must make use of both. But to say that both must in all points tell all they know is so obviously false as to need no refutation. We conclude, then, that there is no real reason for doubting the authenticity of this epistle. (The new international commentary on the New Testament. The first and second epistles to the Thessalonians. Leon Morris).

THE AUTHENTICITY

As is the case of the First Epistle there are good reasons for thinking of 2 Thessalonians as authentic. It has early attestations, for Polycarp, Ignatius, and Justin all seem to have known it, possibly also the writer of Didache. It is found in the Marcionite canon and in the Muratorian Fragment, it is quoted by name by Irenaeus and later writers.

As with 1 Thessalonians, the mention of Silvanus and Timothy as associates of the author and the obviously early date of the writing favour Pauline authorship. 2 Thessalonians emerged into church history associated unequivocally with 1 Thessalonians. It claims to have been written by Paul, and the language and theology are Pauline.

It is difficult to think of a suitable motive for a forger (notice that, since 2 Thessalonians 3:17 claims to be Paul's signature, forgery is the only alternative to authenticity. We cannot think of someone putting out in good faith a sample of Pauline teaching).

It is difficult to think of a reason for making the letter resemble 1 Thessalonians so closely. It is difficult to think of a forger entering so fully unto the mind of Paul as to produce a writing so redolent of the Apostle as this one.

There is also the point that had we, not 1 Thessalonians we would hardly call in question the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians. It is rather strange to call in question an Epistle that has all the hallmarks of a genuine Pauline writing on the grounds that it is similar to another Pauline writing.

For reasons such as these most scholars have not hesitated to accept this writing. In recent times, however, attention has been focused on certain matters which raise doubts. While not many would go so far as to pronounce the Epistle non-Pauline, several scholars feel perplexed. The principal points are the following.

1. There is what Neil speaks of this: "The problem of the letter is one of accounting for the similarity to and difference from a letter written by the same hand, to the same people, only a short while before"

Sometimes 2 Thessalonians repeats 1 Thessalonians not only in general ideas but also in the actual words that are employed. The objection is that such an outstanding man as Paul would not find it necessary to repeat himself. He would, if he had to say the same thing, say it in different words so that deliberate imitation is the explanation.

At the same time, there are differences such as those on eschatology, (The branch of theology that is concerned with the end of the world or of humankind) which we shall notice in the next section. The thought then is that the ideas are not the ideas of Paul, and they are expressed in language which is a deliberate imitation of that of the great Apostle.

In the first place, it must be re-joined to this that the general similarity to Pauline style is very close indeed. It is very difficult to envisage a forger who could imitate Paul's language so very closely. Pauline words and phrases and constructions are everywhere. So are Pauline ideas.

If Paul write 2 Thessalonians not so very long after 1 Thessalonians it would not be surprising if sometimes words and phrases were repeated, especially if, as Neil thinks possible, he read through "the customary draft copy of his first letter before writing the second." This would be the more likely in that he had to bear in mind what was written in 1 Thessalonians because some of it had been misunderstood.

It must also be borne in mind that the extent of the resemblance is easy to exaggerate. It is natural for there to be close resemblances in such places as the opening and the close, and indeed, in the general structure of the letters. It is natural also for an author to come close to repeating himself when he is writing on the same subjects twice within a matter of weeks or even months.

But the suggested parallels do not cover more than about one-third, which is strange in a deliberate imitation. And even so, more or less identical language is used in different ways. For example, there are marked resemblances between how Paul describes his hard-manual labour in the two letters. But in the first, he does it to show love for his converts, while in the second it is to bring out the force of his example. This kind of thing is more likely to slavish imitation by a forger.

There is, moreover, the point that the resemblances are to 1 Thessalonians. Why should a later imitator confine himself to this Epistle and to make use of Paul's major writings? The differences are no more conclusive. Thus,

Paul's comments on the Man of Sin (or Lawlessness) in the second letter are different from anything he has to say in the first. But the difference does not amount to incompatibility. It is no more than a man might add as a supplement to what he has already said on the subject. It is the same with the other differences that are brought forward.

This combination of likeness and difference is interesting, and there may be more to it than at present appears. But the point is that it does not prove the difference in authorship. Such a man as Paul was quite capable of both.

2. The eschatology of 2 Thessalonians is said to be different from that of 1 Thessalonians.

The simplest way of putting this is to say that in the First Epistle the coming of the Lord is thought of as about to take place very soon and very suddenly. But in the Second Epistle, it will be preceded by signs, like a great rebellion and the appearance of the Man of Lawlessness.

But to state, this hypothesis is virtually to refute it, for it is a commonplace in apocalyptic literature that the Lord's coming is to be sudden, and yet that it will be preceded by signs. We find this in the Gospels and in Revelation, to name no other. It should also not be overlooked that Paul's warning in 1 Thessalonians 5 not to be unprepared when the day comes may well imply a knowledge of premonitory signs.

A similar objection is that the people to whom 2 Thessalonians was written knew a good deal about the Parousia, for even the teaching about the Man of Lawlessness is given them only by way of reminder, and not as communicating new information, 2 Thessalonians 2:5.

Such people would hardly be in ignorance of such fundamental teaching on the subject as is given in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 ff. But again, the objection does not get us far. In the short time that he was in Thessalonica Paul could not give all the teaching on the second coming that he would have wished.

Many matters were certainly left un-grasped by the Thessalonians. It is entirely natural that eager new converts should have fastened their attention on such an outstanding figure as the Man of Lawlessness without appreciating the fact that some of their number would die before the great day. Indeed, they may well not have given this matter any thought at all before the decease of some of their number forced it on their notice.

OTHER OBJECTIONS TURN ON THE MAN OF LAWLESSNESS

Thus, some urge that this figure does not appear elsewhere in Paul and therefore we cannot accept the idea as Pauline. To say this is to refute it. We cannot dismiss an idea because Paul produces it once only. For that matter, it does not occur elsewhere in the New Testament. But Paul had an eager, questing mind. He is more likely to have seized on the truth concerning this being than some at least of his contemporaries. There is no real objection here.

A variant of this objection dates the origin of the idea of the Man of Lawlessness too late to put it within the time of Paul. This objection maintains that the whole idea of the Man of Lawlessness is based on the Nero redivivus myth. After Nero's death in 68 A.D., there appeared a number of people who claimed to be that emperor come to life once more. They were discredited, but the idea persisted that one day Nero would come back to life. Then he would put himself at the head of the forces of evil. The myth came to have a super-naturalistic tinge.

Nero was held to be demonic as well as human. Now if the portrait of the Man of Lawlessness was drawn from the Nero redivivus myth, obviously, Paul could not have drawn it. The idea did not gain currency till after his death. But the idea of the anti-Christ is far older than the Nero redivivus myth, as Bousset, for example, has shown. It goes back

long before the time of Paul, and there is no reason for holding that **2 Thessalonians 2** is based on the late myth. Consequently, the objection falls to the ground.

Thus, we see that there are various ways of putting the objection from eschatology, but none of them is decisive. The eschatological teachings in the two epistles are not contradictory, but complementary.

1. There are some who think that a difference in authorship is indicated by the fact that whereas **1 Thessalonians** is warm and friendly in tone, **2 Thessalonians** is cold and rather formal.

The difference is difficult to sustain. Frame points out that the vehement self-defence in the First Epistle accounts for a good deal of its warmth, and that if this were omitted the differences in tone “would not be perceptible.”

Again, the coldness alleged in the tone of **2 Thessalonians** is very largely due to a few expressions. Thus Paul says, “We are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren,” and adds, “even as it is meet” **2 Thessalonians 1:3**. But this is probably to be understood as a protestation that his praise of them in the First Epistle was no more than was right.

Again, the objection that we meet authoritative commands, **2 Thessalonians 3:6**, and elsewhere, overlooks the fact that throughout that whole section there is an undertone of genuine brotherly warmth. Paul is very concerned to bring back into full fellowship some whose conduct had raised a barrier. But he is just as loving as he is authoritative. Thus, while admittedly **2 Thessalonians** is slightly cooler in tone than the First Epistle, it does not seem as though the difference amounts to much. Even if we were to grant all that the objectors put forward it still would prove little. Writers are not always in the same mood, and we have no reason for thinking of Paul as an exception.

Moreover, as we saw earlier, there is good reason for thinking that when he wrote **2 Thessalonians** Paul was experiencing a joyful reaction from a time of discouragement. It would not be surprising if a later letter failed to reproduce such a mood, especially if it revealed that some had failed to give heed to instructions given in that first letter. Moreover, we know from **2 Thessalonians 3:2** that Paul was in a somewhat difficult situation when he wrote that letter.

Thus, it does not seem as though any of the objections is compelling. There is none for which an answer does not lie ready to hand. There is, accordingly, no reason why we should not accept the positive evidence and accept this Epistle as an authentic writing of Paul. (The New International Commentary on the New Testament. The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians. Leon Morris.)

The letter (the date and purpose of the letter) There is no doubt as to who this letter was intended.

“To the people of the church in Thessalonica” **1 Thessalonians 1:1**

The letter itself indicates it was not written long after Paul’s departure as he had only been gone a short time, **1 Thessalonians 2:17-18**. Paul had sent Timothy from Athens, who had returned. **1 Thessalonians 3:1-6** From Luke’s record in Acts, it is evident Paul wrote this letter soon after arriving in Corinth on his second missionary journey. For Paul did not stay long in Athens, **Acts 17:16-18:1**, and Timothy came back from Macedonia after Paul arrived in Corinth, **Acts 18:5**, so the place of writing is most likely Corinth. As the place of writing was after his arrival in Corinth, this would place the date sometime around 50-52 A.D. This would make **1 Thessalonians** one of Paul’s earliest known writings, if not the first.

The purpose of the letter comes from Paul being worried about the condition of the church as he had to leave so quickly, **Acts 17:10**, he longed to return but was hindered, **1 Thessalonians 2:17-18**, and so his worrying about the church prompted him to send Timothy to encourage them, **1 Thessalonians 3:1-3**, who brought back good news, **1 Thessalonians 3:6-8**, of their faith, love, and desire to see Paul again which brought Paul a great deal of comfort. As we read through the letter we can clearly see that Paul had three items on his mind.

1. He wanted to encourage them to continue to be faithful under the persecution they were receiving.
2. He wanted to encourage them and direct them on how to live holy lives for God.
3. He wanted to set their minds at ease in regards to any misleading ideas concerning Jesus' return.

TIME LINE FROM THE BOOK OF ACTS

The year is around 49-51 AD we find Paul coming near to the end of his second missionary journey and after being joined by Timothy, **Acts 16:1**. Paul and Silas had been badly treated by being beaten and jailed in Philippi, **Acts 16:22-24**. Paul, Silas and Timothy with the help of the Lord establish a church in Thessalonica where they preached the gospel and as a result, many people were saved, **Acts 17:1-9**, but once again we find Paul being driven out of the town.

They then travelled to Berea, **Acts 17:16-34**, where we find Paul debating with the so-called wise men and philosophers of the day. Paul himself refers to his time in Athens in **1 Thessalonians 3:1**. It was also during this time that Paul and Silas sent Timothy back to see how this new congregation was doing, **1 Thessalonians 3:2**, and after Timothy returned with a report, the three of them during their time in Corinth wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

SCRIPT

Before we begin I just want to take a moment to say, you've done really well to get to this point in your journey of studying God's Word and I want to encourage you to keep going.

The letters written to the Thessalonian brethren are both very uplifting as Paul tries to encourage them to keep doing what they are doing and gently pushes them to do even more in love. He tells them that their faith, hope and love are pleasing God and should continue to do so.

After Paul, Silas and Timothy had planted this congregation they had to leave because of trouble and they were really concerned about this young church so they sent Timothy to find out how they were doing and to encourage them whilst he was there. When Timothy returned with the report Paul's concerns left him and his concern turned into joy because they were doing so well despite all the persecution they were receiving.

Their faith in God is making a difference, their love for each other and the love they show to others is really making a difference even to the point where Paul informs them that people all around the region and beyond are noticing that they are Christians just not in word but also in deed. In act, Paul calls them an inspiration for other churches.

As with all of God's word Thessalonians are a good study, it's exciting and dramatic and mysterious when it talks about the man of lawlessness and difficult to understand in places. And with so many theories going around which have been for centuries about what happens at death and concerning Jesus' return this will really help us in our understanding of future things.

The church that met in Thessalonica is one the best examples for churches today to follow and try and imitate them as they followed Christ's example. We can also learn a whole lot from Paul himself about how he dealt with false accusations and people trying to pretend they are someone else.

As we go through this study I really want to encourage you to enjoy it and be uplifted by it as you go through each chapter and verse. Take note of the theme of the letters where Paul reminds them to continue to live holy lives for God whilst they await the arrival of Jesus.

CHAPTER 1

“Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Thessalonians 1:1

It’s interesting when we write letters to people today we usually sign the letter at the end to inform the recipient who wrote it but here in New Testament times I think it’s worth pointing out that the author(s) started by informing the recipients who the letter is from. (Paraphrased from William Kendriksen New Testament Commentary 1&2 Thessalonians page 37)

In this case, the authors are Paul who was also the author of half the books in the New Testament and formerly known as Saul of Tarsus, Acts 9:1-2 he was a great persecutor of the church. A little later in Acts 9:15 he became known as the ‘apostle to the Gentiles.’

Silas who was also known as Silvanus was a messenger from the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, Acts 15:22 / Acts 15:27, he was also a prophet who encouraged the saints in Antioch, Acts 15:32. He went on come to become Paul’s travelling companion, Acts 15:34 / Acts 15:40-41 and suffered alongside Paul whilst in Philippi, Acts 16:19-25. The persecution and imprisonment didn’t stop him from being devoted to serving the Lord as together with Paul they established the church in Thessalonica, Acts 17:1-4.

Timothy who Paul mentions in many of his letters was also known as Timotheus and was a travelling companion of Paul, Acts 16:1-3. Timothy himself was a recipient of two of Paul’s letters, 1 Timothy 1:2 / 2 Timothy 1:2.

He also understood what it meant to suffer for the cause when he was imprisoned, Hebrews 13:23. And it was Timothy who had just returned from Thessalonica with a report for Paul, 1 Thessalonians 3:1-2 / 1 Thessalonians 3:6. The recipients of the letter were the church that met in the city of Thessalonica which we know was the capital and largest city of the Roman province of Macedonia. Christians like Jason, Acts 17:9, Aristarchus, and Secundus, Acts 20:4, were all members of this congregation.

We know from Acts 17:1-9 that Paul whilst on his second missionary journey arrived at Thessalonica and went straight to the local synagogue and used gathered for the Sabbath as a way to evangelise to the Jews to which he had some success even amongst the Gentiles.

Notice also that all Christians are in two places at the same time, physically these saints were in Thessalonica but spiritually they are ‘in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.’

This is a theme that Paul speaks a lot about in his letters, for example when you read through the Ephesian letter you will find that the phrase ‘in Christ’ is mentioned 15 times. When you read through the letter to the Philippians 164 times Paul reminds us that we are ‘in Christ’ in one form or another.

As we are about to see this congregation which was mostly made up of Gentiles became a strong church that quickly gained a great reputation throughout Macedonia and beyond, 1 Thessalonians 1:8-9.

Now remember that Paul had become a little anxious about this newly planted church because he had to leave under difficult circumstances, Acts 17:10, he so much wanted to return to find out for himself how they were getting on but was hindered from doing so 1 Thessalonians 2:17-18.

His concern was so great that he sent Timothy to go along and encourage them **1 Thessalonians 3:1-3** but thankfully Timothy brought back some great news concerning their faith, love and their own desire to see Paul again which greatly gave Paul a great deal of comfort. **1 Thessalonians 3:6-8**.

And so when Timothy returned with this great news the apostle Paul wanted to praise them for their faithfulness, especially under the persecution they were receiving. He wanted to encourage them to keep on keeping on living the kind of life which pleases God and also to lay aside any misconceptions concerning Jesus' second coming.

As we go through this letter please take note of the number of times Paul refers to the Lord's coming, at the end of every chapter Paul says something about Jesus' second coming. **1 Thessalonians 1:10** / **1 Thessalonians 2:19** / **1 Thessalonians 3:13** / **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18** / **1 Thessalonians 5:23**.

“Grace and peace to you.” **1 Thessalonians 1:1**

Along with much more, grace and peace are what a Christian has when they are in Christ. Charis which is the Greek word for grace is that unmerited favour that we receive from God; it cannot be earned, deserved or merited. As we don't have anything to pay for it, it is a gift from God.

Grace is God's active favour by which he bestows his greatest gift on those who deserve the greatest punishment. Remember grace isn't just about saving us, grace also sustains us.

Eirene is the Greek word for peace, in Hebrew, it would be shalom is what all Christians have because of that grace that God gives us. It means a lot more than just being in the absence of trouble in our lives although that would be included, it also means being at peace within ourselves, with God and our fellow man.

Remember that grace and peace both come from God and cannot be found anywhere else. **1 Peter 5:10** reminds us that God is the Father of grace and **Hebrews 13:20** reminds us that God is a God of peace. We know that grace and truth are from Christ according to **John 1:17** and Jesus Himself is our peace according to **Ephesians 2:14**.

“We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers.” **1 Thessalonians 1:2**

So often when we speak to God in prayer we put in our requests time and time again and forget to simply stop and say ‘thank you, Father.’ The apostle Paul always thanked God for many things but especially for those who he had a part in sharing the gospel with.

Prayer is one of the most underestimated weapons we have as Christian soldiers, **Ephesians 6:17-18** and a total privilege. Prayer not only reminds us of who God is as the source of all good things but it also reminds us of who we are as His servants. It benefits not only ourselves but those to whom we pray for.

“We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.” **1 Thessalonians 1:3**

We don't have to wonder what the Thessalonian church was like as Paul is about to describe to us their spiritual condition in Christ, especially in terms of their faith, love and hope. Keep in the back of your mind that this is a very young church with young converts which makes it all the more inspiring to read.

Now, these again are terms that Paul uses in his writings. He mentions them in **Colossians 1:4-5** and **1 Corinthians 13:13**, **Colossians 3:14** he mentions them as being very important. We know that all three are graces that should be seen in our Christian lives as **Galatians 5:22-23** reminds us.

Notice first of all that their faith was a working faith, it was faith with legs attached, a faith which was very much alive and active, the kind of faith which James describes in **James 2:20** / **James 2:26**. It was real genuine faith and

remember faith in the Bible always prompts us to do something with ourselves, it's never passive. Real faith helps us live right for God, speak right for God and serve right for God.

“Their faith had worked to make of the Christians; it had continued to work to keep them in Christ” (Robert R. Taylor, Jr., *Studies in First and Second Thessalonians*, p. 35).

Second, notice their labour of love, again real love always prompts us to do something with it, it too like faith has legs attached, **Galatians 5:22** love is mentioned first as a fruit of the Spirit, so people should see our love for God in our lives and hear it in our words. And remember this love is not just for our fellow brethren but for others too as **1 John 3:18** reminds us.

Real love is a motivating love that glues us together so to speak with Christ. This is what is behind the most quoted Bible passage in the world, **John 3:16**, a love which prompted God to give His Son to die for us and it's Christ's love for us that prompted Him to die for us as **Ephesians 5:25** tells us. And love is not an optional extra; it's a command, **Colossians 2:2** / **1 Peter 1:22**. And so it is love that prompts us into action.

Thirdly, Paul, had a hope that gave them patience which is exactly one of the reasons we have hope as **Romans 8:25** reminds us. Hope is one the great themes that run through the Bible, especially in the New Testament. In **1 Peter 1:3-4** Peter reminds his readers that their hope is an inheritance that is “incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.” A little later Paul himself will encourage the Thessalonians to wear hope as a helmet in **1 Thessalonians 5:8**.

The Greek word for patience is the ‘hupomone’ which means to remain under. Again this has legs attached, patience doesn't mean just sitting around waiting for something to happen, patience should prompt us to keep going and surely if we know we have this hope why wouldn't we want others who are not Christians to have the same hope.

Now again notice where the source of our faith, love and hope lays, Paul says they are all rooted in Christ Jesus. And remember if we want to glorify God with any of these, they must be done in Christ as **Ephesians 3:21** / **John 14:6** / **John 15:1-8** and **2 Timothy 2:5** remind us.

The apostle Paul is thankful for the saints in Thessalonica as their faith had legs attached and is evident in the fact that they were working with and in faith. Their love also had legs attached and was evident in their labour for each other and others around them and finally, their hope had legs attached, which was also evident in their patience in striving forward.

“For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you.” **1 Thessalonians 1:4**

1 Thessalonians 1:4 “Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.” KJV The word ἐκλογή translated election comes from the Greek word ekloge (ek-log-ay') which simply means selection (in this case a divine selection). It carries with it the idea of being picked out.

“because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake.” **1 Thessalonians 1:5**

Paul says the gospel is ‘our gospel’ not in terms, ‘it's ours and belongs to us only’ but in terms of how blessed they were in being able to proclaim the gospel to others. **2 Thessalonians 2:14**. The reason the gospel is so powerful is because it came from heaven and was proclaimed with the help of the Holy Spirit which was one of the reasons the Holy Spirit was sent **John 16:8-10** and through His words, we as Christians can know for a certainty that what we believe through the inspired Scriptures is absolutely true. **2 Peter 1:19** / **2 Timothy 3:16-17**

There are two types of Christians, those who talk the talk but don't walk the walk and those who practice what they preach. The authors of this letter had backed up what they were preaching by their conduct, not only did they practice what they preached but others around them knew that they were doing so too. It's so easy just to talk the talk, isn't it?

But as Christians, it's vital that people see Jesus in our lives and the way we live, hear Jesus in our speech and feel the love of Jesus when we serve others. We need to make sure we don't become like the Pharisees and the Teachers of the law who proclaimed one thing but practised another. **Matthew 23:3**.

“You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.” 1 Thessalonians 1:6-10

SUMMARY

What an encouraging start to a letter, this very young church, which Paul was so proud of was making great progress in living and sharing the gospel. This shows us what can happen when Christians fully commit to being Christians and living the Christian life by turning from the world, even when we are being persecuted.

It's obvious they were following the example of Jesus and His apostles and allowing the promise of His return to motivate them in everyday living. I wonder what Jesus and His apostles would think of our congregations today?

CHAPTER 2

When I was a teenager I remember having posters of famous pop stars on my bedroom wall and how they were such a role model for me, I would look at their lifestyle and think to myself 'yes that's what I want to be like, rich and famous' mmmm. We all need good role models in our lives, people who inspire us, wise people who know how to handle difficult times and know how to rejoice in the good times, whether it is our parents or those who are spiritually mature within our congregations or other congregations.

It's clear from 1 **Thessalonians 1** that the church in Thessalonica was setting the example for other churches around them and beyond, and as we enter 1 Thessalonian 2:1-12 we're going to see another example worth following, his name is the apostle Paul.

“For you yourselves know, brothers, our visit to you wasn't in vain, but having suffered before and been shamefully treated, as you know, at Philippi, we grew bold in our God to tell you the Good News of God in much conflict.” 1 Thessalonians 2:1-2 WEB

It's so uplifting when the Gospel is being preached and you can see the results. When Paul preached in Thessalonica it was very evident his preaching wasn't a waste of time. In **Acts 14:1-4** we see the fruit of his labour, there were some Jews, a great multitude of devout Greeks and many important women all coming to Christ.

We also know that it wasn't easy for Paul and Silas, not just because of the persecution they received in Thessalonica 1 **Thessalonians 2:2**, but especially when they were in Philippi. They were taken to court, **Acts 16:20**, beaten and thrown in prison, **Acts 16:22-23**.

And where most men who wouldn't be as strong in the faith would fail, Paul and Silas became stronger. Now we know that Paul experienced fear when he went into Corinth **1 Corinthians 2:3** but notice where Paul found his boldness!

‘In our God.’

The apostles were supermen; they experienced everything we experience today when it comes to being confident or bold in presenting the gospel to others.

Paul himself asked others to pray that God would give him boldness of speech in **Ephesians 6:19-20**. In fact, when you read through the Book of Acts you will see that when the gospel is being proclaimed it's being proclaimed with boldness or confidence depending on your translation. **Acts 4:13 / Acts 4:29 / Acts 4:31 / Acts 28:31**. Remember the power is in the gospel **1 Thessalonians 1:5** and not in the preacher, although they need to be able to present the gospel clearly.

1 Thessalonians 2:2 in the KJV begins with the word ‘but’, this is being used in order to contrast what has just been said with what he is about to say. (Leon Morris, Commentary on 1 & 2 Thessalonians, p. 42) The Greek word for “but” is “alla”. It “is a strong adversative, putting the following words in emphatic contrast with the preceding.” In other words, their entrance to Thessalonica was quite the opposite of being a waste of time or in vain. Just as the persecution these saints experienced brought the opposite result the Jews or the devil expected.

“For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. On the contrary, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts. You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness. We were not looking for praise from people, not from you or anyone else, even though as apostles of Christ we could have asserted our authority”. **1 Thessalonians 2:3-6**

Now not only was the Gospel presented boldly in Thessalonica, but it was also presented in truth and honesty. In truth means without any error and honesty means without any dodgy motives or trickery. **2 Corinthians 4:2**. Now, this is important when it comes to sharing the Gospel, we need to tell people the truth but we must do it honestly with them whilst doing so **2 Corinthians 2:17**.

When Jesus was being questioned by the high priest, He spoke the truth whilst being honest with them at the same time. **John 18:19-21**. When people speak the truth and are honest the less chance there will be of them being scrutinised or contradicting the message they are presenting as Paul himself writes in **2 Corinthians 11:1-15**.

People-pleasing is very popular today in certain circles within the religious world, hence the Gospel is not presented in ‘total’ truth and certainly not honestly as with the ‘wealth and health gospel’.

When you look around today there are now hundreds of ways to become a Christian and a lot of different Gospels which are not found within the Scriptures.

There may be different reasons for this but at its core, you will find an element of ‘giving the people what the people want’, **Isaiah 30:10 / Jeremiah 5:31**.

When we become Christians pleasing God should be our aim in all aspects of our lives but especially when it comes to presenting the Gospel to the lost.

The apostle Paul knew all too well that it was God who entrusted him with the Gospel **1 Thessalonians 2:4**, he was well aware that his conversion was a great expression of God's grace **Ephesians 3:8** and he knew he was a huge example of God's mercy and patience to others today **1 Timothy 1:11-16**.

And so, because of all these things Paul wasn't interested in pleasing people or trying to be popular amongst them, he was only interested in pleasing God. **1 Thessalonians 2:4 / Proverbs 17:3**. After all, God is the One he will ultimately give an account of his life too. **Hebrews 4:12-13**.

When the Gospel is presented truthfully and honestly there is no need to use flattery to win convert people 1 Thessalonians 2:5, Proverbs 29:5. Unlike those who present a gospel using flattery 2 Peter 2:18 the apostles didn't have false motives. The Greek word for "flattery" is *κολακεία* *kolakeia* which involves the idea of selfish motives. Solomon gives us a lot of warning against such things. Proverbs 28:23 / Proverbs 29:5 / Proverbs 26:28.

They weren't greedy for personal gain either like Peter also describes in 1 Peter 2:1-3, see also Titus 1:11. In fact, when you think about Paul and his ministry he was the opposite, he didn't want to take advantage of anyone, especially for financial gain. Acts 20:33 / 2 Corinthians 11:9, 2 Corinthians 12:17. Yes, he wanted to win souls for Christ but he did that through the truth, not through flattery or for any monetary gain.

Now remember as apostles of Christ they could have easily tried to gain the approval of people, especially with the authority they had but they were very careful not to let that happen. Proverbs 25:27. Being a preacher or teacher of the Word isn't a popularity contest, it's about pleasing God and so when our motives are pure we can present the Gospel without seeking the glory of men, 1 Thessalonians 1:6.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:3-6 Paul says we didn't have any hidden agendas but spoke in truth and honesty, he says our motives were pure with no fancy words to win people over. And so he goes on to say how they did go about presenting the Gospel to the Thessalonians.

"Instead, we were like young children among you. Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well." 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8

What a contrast this is with the previous verses, these are beautiful words and bring great pictures to our imagination. He uses the Greek word *τροφός* 'trophos' for nursing which means 'to give food to'. See also Luke 23:29. Here the apostle Paul says the Gospel was presented to them with gentleness and real affection, just like a mother nursing her children.

We can see very clearly that Paul genuinely loved the saints in Thessalonica; he was devoted to them and cared for them deeply as a mother does for her child. And it was because of that affection he had for them which encouraged him not only to share the Gospel with them but also with his own life. Philippians 1:8 tells us that Paul was a preacher who genuinely loved his brothers and sisters in Christ and he would with joy sacrifice his own life if he needed to for them, Philippians 2:17. There is nothing more comforting to know we have preachers who genuinely love us and care for us and want nothing but the best for us.

"Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed." 1 Thessalonians 2:9-10

It's one thing saying something but another thing putting it into practice, Paul jogs their memories and casts their minds back to when they were amongst them in Thessalonica. They worked hard even amidst difficulties night and day. It is clear that Paul didn't want to be a burden to them but a blessing to them, that's why he worked to support himself. Acts 18:1-4. In other words, he would do whatever it took to share the gospel with others, no matter the cost, 1 Corinthians 9:16, apart from trying to please men of course! 1 Thessalonians 2:6.

Paul reminds them that not only were they their witnesses of how they conducted themselves whilst they were amongst them but God was also were witness.

They were holy which tells us the nature of their conduct, they were righteous or (just) which tells us of the way they dealt with people and they were blameless which tells us that they were careful in their conduct when dealing with others. In other words, no one could ever question their conduct whilst they were amongst the Thessalonians.

When we look at these three graces together we can see just how important they are because they all have an effect on our relationship with God, and with those around us and they go a long way in keeping our reputation pure.

“For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.” 1 Thessalonians 2:11-12

I don't know about you but when I was being brought up it was always my father who was the one who gave out the discipline in the home, although he loved me and cared for me just like my mother did, he was always the one who tells me off and punish me when I deserved to be punished. But amongst all that he was always there to try and guide me through life, when I needed some guidance.

Paul said back in 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8 that he loved them and cared for them like a mother, he now goes on to use the concept of the father's role in loving and caring for them. Paul says as a father he encouraged, comforted and urged or charged them as the KJV says. He is saying that he was like a spiritual father to the saints in Thessalonica in much the same way as he was like a spiritual father to the saints in Corinth. 1 Corinthians 4:15. And as we know sometimes disciple is needed, that's why he was urging them to live right for God.

Why was he urging them to live the right lives for God? Well simply because as a father he was concerned about the way they were living as Christians. He wanted them to walk as they belonged to God; he wanted to encourage them and guide them on how to live right because of their calling. After all, it was God who called them into His kingdom and his glory.

The Greek word for 'worthy' is ἀξίως 'axios' which means appropriately also carries with it the idea 'of equal weight.' Ephesians 5:1-2 says, "Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children. and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

It's all about living a balanced life, God on one side and our walk as Christians on the other.

LET'S HAVE A QUICK RECAP OF 1 THESSALONIANS 2:3-12

The apostles were genuinely concerned for the brethren at Thessalonica as a father is for his children; they had real gentleness and affection for them just like a mother does for her children. They were bold, truthful and honest with them when they presented the Gospel to them and made it clear they were out to please God and not men; we see this because they didn't use flattery, greed nor did they seek any kind of glory from people but worked hard night and day whilst living holy, righteously and blamelessly among them in order not to be a burden to them and to show that they practised what they preached.

“And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe.”
1 Thessalonians 2:13

It's quite clear that the saints who met in Thessalonica although very young in the faith started their Christian walk on the right foot. We saw from 1 Thessalonians 1:3-10 that they had the right kind of faith, love and hope because all three had legs attached and they had become a great example for other churches both in Macedonia and Achaia. Part of the reason they had a great start was because of the way the Paul, Silas and Timothy had ministered to them with gentleness and care whilst they were with them, 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12. But the main reason they had become such an example to others around them was because of the way they received the Word of God in the first place.

The apostles were thankful to God, why? Because of the way the Thessalonians' received the Word. The Greek word for received is δέχομαι 'dechomai', it carries with it the idea of welcoming it, as well as receiving it. In other words, the saints at Thessalonica came to understand the value of the Gospel and welcomed it into their lives.

Now again notice where the power of the Gospel lays, not in the preacher but the Word itself. When you read the Bible how do you read it? As a reference book for knowledge?

Hebrews 4:12 reminds us that the Word of God is not a dead book with empty meaningless words, but it's alive, powerful and able to discern. It's the living Word that changes people from the inside out because it produces faith and so as we hear it or read it, it starts to develop faith in our hearts as **Romans 10:17** reminds us.

Because it contains the Gospel of Jesus Christ, it's the living Word that has the power to save souls as **Romans 1:16-17** and **James 1:21** remind us. It's the living Word that prompts us to do what it says to be saved as **James 1:18** and **1 Peter 1:22-23** tell us.

The great call of the New Testament is for Christians to grow spiritually by reading, listening and studying the living Word for themselves to become mature Christians, **1 Peter 2:2**, but sadly as we know not all Christians do grow. Years ago a woman called Amy Grant sang a song called "Fat Baby." Copy and paste the following link on your web browser and watch and listen to the words of her song. You can watch it **here**, if you haven't got access to a PC then simply just read the words below.

I know a man, maybe you know him too, you never can tell, he might even be you,
He knelt at the altar and that was the end, he's saved and that's all that matters to him,
His spiritual tummy, it can't take too much, one day a week, he gets his spiritual lunch.

On Sunday he puts on his spiritual best and gives his language a spiritual rest.

He's just a fat little baby, he wants his bottle and he doesn't mean maybe,

He's sampled solid food once or twice, but he says doctrine leaves him cold as ice.

He's been baptised, sanctified, redeemed by the blood, but he says his daily devotions are down in the mud,

He knows the books of the Bible and **John 3:16**, he's got the biggest King James you've ever seen.

I've always wondered if he'll grow up someday, he's mama's boy, and he likes it that way,

If you happen to see him, tell him I said, he'll never grow, if he never gets fed, He's just a fat little boy; He's just a fat little boy.

It's the living, powerful Word of God that changes our lives and produces faith in us which prompts us to be saved and continues to help us grow spiritually where we can become more Christ-like in every department of our lives. It's the living, powerful Word of God that helps us overcome Satan and prompts us to live holy lives for God.

"For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own people the same things those churches suffered from the Jews who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to everyone in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last." **1 Thessalonians 2:14-16**

Here Paul tells us that the Thessalonian Christians suffered persecution (remember **1 Thessalonians 1:6** too) which we know was done by their own countrymen **Acts 17:5-10**, it's in this way they became imitators of the churches in Judea because they too suffered persecution by the hands of their own countrymen. **Acts 8:1** / **Acts 12:1-4**.

Now, remember that Paul deeply loved his Jewish brethren as **Romans 9:1-5** and **Romans 10:1-22** remind us and he knew and understood that the Gospel was for all as **Romans 3** teaches. **Romans 1** teaches us about how the Gentiles

need the Gospel and **Romans 2** teaches us about how the Jews need the Gospel. And so the apostle goes on to remind the church in Thessalonica about the Judean persecution and lists some Jewish sins.

And notice the first sin which is mentioned! They killed the Lord Jesus. This was a theme that was going to run through the early chapters in the Book of Acts, as time and time again the Jews were reminded that they killed Jesus. **Acts 2:23 / Acts 2:36 / Acts 3:14-15 / Acts 4:10 / Acts 5:30**, see also **Matthew 27:25**. They not only killed the Lord Jesus but they also killed their own prophets as Jesus reminds us in the parable of the wicked tenants, **Mark 12:1-12**.

So they killed the Lord Jesus, they killed the prophets and because of their rebellious hearts they ‘didn’t please God’ either, they weren’t long out of Egypt when they rebelled as a nation, **Deuteronomy 9:7** and they continued to rebel as a nation throughout the Old Testament, **Ezekiel 2:3**.

In fact, it got to the point that Paul says they were ‘hostile to everyone’. Now the word ‘hostile’ is a very strong word but it perfectly describes the condition of the hearts of the Jewish nation at this time. Diodorus Siculus describes them as “those alone among all the nations who were unwilling to have any intermingling with any other nation, and who regarded all others as enemies” Barnes in his commentary on **1 Thessalonians 2:15**.

And one of the reasons they were so hostile to everyone was because they didn’t want the Gentiles to have what they thought they had, God was their God and exclusively for them alone and everyone else didn’t have a right to any of it! And because of that heart attitude they didn’t want the apostles speaking to the Gentiles. This is what happened in **Acts 13:42-51** at Antioch of Pisidia.

A Jew would never agree to have a Gentile as a part of ‘their’ people, **Acts 22:21-22**. We also know from **Acts 15:5** that even some of the Jewish Christians were demanding that these Gentiles be circumcised and they must keep the Law of Moses if they wanted to be saved.

And so because of that attitude towards God, His Son, His prophets, His apostles and the Gentiles that Paul says ‘they’ve always heaped their sins up to the limit’, in other words, they have pushed their luck, but now pushed it too far as Paul says ‘God’s wrath has come upon them’, which is a possible reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, **Matthew 23:29-39**.

Now please keep this in its proper context, Paul is not anti-Jew and saying there is no hope for the Jews because as we know many Jews became Christians including the apostle Paul himself who actually went all out to persecute the church and as we just read in **1 Thessalonians 2:14** there were churches in Judea.

Romans 11:23-24 tells us that the Jews would be grafted back in if they came to Christ, but more importantly, we need to remember not to have the same attitude towards those who aren’t Christians as the Jews had, because we can be just as bad at times, **Romans 1:18-32**.

The Thessalonians received the living Word of God with joy and great eagerness but the Jews constantly fought against God and His word which was seen in their attitude towards God, His Son, His prophets, His apostles and those on the outside of the Jewish Nation.

“But, brothers and sisters, when we were orphaned by being separated from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, did, again and again—but Satan blocked our way. For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy.” **1 Thessalonians 2:17-20**

What are our hope, glory, and joy? The apostles ask. To us today we may thank that their biggest hope would be to be free from persecution and prisons, to roam around from city to city creating new Christians and to encourage faithful and struggling Christians to remain faithful bringing glory to God and joy to the soul without any satanic influences interrupting their calling to take the Gospel to the world.

Here the apostles remind the church in Thessalonica what their true hope, glory and joy were. Now, remember that Paul says here in **1 Thessalonians 2:17** that he had been taken away from them which we know happened as **Acts 17:10** tells us. But he tells us this was a painful experience for him, this really hurt, even though it was only for a short time, how short we don't know probably a few months, but it deeply moved him, it was like a child being taken away from their parents, that's why he uses the word 'orphaned'.

Because of this painful separation, made Paul was even more eager to see them again in person, or as the NIV says, 'an intense longing' to see them again, even though they were always in his thoughts. That's why he sent Timothy to find out how they were getting on **1 Thessalonians 3:1-2** / **1 Thessalonians 3:7-8**.

There is a saying which says, 'plan the plan but not the outcome' which was something that Paul and the apostles could easily apply to their lives as missionaries. Paul had planned and planned again to return to the church in Thessalonica but according to **1 Thessalonians 2:18** Satan had prevented him from doing so.

We know that many unbelieving Jews were always making trouble for Paul, we know from **Acts 17:5** / **Acts 17:13** that they followed him everywhere he went causing trouble for him. We also know that Satan is ultimately behind every source of persecution the early church ever faced, **1 Peter 4:8-9** / **Revelation 2:10**.

But in what way did Satan prevent Paul from going back to this congregation? Imagine you're at the Olympics competing in the great games and you win the gold medal, wow what a feeling that must be. In Greek times, there were no medals as such, no second or third place prizes either, in fact, there was only one prize for winning, and that was a laurel wreath simply placed on the victor's head. This is what Paul means when he uses the word crown, **στέφανος** 'stephanos'. It was a prize in the public games or a symbol of honour generally.

The reason the Thessalonians were Paul's hope was because he hoped to see them at the coming of the Lord, they were his joy or crown because he longed to see them in the presence of Jesus Himself. **1 Thessalonians 2:19**.

The apostles knew that if the Thessalonians had turned back to the world, then his hope and joy would simply disappear and that would hurt him even more. Notice how important it is to carry on studying and encouraging new Christians, Paul didn't just help them become Christians and leave them to it, no!

His work involved not just converting people to Christianity but helping and encouraging them to get to heaven, he wasn't truly happy until he helped them get right into the presence of Jesus when He returns and then and only then could Paul truly say his work with them was complete.

The church in Thessalonica was also the apostle's glory and joy not just in the future tense but also in the present tense, hence he writes in **1 Thessalonians 2:20** 'you are our glory and joy'. Do we feel that way about our brethren within the congregations we're a part of? Do we feel it is a glory and joy to be associated with our brethren?

Surely our attitude should be like that of the apostles, especially Paul. Yes, we want to get to heaven ourselves and be in the presence of Jesus at His return but surely we want ALL our brothers and sisters in Christ to make it too! **John 14:2**. No wonder the songwriter Eliza E Hewitt writes, 'When we ALL get to heaven, what a day of rejoicing that will be. When we all see Jesus, we'll sing and shout the victory'.

So, our glory is seeing each other in the presence of the Lord as we serve him faithfully today, tomorrow and all the days of our lives and when we all will be glorified when the Lord returns as the apostles already reminded us of in **1 Thessalonians 1:10-12**. Our joy is the happiness that comes from working together in and for the Lord as the apostles are going to remind us of in **1 Thessalonians 3:6-9**.

And notice that our hope, glory and joy are real because they are all eternal in nature, if our hope, glory and joy are in our homes, cars and jobs etc then we have misplaced confidence and missed the point of these words because all these things are temporary in nature. So, it's important that we spend time with our brethren to love and encourage them to get to heaven as they do the same for us.

CHAPTER 3

“So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. We sent Timothy, who is our brother and co-worker in God’s service in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. For you know quite well that we are destined for them. In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know. For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter had tempted you and that our labours might have been in vain.” 1 Thessalonians 3:1-5

As we enter chapter 3 we need to remember that the Bible was never divided into chapters and verses originally and although these divisions can be useful at times, in this case, it’s not so useful. We should read 1 Thessalonians 3:1-5 as a continuation of 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20.

There is no doubt the apostles were genuinely concerned for the saints at Thessalonica, they needed to know how the saints were doing and they realised that just knowing this was better than the help that Paul would have gained from those he was sending. And so they sent Timothy to them, he is described as their brother and co-worker, working for God in spreading the Gospel.

But notice why they sent him, to strengthen and encourage them in their faith. The apostles sent Timothy with the purpose of helping this young church to be a people of faith both in their personal lives and their service to God, especially in light of the trials they were facing as Christians.

And as 1 Thessalonians 3:4 tells us, these trials shouldn’t have come as a surprise to the church in Thessalonica because when Paul was originally with them he forewarned them that this was going to happen and if you remember Acts 17:5-10 they had already as a church personally experienced some persecution.

Make no mistake about it the apostles knew exactly what these dear brethren were facing, they knew the challenges and temptations they were going through and going to go through and because of that, they were greatly concerned for their brethren. And notice also that it wasn’t so much their physical well-being they were so concerned about but their faith, their spiritual well-being.

As Christians, we can survive all sorts of things physically but we need to understand if we lose our faith we cannot survive anything. 3 John 2. Just as a side note, if the doctrine of ‘once saved, always saved’ was true then why would the apostles be so concerned for these brethren?

The apostles needed to know how they were doing because they realised that all Christians are involved in spiritual warfare. And notice who were at war with, 1 Thessalonians 3:5 calls him the tempter. Just as Jesus was tempted in Matthew 4 by the devil we too as Christians can be sure that he is always busy tempting us today. When the apostles use the word ‘tempted’ πειράζω ‘peirazo’, in Greek it means simply to test, they are using it in two ways.

1. In terms of hardships and afflictions.

2. In terms of enticement. In other words, the devil is busy trying to lead people away from their faith in Christ and this is why the apostles are so concerned because they have invested so much into each of them spiritually. 1 Thessalonians 2:18-20.

Let’s pause for a moment and reflect upon these questions, are Christians promised a pain-free life when they submit to Christ? Does the Bible teach us, to become a Christian and our life will be free from trials and difficulties? A little assignment might be useful here.

“But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you. Therefore, brothers and sisters, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged by you because of your faith. For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord. How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we

have in the presence of our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.” 1 Thessalonians 3:6-10

1 Thessalonians 3:6 begins a new section with the word ‘But’, this is used in contrast to what has just been said, the apostles were really worried about the saints in Thessalonica ‘But’, they were really concerned that the tempter was really tempting them away from the faith ‘But’. They are basically saying they could have given in to the temptations and the trials they were going through and fell away ‘But’ they didn’t. The enemy could have won ‘But’ he didn’t. The reality was when Timothy returned to Corinth with the good news concerning their faith and love, Paul there and then sat down and wrote this letter to them. Acts 18:1-2. This was great news and as the writer of Proverbs says in Proverbs 25:25, “Like cold water to a weary soul is good news from a distant land.”

Timothy’s report basically said, their faith is great and their faith is seen by all through their love for all and they have fond memories of Paul and they long to see them all again. The apostles wrote in 1 Thessalonians 3:2 that they desired for the Thessalonian church to be encouraged but here in verse 7 because of that great report the apostles were the ones being greatly encouraged by the saints in Thessalonica.

Leon Morris (The Epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians, p. 14) writes this about this passage, “Up to this point Paul had had little to encourage him. In four successive centres, there had been discouragement. A promising beginning had been followed by forcible disruption in Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea, and in Athens, he had had little success. Small wonder that he began his preaching at Corinth ‘in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling’, 1 Corinthians 2:3.

But when the messengers came from Thessalonica they brought such a report of the continuing steadfastness of the converts that Paul saw that the blessing of God had after all rested upon his work there, and this so caused his spirits to rise that he was able to give himself much more energetically to the work he was doing.

This appears to be the meaning of ‘Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ’. Acts 18:5. Out of this sense of relief and reassurance, Paul wrote his first letter to the Thessalonians, and it is clear that he wrote with a full heart.

You can almost feel the excitement the apostles must have had in 1 Thessalonians 3:8 when they write “For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord.” The good news that Timothy brought back not only encouraged them but also joy.

It’s not that they never received any encouragement or had any joy but because this was a congregation they invested so much time and effort in, they were greatly encouraged and filled with joy because they were hearing about the fruit of their labours, this young congregation was standing firm in the Lord amid persecution. 1 Thessalonians 3:5.

In fact, the apostles were so excited they just couldn’t help but look for ways to thank God for them. But notice the apostles especially Paul could have taken all the credit for planting this young church, but he didn’t, he gave credit and thanks to the One and only person he knew was behind it all, God Himself. They did boast about this church as we saw in 1 Thessalonians 1:4-10 but they always knew that it was God who was working in and through them for His purpose.

The apostles were excited about the saints in Thessalonica and were moved to pray for them constantly as they are going to encourage them to do later in 1 Thessalonians 5:17. The apostle’s prayers were twofold,

1. To see them again and
2. So they could supply what was lacking in their faith.

They wanted to see them again is so evident in everything we’ve read in the text but they also wanted to see them not just for a social visit but to help meet their spiritual needs.

It's interesting when you think about it, the saints in Thessalonica were doing great in so many areas of their faith but there was obviously more spiritually growing to do. If we as Christians ever think we 'know it all' or there is 'no more room' for spiritual growth we've sadly missed the point.

“Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.” 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13

After looking for ways to give thanks to God and telling the saints in Thessalonica that they are praying for them night and day, they now get more specific with their prayers for them. It's important to notice in 1 Thessalonians 3:11 how 'our Lord Jesus' is linked with 'our God and Father.'

The apostles are stressing Jesus' Lordship and oneness with the Father, John 17:21 / Zechariah 13:7. They also recognise Who is in control by telling us that they want Jesus and the Father to make it possible for them to see the saints again.

There is something else the apostles recognise in verse 12, they recognise where all our spiritual blessings come from. Let me give you a few examples, our spiritual growth comes from the Father and should be seen in our lives, Galatians 5:22-23, our desire for meatier spiritual food comes from the Father, 2 Peter 2:2 / 2 Peter 3:18. The things we should be thinking about comes from the Father, Philippians 4:8 / 2 Peter 1:5-10. In fact, all our spiritual blessings come from the Father, Ephesians 1:3.

We are so blessed in so many ways and we must recognise where these blessings come from. The apostles wanted the Lord to bless these saints with more love for themselves and everyone they come into contact with, to the same level that the apostles loved them.

The motivation and goal of the apostle's prayers are very clearly seen in 1 Thessalonians 3:13, they wanted them to be strengthened in their hearts, in order for them to be blameless and holy when Jesus returns. We need to remember that 'blameless' doesn't mean 'sinless' but means we need to make sure our sins are properly dealt with.

In Philippians 3:6 when the apostle Paul talks about what he was like when he was a fully devoted Jew, he says that he was 'blameless' in his righteousness, but that doesn't mean he never sinned, it means that he did everything the law required of him to deal with his sin, i.e. sacrifice an animal in the temple.

Now thankfully if a person has been immersed into Christ according to Acts 2:38 they receive forgiveness of sins (the 1st law of forgiveness) and the gift of the Holy Spirit, but what happens after that moment? This only deals with our past sins, what about our future sins?

Well thankfully the Lord has provided what we might call the 2nd law of forgiveness which is found in 1 John 1:10-2:2. In other words, a faithful walk with God along with confessing our sins will keep us 'blameless' and holy as long as we continue to do so.

Again notice how the apostles close this section with another reminder that the Lord will indeed one day come back with the holy ones. But who are these 'holy ones'?

2 Thessalonians 1:7 tells us that Jesus is coming back with His mighty angels. Jesus, Himself tells us in Matthew 25:31 that when He returns He will come with his holy angels. 1 Thessalonians 4:10 tells us that Jesus is coming back with dead saints. So who are the 'holy ones'? It may well be both since the angels are holy and those who died in Christ are holy too.

It's a very sobering thought to know that the Lord will come again one day and we really need to be found 'blameless and holy in His sight.' Some people believe He won't return and others believe He will, but the real question is this, how will He find you if He returns today?

CHAPTER 4

“As for other matters, brothers and sisters, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living.” 1 Thessalonians 4:1

After concluding their prayers for the Thessalonians which included Paul’s desire to see them again and that they are established blameless in their living, he now goes ahead to instruct them on how to live a life that pleases God.

Notice that they are already doing this ‘as in fact you are’. What a compliment this is, to this congregation who are already walking the talk, practising what the apostles are preaching and being such a great example to many other churches even beyond the borders of Thessalonica. As we go through the second part of this letter, we will see that they are going to be encouraged to increase and abound in love so that they may be found blameless at the coming of the Lord Jesus.

“Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.” 1 Thessalonians 4:2

Paul doesn’t just suggest but urges them how they should live a life that pleases God and twice he appeals to the Name of Jesus for his authority in doing so. He wants their service to God to be evermore increasing as he mentioned earlier in [1 Thessalonians 3:12](#) and he will urge them again later in [1 Thessalonians 4:10](#).

We always need to remember that the Christian walk never stands still, walking involves moving, hence why we are to abound more and more and increase our levels of service to God, especially in terms of living morally pure lives for God.

“It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honourable, not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister. The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before.” 1 Thessalonians 4:3-6

Now there is absolutely no misunderstanding of what God’s will is in this text. He wants all Christians to be sanctified which means simply put means to be set apart for God’s purpose. It’s important to understand that this is a process that doesn’t suddenly happen after we’ve been Christians for a while.

The sanctification process starts with God’s Word, Jesus says in [John 17:17](#) “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth”. And so it’s the very Word of God (Truth) that begins the setting apart process when we allow His Word to change us. We’re also later going to be reminded that it is God who sanctifies our whole being. [1 Thessalonians 5:23](#). Read also [1 Peter 1:2](#).

But when we obey the Truth we see the real start of the sanctification process beginning at our baptism. [1 Corinthians 6:11](#) / [Ephesians 5:26](#). But it’s important to understand that it doesn’t end there, this setting apart process continues throughout our Christian lives as [Hebrews 2:11](#) and [Hebrews 10:14](#) remind us. But when will our sanctification end? Well, as we will see later in this letter, it will be completed when Christ returns. [1 Thessalonians 5:23](#).

From the text, we can see that part of our sanctification involves some self-denial, in this case, it’s sexual immorality. The Greek word used here for sexual immorality is the word porneia which is a general word used to describe anything which is unlawful and immoral such as sexual intercourse and immoral relationships. This would include pre-marital sex, extra-marital sex (adultery), and homosexuality, in other words, any sexual activity outside a lawful, marital relationship between husband and wife.

As Christians, we are commanded to control our bodies in a completely different way from the world, [Ephesians 4:17-19](#). The world loves pornography and the abusing of their own bodies and the bodies of others for sexual

gratification but as Christians, we are to be different. But how do we go about doing that? Simply by the renewing of our minds Romans 12:1-2 and being on our guard against the lust of the flesh as Romans 13:13-14 tells us.

It is sad that even in the religious world today, there are those who will take advantage of their own spiritual family members, even for sexual purposes, and so we can understand why we need to practice self-denial and allow God's Word to sanctify us every day of our lives. After all, if we have our mindset on heavenly things the less chance there will be of allowing the fleshly, earthly things to actually happen.

Remember we need to live godly lives and stay clear of these things because it's God's will and if that isn't enough motivation to stay clear of sexual immorality then we need to read on.

“The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins.” 1 Thessalonians 4:6

Hebrews 13:4 also reminds us that “Marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.”

And so the Christian should stay clear of sexual immorality because it's God's will and the Christian knows that God will punish anyone who gets involved in such sin and one other way to help live a life that pleases God is to remember our calling.

“For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit.” 1 Thessalonians 4:7-8

It's worth noting at this point that sexual immorality is sinful in at least four ways. 1 Corinthians 6:18 tells us that it is a sin against our own bodies. 1 Thessalonians 4:6 tells us that it's a sin against our fellow brothers or sisters in Christ. 1 Thessalonians 4:8 tells us that it is a sin against God and in the same verse, the text tells us that it is a sin against the Holy Spirit.

And so, God has called us to holiness, Jeremiah 7:8-18, not to live our lives trying to please our own fleshly desires, remember our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit according to 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 and we need to live up to that calling otherwise through our actions we can actually reject God and His calling for us as the text above implies. Take a moment to read Isaiah 59:1-2 to remind yourself that we cannot preach one way and walk in another way.

“Now about your love for one another we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. And in fact, you do love all of God's family throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more.” 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10

It seems pretty obvious to me that two of the most obvious characteristics of the early church were the way they strived to live in purity and holiness and also the way they loved one another. Can you imagine how the church would flourish today if all Christians strived to do the same?

Now, remember Paul has just finished praying to the Lord that the Lord will increase their love for one another and for everyone 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13 but here in chapter four we have seen that not only are the Christians in Thessalonica already living a life which pleases God 1 Thessalonians 4:1 but here in 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10 the writer also tells us that they are practising love for one another and love for all of God's family throughout Macedonia.

But notice that Paul once again urges them to love more and more. Did they take Paul's words and put them into practice? They certainly did, take a moment to read 2 Thessalonians 1:3-4.

“And to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.” 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12

Already here in chapter four Paul has urged and encouraged them to continue to live a life that pleases God, continue to love everyone as they have been doing so and now here in 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 he is going to encourage them to be diligent with those ‘outsiders’.

It should be the ambition (Greek φιλοτιμέομαι ‘philotimeomai’) meaning to be found in honour, of all Christians to lead a quiet life. Romans 12:18 / Romans 14:19 / Hebrews 12:14. But as we know this is not always the case, I personally find that as a Christian my life is usually very peaceful but it is others who come along and bring trouble into it, but nonetheless, we strive to live a peaceful life.

There was a woman who used to live in our street who knew everyone and everyone’s business; I guess she would be classed as a gossip and a ‘nosey-parker’ (someone who wants to know what everyone else is up to.) Now there is a big difference between wanting to know what’s going on in someone’s life just for the sake of knowing and wanting to know what’s going on in someone’s life because you genuinely care and want to help.

Here in our text the Thessalonian church is being told to mind their own business, the KJV says, ‘and to do your own business’ but what the writer is telling them is simply not to become busybodies, don’t interfere in the affairs of others.

Now as great as this church was, this is one area where they did have problems as we will see when we get to 2 Thessalonians 3:10-14.

Now, this is a real problem that can have serious consequences, Peter in his first letter puts ‘busybodies’ or ‘meddlers’ in the same category as murderers and thieves. 1 Peter 4:15. And so, we shouldn’t be interfering in people’s lives for all the wrong reasons but we should be working with our own hands. What does the writer mean? Simply put, he means that we should be working to provide for our own families as 1 Timothy 5:8 reminds us. It also means we should be working to help those who are less fortunate than ourselves. Ephesians 4:28 / Acts 20:34-35. So why is it so important to lead a quiet life and not to become busybodies but work with our own hands? The answer as always is in the text, in order for us to win the respect of those who aren’t Christians and so we can become independent.

“Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord’s word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.” 1 Thessalonians 4:13-15

As we noted at the beginning of our studies of the Thessalonian letters, we see that Paul concludes every chapter with thoughts concerning the Lord’s return, and this chapter is no exception. In 1 Thessalonians 1, we saw that the Thessalonian church had turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and were waiting for His Son from Heaven. 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10. We saw in 1 Thessalonians 2 that the apostle’s hope, joy or crown was that the Thessalonians would be found in the presence of Jesus at His coming. 2 Thessalonians 2:19.

We also saw in 1 Thessalonians 3 that Paul’s desire for the Christians in Thessalonica was that they would abound in love one toward another and that they would be found blameless in holiness before God at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints. 1 Thessalonians 3:12-13.

It seems that Paul had taught them about Jesus’ return while he was in Thessalonica but it also seems that there was some misunderstanding on the part of these Christians. So, in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 Paul will deal with the topic of the dead in Christ and the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

If you’re older physically the chances are you’ve probably heard this text readout on several occasions, especially during funeral services. And you will know that there is no escaping the fact that losing someone you know and love is a very real and often traumatic time for those who are left behind. The sorrow is often overwhelming and the grief

which follows is often hard to deal with and as someone once said, ‘it is probably one of the most stressful times, we humans have to go through.’

Yes, as Christians we need to go through these times too, but at the same time for Christians, there is hope, hope in knowing where our loved ones have gone and that we will see them again and this, in turn, brings up great comfort. And this is what Paul is going to try to explain to the saints in Thessalonica, that they can find comfort in knowing that Jesus will return one day and they will find comfort in the events which will surround His coming.

The Bible often talks about sleep which in Greek is the word κοιμάω koimao. This word is found 18 times within the New Testament, 4 of those times refer to literal sleep. [Matthew 28:13](#) / [Luke 22:45](#) / [John 11:12](#) / [Acts 12:16](#). The other 14 times including the passage above refer to those who are literally dead. And so here the apostle Paul is referring to those who have literally died in Christ, in other words, faithful Christians. [1 Thessalonians 3:13](#).

The text tells us that God Himself will bring those who have died in Christ back when Jesus returns. And so we can find comfort in this and we can know it’s true because we know that Jesus Himself died and rose again from the dead. And notice also that this text implies that these saints are with Jesus now since God says He will bring them with Jesus. We can see this thought clearer in [1 Thessalonians 5:10](#) / [2 Corinthians 5:8](#) / [Philippians 1:21-23](#).

But it seems there were some Christians in Thessalonica who were worried about those who had already died in Christ would miss out on the blessings of Christ and Paul has to reassure them that this is not the case. He’s already told them that God will bring those who have fallen asleep in the Lord with Jesus when Jesus returns and he now tells them that by no means will those Christians who are still alive precede those Christians who are dead in Christ.

Paul’s point is simply this, those who are alive when Christ returns whenever that happens will have absolutely no advantage over those who have died in the Lord.

And he goes on to inform them that they can have assurance about this because it is ‘by the word of the Lord’. This is the same word that lives and remains forever as [1 Peter 1:23-25](#) reminds us. This is the same word that foretold and brought about the great flood of the earth as [2 Peter 3:3-6](#) reminds us. This is the same word that tells us that Jesus will indeed return again one day as [2 Peter 3:7-13](#) reminds us. In other words, if God says He is going to do something, He will.

“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.” 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

As Paul continues to clear up any misunderstanding about the Lord’s return, he now proceeds to discuss the processes which will take place when the Lord returns. He says when Jesus Himself returns there will be a loud command, the voice of the archangel and the trumpet call of God.

Now notice that God is not sending a substitute or any kind of helper; it’s the Lord Himself who will be coming down from heaven. [Revelation 1:7](#) says, “Look, he is coming with the clouds,” and “every eye will see him, even those who pierced him”; and all peoples on earth “will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.”

[Matthew 24:30](#) says, “Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.”

The NIV uses the words ‘loud command’ other translations use the Greek word κέλευμα keleuma translated ‘shout’. This makes no difference as they both are telling us that this is a shout of command, the idea of a charioteer giving a command to his horses to go, or a shipmaster giving the orders to start rowing to the rowers, or someone who is in charge of many soldiers and gives them the command to go. The point is there is a tone of authority behind the command.

With reference to the voice of the archangel, we cannot be certain exactly who is this archangel is, it possibly could be Michael as this is how he is described in [Jude 9](#) and [Revelation 12:7](#), but along with the voice comes the sound of the trumpet. Trumpets are used in various ways throughout Scripture.

We know that Moses was commanded to make two for use in the tabernacle, [Numbers 10:2](#) but later Solomon made much more for use in the temple, [2 Chronicles 5:12](#). We know that they were made of either silver or ram's horns. [Numbers 10:2](#) / [Joshua 6:4](#), we also know that they were used as musical instruments in the Old Testament. [1 Chronicles 13:8](#). God also instructed them to be made and used for getting his people's attention when it comes to making journeys from place to place. [Numbers 10:2](#) / [Numbers 10:5-6](#).

We also see from [Numbers 10:2-3](#) / [Numbers 10:7](#) that they were used to call God's people together. They were also used for blowing over the sacrifices on the feast day. [Numbers 10:10](#) / [Psalm 81:3](#). They were also to be used at all other religious processions and ceremonies. [1 Chronicles 13:8](#) / [1 Chronicles 15:24](#) / [1 Chronicles 15:28](#) / [2 Chronicles 5:31](#) / [2 Chronicles 15:14](#).

Trumpets were used to assemble God's people in times of war, [Judges 3:27](#) and were used when they went into battle to help God's people remember the Lord, [Numbers 10:9](#) / [Numbers 31:6-7](#). They were also used when the people proclaimed a king, [2 Kings 9:13](#) / [2 Kings 11:14](#). They were also used as alarms in times of danger, [Ezekiel 33:2-6](#).

Now I'm going to stop here as I don't want you to get distracted from our main text, if you want to find out other things for which trumpets were used please feel free, but for a moment I think it worthwhile just quoting two other verses from [1 Corinthians 15:51-52](#) "Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed."

Notice that it's after the loud command, the voice of the archangel and the trumpet sound of the Lord that the dead in Christ shall rise first.

And so not only will the Lord's return be very audible, we see that the dead in Christ will rise first, which is obvious as they will come with Jesus when He returns but it's important to say that it will be their 'souls' which will be coming with Jesus as implied in [1 Thessalonians 4:14](#) but their 'bodies' will be raised from the grave as implied in [1 Thessalonians 4:16](#). And so this will happen first, so we who are alive will not precede those who are dead.

Next, we see what will happen to those who are still alive when Christ returns. Paul says that those who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds. Paul explains this more in [1 Corinthians 15:51-58](#) where he tells us that those who are still alive will be transformed, and their bodies will put on immortality and their bodies will become incorruptible. And it's that this same point in time when the righteous living will join the righteous dead together in the clouds. [1 Thessalonians 4:17](#).

Notice also that there is no mention of Jesus literally touching the Earth with His feet when He returns as some people believe, but we will meet with him in the air. [2 Peter 3:7-11](#). And I don't know about you but I just can't wait to be with the Lord forever as Paul says here and as Jesus promised us in [John 14:3](#).

What an amazing scene this is and how difficult it is to even begin to try and imagine what this day is going to be like. But what a day it will be, or as the songwriter Eliza E. Hewitt, writes,

'Sing the wondrous love of Jesus, Sing His mercy and His grace.

In the mansions bright and blessed He'll prepare for us a place.

Refrain

When we all get to Heaven, What a day of rejoicing that will be!

When we all see Jesus, We'll sing and shout the victory!

“Therefore encourage one another with these words.” 1 Thessalonians 4:18

Now, remember despite the NIV using the word ‘encourage’ these words are all about comforting the saints who remain alive in Thessalonica and who were concerned about those who were already dead in Christ. Yes, when Christians pass on to be with the Lord it can be and is very painful but it can be even more painful if that person isn’t a Christian and dies without any hope.

Paul says encourage each other with these words, which is something he also reminds all Christians to do in Romans 12:15 / 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 / 1 Thessalonians 5:10-11.

Now as we enter 1 Thessalonians 5 we will see once again that Paul isn’t finished talking about the Lord’s return but for the moment he wants them to understand that losing a loved one is very sorrowful but not so much for Christians who have passed on.

He reminds them that those who have already died in Christ will not lose out on any blessings when the Lord returns and he talked them through the process which will take place when the Lord returns and finally he reminds them of the purpose of all his words in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17, to comfort them, 1 Thessalonians 4:18.

Now I don’t know about you but this doesn’t sound like the second coming that so many religious groups believe these days and so a short assignment might be very useful for you at this point on this topic.

CHAPTER 5

“Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, “Peace and safety,” destruction will come on them suddenly, as labour pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.” 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3

The writer begins this chapter by addressing the church in Thessalonica about times and dates concerning the Lord’s coming. I think it would be useful to look at those two words to gain a better understanding of what the writer means. The word ‘times’ is the Greek word ‘χρόνος’ ‘chronos’, which deals with time chronologically speaking. In other words, whatever you are doing for ten minutes is still ten minutes.

But the Greek word for ‘seasons’ is the word ‘καιρός’ ‘kairos’ which deals with time in terms of quality. In other words, ten minutes spent with someone you love might seem like a fleeting moment but ten minutes with someone you don’t like being around might seem like an eternity. And so in the context of this letter the writer speaks of time and also speaks of the nature of the times or the events that surround the return of Jesus.

It’s obvious that Paul must have already spoken to them about this matter whilst he was in their company and they should already know about these things because he tells them, ‘we do not need to write to you, for you know very well.’

Paul is reminding them that they should know that nothing; no one, except the Father of course knows exactly when Jesus is going to return but when He does, it shall be like a thief in the night for some.

And I use the word ‘some’ carefully here, as Christian; we should always be ready and prepared for His return. For those who are not Christians and if Christians are not ready for His return, it certainly will be like a thief in the night. Take a moment to read the following passages carefully. Matthew 24:43 / 2 Peter 3:10 / Revelation 3:3 / Revelation 16:15.

Paul says that Jesus will return when people are saying, ‘peace and safety’. These words shouldn’t come as a surprise to us as this has been proclaimed time and time again throughout the Scriptures. Take a moment to read the following Scripture, **Ezekiel 13:10 / Jeremiah 6:14 / Jeremiah 8:11 / Micah 3:5 / Matthew 24:39**. It’s interesting, in the world today, many so-called Christians believe that Jesus will return when there is a lot of trouble going on in the world but here Paul says it will happen during peaceful times.

But again, we are reminded that it will be sudden, just like a woman who goes into labour, it will be destructive for those who just aren’t ready or prepared. When we get to **2 Thessalonians 1:7-10** we will see that there will be no time or any way to escape this destruction. And so in the meantime, we need to be ready and prepared for His coming. **2 Thessalonians 1:10 / 2 Thessalonians 4:17-18**.

“But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness.” **1 Thessalonians 5:4-5**

Paul has just finished telling the saints what will happen to those who aren’t ready for the Lord’s Day and how they won’t escape destruction, in these verses he is making contrast and reminding them that they must live as children of light because they do not belong in the darkness.

We know that darkness is representative of evil and light is representative of goodness. Read through the following Scripture to see how dark and light are used in the same way, **Romans 13:12 / 2 Corinthians 6:14 / Ephesians 5:8 / Ephesians 5:11-12 / Colossians 1:13 / 1 Peter 2:9 / 1 John 1:5-7 / 1 John 2:8-11**.

We need to remember what Paul is reminding the saints at Thessalonica if we don’t want to be surprised when the Lord returns. We don’t know when Christ will return but we know He will and this should prompt us to live the Christian life properly until His return. We are children of light, not dark and we are children of the day and not night, in other words, we should have nothing to hide and everything we do should be in the open as Paul reminds us in **Philippians 2:15**.

“So then let’s not sleep, as the rest do, but let’s watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep in the night, and those who are drunk are drunk in the night. But let us, since we belong to the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and, for a helmet, the hope of salvation. For God didn’t appoint us to wrath, but to the obtaining of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him. Therefore exhort one another, and build each other up, even as you also do.” **1 Thessalonians 5:6-11 WEB**

The writer begins these verses by reminding the church ‘not to sleep, as the rest do’. There are people who aren’t really concerned about spiritual matters, there are Christians who aren’t really concerned about the way they act or live, these are the people who are ‘asleep’. The word sleep used in this verse is the Greek word, ‘koimao’ which is a different Greek word the writer uses in **1 Thessalonians 4:13**. In the verse above, ‘sleep’ carries with it the idea of spiritual slackness or unconcern. And so, a Christian who has no spiritual concerns will certainly not be watchful, they will certainly not be watching out for the Lord’s return.

As Christians, we are constantly on the watch, watching out for Satan’s schemes and ploys to tempt us to sin, **Mark 13:33-37**, we’re constantly watching out for our own souls, **1 Corinthians 16:13**, and the souls of our brothers and sisters in Christ, **Hebrews 13:17**, and all of would certainly include praying. **Matthew 26:41 / 1 Peter 4:7**.

Not only are Christians to be watchful but also sober, this is the Greek word ‘nepho’ which literally means to abstain from wine or anything intoxicating. See also **1 Peter 1:13 / 1 Peter 5:8**. It’s common sense that Christians shouldn’t get drunk, not only because the Bible condemns drunkenness **Ephesians 5:18** but also because there is no way that they can be fully watchful for the Lord’s return whilst under the influence of alcohol.

At the beginning of this chapter, the writer contrasted those who live as children of the night with those who live as children of the day, here when he writes, ‘For those who sleep, sleep in the night, and those who are drunk are drunk in the night’

He is contrasting those who are watchful and sober with those who aren't. This is why the writer goes on to remind the church in Thessalonica that they belong to the day.

You see it's all very well pointing our fingers at those who aren't Christians and complaining about the way they live their lives but as Christians, we need to constantly be looking at ourselves. Are we being sober (serious)? Are we armed and waiting?

When you think about a soldier getting ready to go to war, the commanding officer wouldn't let him go anywhere drunk or unprepared and unarmed! We are in the middle of spiritual warfare and so we should be sober, prepared and armed. Paul writes about our full armour in **Ephesians 6:11-18** but here he reminds us that we should arm ourselves with the breastplate of faith and love and the helmet of hope (salvation).

We already reminded ourselves of the important link of faith, hope and love back in **1 Thessalonians 1:3**. (See also **1 Corinthians 13:13**.) Faith and love protect our hearts from evil and our hope protects our minds against fear and doubt. Please remember these are not the only spiritual weapons we have at our disposal. (Take a moment to read **Romans 13:12 / 2 Corinthians 6:7 / 2 Corinthians 10:4 / Ephesians 6:13ff**.)

In **1 Thessalonians 5:9**, the writer mentions the word 'us'. Who are they?

Well, again he is referring to the children of light, those very same individuals who are sober, prepared and armed. And notice that it is these individuals who have NOT been appointed to wrath, the individuals who ARE appointed to wrath are those who are of the darkness and night, those who are not sober, not prepared and not armed. These saints in Thessalonica had obeyed the Gospel and were striving to remain faithful so as to be prepared when Christ returned. They are the ones who are appointed to salvation.

They recognised who Jesus was and what He did for them. Take a moment to pause and remind yourself about this. Read the following passages, **Philippians 2:8 / Romans 6:3 / Galatians 2:20**. The whole purpose of Jesus dying according to this text is that 'whether we wake or sleep', we should live but live together with Him. **John 11:25-26 / Philippians 3:10**.

This is why we are to exhort or comfort one another with the comfort we each receive from God, **2 Corinthians 1:3-4** and with the comfort of our hope we have in Christ, **1 Thessalonians 4:18**. The word 'comfort' is the Greek word, παρακαλέω 'parakaleo' and it literally means to call to one's side, call for, summon. The idea is of someone walking alongside another, providing comfort, even exhortation.

We are also to edify or build each other up which is a goal all Christians are to pursue, **Romans 14:19** and as we know is the main work of the church, **Ephesians 4:11-16**. Now the great news was that the church in Thessalonica was already doing these things but the writer encourages them to continue to do so.

The word 'edify' is the Greek word, οικοδομέω 'oikodomeo' and this literally means to build a house. The idea is that we are supposed to edify one another by promoting spiritual growth and the development of the character of believers by teaching or by example.

"But we beg you, brothers, to know those who labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you, and to respect and honour them in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves. We exhort you, brothers, admonish the disorderly, encourage the fainthearted, support the weak, be patient toward all. See that no one returns evil for evil to anyone, but always follow after that which is good, for one another, and for all." **1 Thessalonians 5:12-15**

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As we are the sons of light and sons of the day, we have an obligation to comfort and edify one another and these are just some of the things we need to do as the body of Christ. Each member has to be involved in this in order for the body to develop and grow. **Ephesians 4:15-16**.

But we also need to acknowledge those within the body who edify the body through their service in certain areas, such as evangelists, pastors and teachers as their purpose is to equip and edify the saints for the work of

ministry. **Ephesians 4:11-12**. Acknowledging these saints is not in terms of just knowing them but we need to know their worth, appreciate the value in what they do and hold them in high regard, after all, they do work hard amongst us.

Elders also known as pastors, and bishops, are among the people we need to acknowledge, whose duty is to watch and feed the local congregation. **Acts 14:23 / Acts 20:17 / Acts 20:28 / 1 Peter 5:1-2 / 1 Timothy 3:1-7 / Titus 1:5-9**. Deacons are also among the people we need to acknowledge, as they minister to the needs of the congregation. **Philippians 1:1 / 1 Timothy 3:8-13**.

Evangelists, whose ministry is to the Word of God, proclaim the good news to both sinner and saint. **Ephesians 4:11 / 2 Timothy 4:5, 2 / 1 Timothy 4:16**. Teachers, who provide instruction in the doctrine of Christ. **Ephesians 4:11 / Acts 13:1-2 / 1 Corinthians 12:28-29 / Titus 2:3-5**.

Now we need to also acknowledge a whole bunch of other people within our congregations, this would also include those who teach our children and those who teach those who are not Christians within our families and communities. Those who minister through exhortation, giving, and showing mercy (such as in visiting the sick) **Romans 12:6-8**. Those who use their talents to do good deeds, as did Dorcas. **Acts 9:36-39**. Those who keep up the facilities in which we meet to worship, clean the building, prepare the communion etc.

Here in the text, the writer has elders in mind as he says those who are 'over you in the Lord'. They are the only ones given authority 'over' us in the Lord. **Acts 20:28 / 1 Peter 5:1-2**. And they as elders have a duty which very often requires them to admonish and warn. **Titus 1:9**. But also they need to be qualified to teach **1 Timothy 3:2**. And so any congregation with men qualified to serve as elders should certainly be careful to acknowledge and recognize them as such, and respect their God-given duty.

Not only are we to acknowledge them but we are to honour them in love. Now it is true we are to honour all our brothers and sisters in Christ, **Romans 12:10 / Philippians 2:3** and it is true we are to love all our brother and sisters in Christ, **1 Peter 2:17 / John 13:34-35**. But how much more should we honour and love those who spend their time and energy serving each of us!

When you think of the work of an elder we should love them and hold them in high honour, after all, they feed us, they watch over us, they provide examples for us, **1 Peter 5:1-3** and they must give an account for our souls, **Hebrews 13:17**.

The writer continues and encourages the church in Thessalonica to be at peace among themselves. Peace is something all Christians should be pursuing, **Romans 14:17-19 / Hebrews 12:14** and there is nothing better than a congregation that is at peace with each other, this certainly helps with unity **Psalms 133:1** and is also a sign of heavenly wisdom, and provides the atmosphere in which much righteousness can be sown. **James 3:17-18**.

If there is peace then the work of an elder can be a lot easier, after all the work of an elder can carry a heavy responsibility, **Hebrews 13:17**. And so we can make their load lighter, we can make their work a joy, contributing to peace through obedience and submission and so avoid adding unnecessary grief, which would not be good for us. And so as we wait for the coming of the Lord, we are blessed not to wait alone, the Lord's church is here to comfort and edify us and many individuals labour among us, and are over us in the Lord.

Some meet our needs which makes it easier for us to grow in Christ and there are others who watch over us and admonish us as necessary and for that, we should be thankful.

So far in **1 Thessalonians 5**, the writer has reminded us that we are children of light and children of the day and we have responsibilities to be prepared and sober whilst we wear the breastplate of faith and love and the helmet of hope. We also have the responsibility to comfort and edify one another and acknowledge those who serve us whilst honouring them in love. Now the writer turns our attention to those who are in need whether they are a part of the church or not.

He asks us to admonish the disorderly or unruly as some translations have it. The Greek word for unruly is ἄτακτος ‘ataktos’ means disorderly, out of ranks and is used often of soldiers who fall out of line or deviate from the prescribed order of rule.

And so the unruly Christian is one who does not abide by the teachings of the apostles and so there may well be times when they need to be warned just like the apostle Paul had to do with the brethren at Ephesus, Acts 20:31 and just like he encouraged his young friend Timothy to do in 2 Timothy 4:1-2.

Any Christian who is unruly after being warned needs to be identified and withdrawn from fellowship. 2

Thessalonians 3:6-15. This is done in order to save them and to keep the church pure. 1 Corinthians 5:1-13.

As Christians, we also need to identify and encourage the fainthearted, the Greek word for fainthearted is ὀλιγόψυχος ‘oligopsuchos’ and it literally means small-souled or little-souled, it describes those who lose heart, prone to dropping out or quitters. These are the Christians which need to be encouraged and consoled.

This is something the writer has already done in this letter. 1 Thessalonians 2:11-12 / 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. But notice the contrast, some Christians (the unruly) need to be warned, and admonished, while other Christians (the fainthearted) may need a more tender touch, to be encouraged.

The writer continues to identify other Christians in need of help, he reminds the church in Thessalonica to uphold the weak. This is likely a reference to those who are weak in the faith. Those who are easily tempted by sin and or those who are likely to violate their weak consciences. 1 Corinthians 8:7-13.

But we uphold them by receiving them, Romans 14:1-3 not by arguing with them or by putting them down because they have a weak faith but by bearing with them Romans 15:1-2. We do need to learn this lesson that many who are weak in the faith need time to grow, they need time for their consciences to become stronger. Romans 15:2.

And for us to learn this lesson we need to learn to be patient, not just with each other but with everyone. The Greek word for patient is the word μακροθυμέω ‘makrothumeo’ and it means to persevere patiently and bravely in enduring misfortunes and troubles.

And so we are to be patient with the fainthearted and the weak but we’re also to be patient with those we teach, hence why we need to be patient in terms of warning the unruly 2 Timothy 4:2 and patience needs to be shown when we’re dealing with those who oppose us. 2 Timothy 2:23-26.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:15, the writer comments ‘see that no one returns evil for evil to anyone’. This is a principle that Jesus taught in Matthew 5:44-45, the apostle Paul elaborated upon in Romans 12:17-21 and discussed in Peter’s letter in 1 Peter 3:9.

Leon Morris says this, “Faced with opposition from both Jews and Gentiles, and with some differences within the church itself, this must have been exceedingly difficult for the Thessalonians, yet Paul does not hesitate to put the matter plainly to them. Christian teaching is not meant to be applied only when circumstances are easy. Christianity is a robust faith, empowered with a divine dynamic, and is to be lived out even under the most trying circumstances” (The Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians, pg. 101)

And so we are not to return evil for evil but we are encouraged to follow after that which is good. And what good would this be? Well for Christians it would certainly be things like peace and edification, Romans 14:19.

Righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness, 1 Timothy 6:11 and holiness, Hebrews 12:14.

And for the non-Christian, this would certainly include things which are honourable, and honour itself, Romans 12:17 / 1 Peter 2:17, things that are good, Galatians 6:10. Things like civil obedience, kind words, gentleness and meekness, Titus 3:1-2 and prayers on their behalf, and a knowledge of the truth leading to their salvation, 1 Timothy 2:1-4.

“Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

There are times when we need to look after our own spiritual well-being, here the writer shares with us three ways to do just that.

1. Rejoice always.
2. Pray continually and
3. Give thanks in all circumstances.

Notice also that the writer reminds us that all these things are God’s will for all Christians, in other words, God wants us to consciously and actively do all three in order for us to be of better service to others.

Remember rejoicing isn’t going around with a constant smile on our faces, it is much deeper than that. **Nehemiah 8:10** reminds us that there is great strength in joy, **Romans 15:13** reminds us that when we have joy in what we believe, we also abound in love. When we are joyful, it helps those around us to be joyful. **2 Corinthians 2:3**. And so if we are a joyful people, it helps us to remain strong whilst also being a source of strength for others. **Proverbs 15:13 / Proverbs 17:22**.

Now we might ask, where are we to rejoice always?

First and foremost, our joy needs to be in the Lord, **Philippians 4:4**, because it is in Him who gives salvation, **Psalms 21:1**, it’s Him who gives joy to anyone who pleases Him, **Ecclesiastes 2:26 / Ecclesiastes 5:20**, it’s Him who provides mercy, **Psalms 31:7**, when we are in Him we can experience the fullness of that joy, **Psalms 16:11**.

We also may ask, how are we to rejoice always?

Well if God is the source of our joy then it should follow that we should spend as much time with Him as possible. There is joy in reading and feeding upon God’s Word, **Jeremiah 15:16**, there is joy in meditating upon God’s Word, **John 15:11 / 1 John 1:4**.

There is also joy in simply spending some valuable time with our brothers and sisters in Christ, Paul was filled with joy because of the encouragement he received from Titus, **2 Corinthians 7:13**, that wonderful little letter to Philemon reminds us that Philemon’s love and joy refreshed the hearts of the saints and also gave Paul joy. **Philemon 7 / Philemon 20**.

Another great source of joy is found when we bring others to Christ, not just because they have become Christians but because of the joy they bring with them, we’ve already read about this happening in this letter, the Thessalonians brought Paul a great deal of joy, **1 Thessalonians 2:19-20 / 1 Thessalonians 3:9**. And like we mentioned above Philemon brought Paul a great deal of joy, **Philemon 1:7**, the people that John brought to Christ gave him joy too, **3 John 4**.

And so, we can actively and consciously rejoice always if we consciously and actively remember the above and when we come together in worship and sing praises to God our joy will be expressed in our singing, **Psalms 71:23 / Psalms 104:33-34 / Psalms 135:3 / James 5:13**. I believe one reason why a lot of Christians lose their joy is because they spend too much time in the world and not enough time in the Lord.

But not only are Christians commanded to rejoice always, but the writer also reminds us that Christians are commanded to ‘pray continuously’. We are not just a joyous people we are also a people of prayer because it is through prayer that we find mercy and grace in our time of need, **Hebrews 4:14-16**, it’s through prayer that we find the forgiveness of our sins as we confess them to God, **1 John 1:9**, it’s through prayer that we receive that peace which goes beyond our understanding during anxious times, **Philippians 4:6-7**.

But how is it possible to pray continually?

This is where it comes down to self-discipline, if we look at the examples we have within the Scriptures we see godly men praying at certain times of the day and night. David was a man who prayed evening, morning and noontime, **Psalm 55:17**. Daniel was also a man who prayed three times a day, **Daniel 6:10**.

These men disciplined themselves to pray at certain times of the day and night and so as Christians we too should set aside some time every day to spend some much-needed time in prayer with God.

Now, this doesn't mean that the time we set aside should be the only time we pray, there may be important occasions that need our prayers, **Luke 6:12-13**, there may be times when our lives are getting a little difficult, **Acts 16:25** and of course, they may well be times when we just want to pray on the spot, there and then, **Nehemiah 2:4-5**. The point is if we have time set aside, pray during important occasions or difficult times or simply on the spot, all of these prayers will help us to pray continually.

And so, we are a people who are to rejoice in the Lord and pray continually to the Lord but we are also a people who are full of gratitude to God. When we are in prayer to God we need to remember to include some form of thanksgiving within our prayers. After all, when you stop for a moment and think about what God has done in Christ for every one of us, that at the very least is one reason to be thankful. **Colossians 1:12-14 / Colossians 2:7 / Colossians 4:2 / 1 Timothy 2:1**.

Now please take note that the writer doesn't say, 'be thankful when things are going well' he writes 'be thankful in ALL circumstances.' When was the last time you heard, anyone thanking God for the trials they are going through?

Thankfulness comes by remembering that all things can work for our own good, **Romans 8:28** and when we remember what God has done and continues to do in our lives we will understand that we can be thankful even when suffering comes, **Romans 5:3-5**, we can be thankful and even rejoice when persecution comes our way, **Matthew 5:10-12 / James 1:2-3**.

When we remain in Christ, spend time with God in His Word, fellowship with our brothers and sisters in Christ, be consciously and actively trying to bring people to Christ, we will remain a joyous people, we will spend a lot of time in prayer to God and as we're remembering His good purpose for us we should always be a thankful people.

The writer says that this is God's will for us and when you think about it, the more thankful we are, the more prayerful we will be and the more prayerful we are, the more joyful we will be, all three are knitted together.

“Do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil.” 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22

What does 1 Thessalonians 5:20 mean, when it says, 'Do not despise prophesying'?

When one encounters a problem passage, it is important to consider the context. In practice, this means looking at the verses which go before, and those, which follow. That is always sound advice, and it is advice worth following as we consider the question before us this month. The previous verse **1 Thessalonians 5:19** says, 'quench not the Spirit.' Now, the Spirit is referred to be unquestionably the Holy Spirit. Notice that in this verse the present imperative tense is used, which means that we have here a statement that relates to something which the believers in Thessalonica had evidently been doing and were continuing to do up to that moment.

An 'Imperative' is a command or an instruction, so the sense of this verse is literally, 'Do not continue to quench the Spirit'. This tells us that the Thessalonians were offending the Holy Spirit. They were disregarding and perhaps even repressing, a particular manifestation of the Spirit.

We see from the next verse that the specific gift involved was the gift of prophecy because the word which is translated 'prophesying's', 'propheteia', occurs on only two other occasions, **1 Corinthians 14:6 / 1 Corinthians 14:22**, where Paul discusses the exercise of spiritual gifts.

The church at Thessalonica, therefore, is told, in effect, ‘Do not continue what you have been doing, quenching, or suppressing, this manifestation of the Spirit’. Certainly, at the very least, they were discouraging the exercise of the prophetic gift.

The apostolic command in **1 Thessalonians 5:19** is followed by the verse, at which we are now looking, **1 Thessalonians 5:20**, ‘And do not despise prophesying’. Here, again, this is a present imperative, and it means, ‘Do not continue to despise prophesying’.

You will notice that there is a significant difference between the Authorized Version and many modern versions in the way in which **1 Thessalonians 5:19-20** are rendered.

In the A.V., we find two short sentences, ‘Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesying’s.’ But in modern versions, (the Revised Standard Version for example), the two verses are separated only by a comma, so that they read as one sentence, ‘Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophesying.’ The implication is that to despise ‘prophesying’ was to quench the Spirit.

Clearly, then, Paul, writing under the inspiration of the Spirit, regarded the exercise of that particular gift, the gift of prophecy, as of very real importance to the spiritual growth and wellbeing of the infant church in Thessalonica.

Now, this letter was written during the second missionary journey, and is, therefore reliably regarded as one of the earliest of the apostolic letters, it was written from Corinth, where Paul arrived about 50 AD, after leaving Thessalonica, and where he stayed for 18 months. **Acts 18:11**.

We arrive at this date because we know that the proconsul Gallio, which is mentioned in the next verse, took up his position in Corinth about that time. The letter was probably about 51 or 52 AD. It is even likely, although not stated, that it was Paul himself who imparted spiritual gifts to the Thessalonian Church as he had at Corinth during the year and a half he remained in that city.

On the matter of spiritual gifts in the infant church, we learn that Paul informed the Ephesian believers that prophets were among the Lord’s gifts to the Church. **Ephesians 4:11**. Earlier in the same letter, he had stated that apostles and prophets had laid the foundation on which the Church is built; that foundation being Christ himself, **Ephesians 2:20**. He followed this, in **1 Thessalonians 3:5**, with the assertion that the Spirit used apostles and prophets as instruments for the revelation of truth.

Although we do not believe that there are such inspired men alive today, it should not be difficult for anyone to understand that in those days, apostles and prophets fulfilled an essential role in the revelation of the truth and the establishment of the church.

Bear in mind that the New Testament had not then been compiled. Indeed, as I have already implied, many of the books, which comprise our present New Testament, had not even been written. Therefore, instead of being able to study written instruction and teaching, we find that prophecy, ‘oral,’ that is spoken instruction, was the means by which the early Christians were taught.

Bear in mind, also, that the word ‘prophesying’ does not mean that a new revelation was presented every time the prophet opened his mouth! The word ‘profetes’ means ‘to speak forth’, and covers preaching and teaching generally. And, if you examine the Old Testament books, you will find that many of the writers never fore-told future events, but simply delivered a message on God’s behalf.

In fact, in the Old Testament, a prophet.

1. Delivered a message from God.
2. Interpreted current events He explained what was happening at that moment. (And very often. the explanation the prophet gave. was very different from what the people thought!)

3. And sometimes was able to tell the people what God was going to do.

In the New Testament, the exercise of the gift of prophecy simply meant that men were led by the Holy Spirit to speak in order that the Church might be strengthened and built up. Now it is clear from **1 Thessalonians 5:20**, that some of the Thessalonian Christians had been inclined to undervalue this particular gift because the word ‘despise’ means ‘set at nought’. So, Paul is urging them, not to ‘set at nought’ these Spirit-led teachers, or the messages they delivered.

However, he also issues this warning, ‘Test everything’. In other words, ‘Be on your guard, and hold fast what is good’, **1 Thessalonians 5:21**.

I stress again, that this instruction, to pay attention to the prophets, was valid as long as the spiritual gifts, which included apostles and prophets, remained. But when they were removed, the specific sense of these words ceased to apply.

Yet there is a sense in which they contain a message for us today. ‘Prophesying’ means ‘speaking forth’. And prophecy, in the general sense of the word, is that which is preached. It is preaching and teaching. There is no one today who possesses the gift of prophecy, about which Paul writes. Be on your guard, and do not trust those who claim to predict future events.

Remember that almost 2000 years ago, Paul said that prophecies would fail, the word means ‘cease’. The gift of tongues, which was the ability of people to speak in languages they had not learned, would cease, and the gift of miraculous knowledge would end. **1 Corinthians 13:8-10**. We have no inspired, Spirit-led messengers; no apostles and prophets such as those who served the infant church. But we do have those who preach and teach that which the Holy Spirit has preserved for us and presented to us in the Word.

We have inherited the rich blessing of ‘all things that pertain to life and godliness’, in the New Testament Scriptures. We have the recorded words of ‘holy men of God who were moved by the Holy Spirit.’ **2 Peter 1:3** and **2 Peter 1:21**. It is as imperative today as it ever was, that we who love the Lord should not undervalue, despise the preaching and teaching of the Word of God.

We should never forget that the Lord himself told his apostles. ‘He who listens to you, listens to me; he who rejects you, rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects Him who sent me’. **Luke 10:16**.

I wonder how anyone can claim to accept the authority of Christ, whilst rejecting the writings of the apostles whom he authorized to speak on his behalf.

And so, as a quick recap, we need to remember to keep this in the context of its date, when the writer is writing they were still in the age of miraculous revelations from God. We know miracles, wonders and signs had a purpose and were to confirm the preached Word, **Mark 16:20** / **Hebrews 2:4**. We also know what these miracles, signs and wonders were, **1 Corinthians 12:7-11** and finally, we also know when the miraculous would cease, **1 Corinthians 13:8-13** / **Ephesians 4:7-16**.

It was the Holy Spirit who was the one who empowered those who prophesied for the purpose of giving God’s revelation to men and so to despise prophecies, would be to quench the work of the Holy Spirit, and so remove one’s self from the life-giving revelation of God, **Ephesians 4:30**.

Today, if we turn our back on the result of the Spirit’s work, (the word of God), we can, in a sense, quench the Spirit. God’s word was made known through His Holy Spirit, **John 16:13**, in Old Testament times, God did this through prophets, **1 Peter 1:10-11**; **2 Peter 1:20-21** and in New Testament times, God did this through the apostles and prophets of Jesus Christ, **John 16:13** / **John 14:26**.

Throughout history mankind has always had problems accepting God’s Word, even God’s own people Israel struggled with this, **Hosea 4:1**, **Romans 1:18-23** reminds us that even the Gentiles had problems accepting God’s

Word. And so, what the writer is telling the Thessalonian church is, don't refuse to listen and obey what the Holy Spirit was making known to them through revelations at that time.

He's reminding them not to despise prophecies, in other words, don't belittle the prophecies which were being made through the prophets, don't refuse to accept what God was revealing through them. But this is important, they cannot simply just accept any 'new' revelation, they have to test them, and the reason they had to test them was because they had to recognise that NOT every claim to be from God was true.

John reminds us in **1 John 4:1** that we're 'not to believe every spirit, but test the spirits.' Why? 'Because many false prophets have come into the world.'

And so today especially within the charismatic churches, we need to test what people say when they claim they have a 'new' revelation from God, or God is still performing miraculous, signs and wonders through them, today we need to be like the Bereans in **Acts 17:11**, they received the word with great readiness but they also searched the Scriptures daily to find out for themselves as to whether what Paul was teaching was true or not. We should accept everything which is in harmony with the Scriptures and its teaching, and reject everything which is not. **1 John 4:6 / Acts 2:42**. We are hold on to everything that is good and reject everything which is evil. **Amos 5:15 / Psalm 97:10 / Romans 12:9**. The word reject is sometimes rendered abstain, the Greek word for abstain is the word, ἀπέχομαι 'apechomai' and it literally means to run in the opposite direction. Are we actively running away from evil or running towards it?

“May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.” **1 Thessalonians 5:23-24**

The writer again ends this chapter with another reference to the return of Christ and he also ends with a prayer mentioning both peace and sanctification. We know that God is a God of peace as too is the Christ, **Isaiah 9:6** and as Christians, we can experience this peace because it comes from Christ, **John 14:27 / Philippians 4:7**. The very Gospel we are to proclaim to people is called the Gospel of peace, **Romans 10:15**.

But not only does God give us peace, but He also sanctifies us, the Greek word for sanctify is the word, ἁγιάζω 'hagiazō' and it means to make holy, to set apart, in other words, God sets us apart from the world for a holy purpose, remembering that He does this through His Word. **John 17:17 / Acts 20:32**. Again this is a subject that the writer has already mentioned back in **1 Thessalonians 4:3-4** in regards to sexual purity.

The apostle Paul gives us a complete description of the nature of man in **1 Thessalonians 5:23**, He mentions spirit, soul and body. Here, the apostle clearly reveals that man is a triune being, consisting of spirit and soul and body. And even though this is the only verse in the Bible in which the three-fold nature of man is mentioned, these three elements, body, soul and spirit, are referred to in different combinations in other places, in both the Old and the New Testaments.

In the Old Testament, for example, in his God-given wisdom, Solomon refers to the body and the spirit. “The dust returns to the earth as it once was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it”. **Ecclesiastes 12:7**

Solomon says at death, the body returns to the dust of the earth, and the spirit goes back to God who gave it. So straight away we can see a distinction between the body and the spirit.

In **Matthew 10:28** “And be not afraid of them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

Here, Jesus, Himself speaks of those who are able to kill the body, but who are unable to kill the soul. This statement proves that the body and the soul are also different.

“For the word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart.” **Hebrews 4:12**

The Hebrew writer tells us that the Word of God can pierce, ‘to the dividing of soul and spirit’. Again, this shows us that there is a difference between the soul and the spirit. And remember the spirit which the Hebrew writer refers to here is not the Holy Spirit but the human spirit.

Paul makes this clearer in **Romans 8:16** where he writes, “The Spirit himself bears witness to our spirit that we are God’s children.” He also makes it clearer in **1 Corinthians 5:4** “In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, you being gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

And finally, in **Hebrews 12:13** the writer says, “To the general assembly and assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect.” Contrasting the assembly of the Israelites at Mount Sinai with the assembly of the Hebrew Christians at Mount Zion, the writer tells them, “You have come to the spirits of just men made perfect”.

And so, in **Ecclesiastes 12:7** we see the distinction between the body and the spirit. In **Matthew 10:28** we see the distinction between body and soul. And in **Hebrews 4:12** we see the distinction between soul and spirit.

Now please remember that in these verses where these three elements are mentioned, I’m not offering them as proof of man’s nature because we need to understand them in the context in which we find them. It’s in **1 Thessalonians 5:23** where we find a definite statement as to the nature of man.

“The LORD God formed the man from the soil of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.” **Genesis 2:7**. We see here that God formed or fashioned or moulded, man’s body out of the ground, and we read, that God “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being”.

Now the word ‘being’ has been preferred by later translators, rather than the word ‘soul’ which is used in the King James Version, because the original word ‘nephesh’ does not mean ‘soul’ in the special New Testament sense.

Mickelson Hebrew Dictionary says this, nephesh (neh’-fesh) 1. (properly) a breathing creature, i.e. animal of (abstractly) vitality 2. used very widely in a literal, accommodated or figurative sense (bodily or mental)

Mickelson Greek Dictionary says this, psuche (psoo-khay’). 1. soul, inner being or life 2. (literally) breath

In the Old Testament, where the word ‘nephesh’ occurs 745 times, the translators of the King James Version have rendered it by at least 30 different words or phrases. So the difference between the Hebrew ‘nephesh’ of the Old Testament and the Greek ‘psuche’ of the New Testament is easily recognizable.

Something else we need to remember is that we’re not to suppose that man was a ‘dead soul’, until God breathed into him ‘the breath of lives.’ The word ‘life’ is plural in the Hebrew text. In other words, there was nothing before; it was the entrance of ‘the breath of lives’ which actually constituted him ‘Man’.

Notice that the word ‘became’ is categorical. We should read the verse in this way; “God ‘breathed into his nostrils the breath of lives, and Man came into being – a living soul.’”

That phrase, ‘a living soul’, is adjectival and describes and defines man after God breathed life into the form which He had shaped. And it’s here we see the difference between man and the rest of Creation. Remembering that the Hebrew word ‘Adam’ means ‘man.’

‘Life’, like animal life, is something that Adam shared with every other living creature created by God. But the difference between the other creatures and man lies in the fact that God said ‘Let us make man after our own image, after our likeness.” **Genesis 1:26**

SELF CONSCIOUS

Only with reference to man is this said, and it is this ‘likeness to God’ which uniquely constituted man as a rational and moral being, possessing a conscience that enabled him to distinguish between good and evil, right and wrong, obedience and disobedience. It is in this sense that man is a soul, a self, having self-awareness and self-consciousness.

“God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the sky, and over the livestock, and overall the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” **Genesis 1:26**

This shows us that man is not only superior to all other living creatures on Earth because he possesses this moral awareness. This also shows us that the gulf between man and the rest of creation was further emphasized and endorsed when God assigned to him dominion over all other living creatures.

So how do these three different parts of man relate to each other? Does the body have a soul? Now that’s a great question and yes, we can answer and say yes the body has a soul but maybe we should say, it’s the soul which has a body.

Now I write that in light of what we’ve just looked at, the ‘soul’ is man’s unique self. It is the part of his being that, because it is rational and moral, determines the actions performed by his body, and which, therefore, renders him personally accountable for what he does.

And so, it is man’s ‘soul’ which will ultimately be either saved or lost, depending on his response to the offer of the salvation which was made first possible by the coming of Christ into the world.

So now let’s look at the body, as someone once said to me ‘The Body is of the earth and for the earth’.

EARTH CONSCIOUS

We might describe the body as ‘Earth-conscious’, since it is the physical tool or instrument, by means of which a person’s ‘soul’ or ‘self’ by its very nature is invisible and is able to function in a physical world.

If we think about Jesus Himself when the Lord came into the world.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was fully God. The Word was with God in the beginning.” **John 1:1-2**

“And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us.” **John 1:14**. Although the Son existed ‘in the beginning with God’, it was necessary that ‘the Word’ should ‘become flesh’ and ‘dwelt’ or ‘tabernacled’ among us.

The Lord needed a physical body and as Paul tells us in **Philippians 2:6-8** that Jesus “Though he existed in the form of God did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking on the form of a slave, by looking like other men, and by sharing in human nature. He humbled himself, by becoming obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross!”

Paul says without the human form that He took on Himself, it would have been impossible for Him to fulfil the unique purpose for which He came. He needed a body why?

1. To be able to communicate with mankind in a personal and unmistakable and uncomplicated manner.
2. To present the ‘signs’ which were to be the authentication and endorsement of His Messiah-ship.
3. To set the human race the perfect example of obedience to the will of the Father.

4. And above all, by means of that perfect life, to demonstrate His worthiness to become the perfect offering for the sin of the world.

And so The Word must become flesh. This was the divine plan, and it is why we find the writer of the letter to the Hebrews, in 10:5 placing the words of the Psalmist from **Psalm 40:6-8** into the Lord's mouth.

"Therefore when he comes into the world, he says, "Sacrifice and offering you didn't desire, but you prepared a body for me; You had no pleasure in whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin. Then I said, 'Behold, I have come (in the scroll of the book it is written of me) to do your will, O God.'" **Hebrews 10:5**. Notice that the 'body' was prepared for 'me.'

Peter, also talks about the body in **2 Peter 1:14**, and he describes it as "putting off my tent." In other words, man is more than just a bunch of chemicals. Man is not merely an animated construction of flesh and bones; he is a soul, a 'self.' Man is housed in a physical body; and since his body is designed for earthly life, at death, the body returns to the earth.

God told Adam in **Genesis 3:19** "In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to the dust you shall return."

We've briefly looked at the soul and the body now let's briefly look at the spirit of man.

GOD-CONSCIOUS

"But there is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty gives them understanding". **Job 32:8**. If we consider the body to be Earth-conscious, and the soul to be Self-conscious, we may think of the spirit as being God-conscious. In other words, it is that part of man's nature that enables him to reach out to, and communicate with God. It is the spiritual dimension in man's character, and, here again; we see the difference between man and other creatures. Its only man says who can say, "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God". **Psalm 42:2**. It's only man who is encouraged to "seek after Him, in the hope that they might feel after Him and find Him" **Acts 17:27**. It's only man who is given the assurance that "He is not far from each one of us, for in Him we live and move and have our being". **Acts 17:27**

And like we saw earlier according to **Ecclesiastes 12:7**, at death, "the spirit returns to God Who gave it". Someone recently shared with me an illustration to help me get to this point and I would like to share it with you because I think it's helpful. When I am away from home, I use the telephone as a means of communication with my wife. But when I am at home we talk face to face and so I do not need the telephone.

Well in a similar way, God has endowed us with the ability to contact and communicate with Him, whilst we are here on earth. And so when we are 'at home with the Lord' we will no longer need the telephone.

And so our God of peace wants to sanctify us completely in order to keep us blameless, **1 Thessalonians 3:13** when Jesus returns. Blameless means without fault **Jude 24**, this doesn't mean we are sinless because we are sinners but if we remain faithful, **Colossians 1:23**, and confess our sins to Him, we will be blameless in His sight. In other words, we need to do what God asks of us when we sin **1 John 1:8-9** to remain right with Him.

Notice that the writer reminds the saints in Thessalonica that God is faithful and can be counted on to help us answer this prayer but we must cooperate with God. **Philippians 2:12-16**.

"Brothers and sisters, pray for us. Greet all God's people with a holy kiss. I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers and sisters. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you." **1 Thessalonians 5:25-28**

It's good to know that even the great men of God ask for prayers, if these men requested the prayers of others, then we too today shouldn't be afraid to ask people to pray for us. **Philippians 4:6 / 1 Timothy 2:1ff**. As a body of believers, we should always be praying for each other, we should be praying that the Gospel can be spread easily without any hindrance, **2 Thessalonians 3:1 / Colossians 4:3**, we should pray when we sin, **1 John 5:16-17**, when we are serving the Lord, **2 Thessalonians 3:1** and when we are sick, **James 5:14-16**.

Now think about this for a moment, if the prayer of one righteous man avails much, how much more do the prayers of many righteous? The point is if the apostles didn't hesitate to ask for prayers because they believed in the power of prayer, then we too should have the same attitude and belief.

The writer asks for prayers and then goes on to ask the recipients to greet all the saints with a holy kiss. The apostle Paul often mentions this in his letters, **Romans 16:16 / 1 Corinthians 16:20 / 2 Corinthians 13:12**. Greeting one another with a kiss was a common practice in those days and many eastern countries even today.

Justin Martyr wrote this about the kiss. "The custom hence arose in the early Church of passing the kiss through the congregation at the holy communion (Justin Martyr, *Apology*, 1.65; *Apostolic Constitutions*, 2.57),

The men kissing the men, and the women, in the Lord. The emphasis appears to be greeting each other in love, and holiness.

The writer continues by charging them to make sure this letter to read by all the saints in Thessalonica. The Greek word of charge is ὀρκίζω 'horkizo' and it carries with it the idea of being a command as you would find in the military when a high-ranking officer gives a lower-ranking officer a command which needs to be carried out. But as the writer uses the term, 'by the Lord' he is simply magnifying the command, **2 Timothy 4:1-2**.

But the point is that everyone was to hear what the writer had to say. **Colossians 4:16**. Just as a side note, we are reminded of the importance of reading the Scriptures for ourselves, all too often we neglect to study the Scriptures because we underestimate the importance of them in our lives.

Paul ends his letter with a simple prayer, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen." The word grace derives from the Greek, χάρις 'charis' and is closely related to the Greek word 'chairō' which simply means to rejoice. In the New Testament, the word grace appears 156 times and takes on a special redemptive sense in which God makes available his favour on behalf of sinners, who actually do not deserve it.

Now remember that grace cannot be merited, not even by doing good deeds, we need to remind ourselves that no one deserves salvation. **Ephesians 2:8-9**. Jesus, Himself told us that our sins have put us in major debt and no one can pay it off. **Matthew 18:24-27**.

Don't we all need the grace of God? Especially as we live our lives in expectation of the Lord's return.