

## 1 Thessalonians

**1:1** Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy to the gathering of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus the Messiah—grace and shalom to you.<sup>1</sup>

**1:2** We always give thanks to God for all of you as we repeatedly make mention of you in our prayers,<sup>2</sup> **1:3** while remembering your work of belief, your labor of love, and your perseverance of hope in our Lord Jesus the Messiah in the presence of our God and Father.<sup>3</sup>

**1:4** We appreciate, brothers, who are loved by God, His choice of you,<sup>4</sup> **1:5** because our good news did not come to you by spoken word only but also by power, by the Holy Spirit, and with complete certainty,<sup>5</sup> just as you appreciate what kind of people we were among you for your sake.<sup>6</sup> **1:6** Indeed, you became imitators of us and of the Lord when you embraced the message with the joy of the Holy Spirit in the midst of great difficulty.<sup>7</sup>

**1:7** The result has been that you have become an example to all believers in Macedonia and Achaia,<sup>8</sup> **1:8** because, from you the message about the Lord has sounded forth. Not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place, your belief, which is directed towards God, has gone out, so that we have no need to say anything,<sup>9</sup> **1:9** because they themselves report about us what kind of entrance into you as a group we experienced and how you turned to God from idols to serve as slaves the living and true God,<sup>10</sup> **1:10** and to wait for His Son from the heavens, whom He raised from among the dead, Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.<sup>11</sup> **2:1** By inference, you yourselves appreciate, brothers, that our entrance into you as a group has not been in vain.<sup>12</sup>

**2:2** Yet, as you also must appreciate, after suffering beforehand and being scoffed at among the Philippians, we had the courage in our God to speak to you the good news of God in the midst of a great conflict.<sup>13</sup> **2:3** For our persuasion is from neither error, nor immorality, nor with deceit.<sup>14</sup> **2:4** But just as we have been attested by God to be entrusted with the good news, so also we speak, not as pleasing men but God who assesses the genuineness of our hearts.<sup>15</sup> **2:5** Indeed, we came neither with a flattering message, just as you have appreciated, nor with a false motive of boundaryless evil (God is our witness).<sup>16</sup> **2:6** Nor were we seeking the glory of men, whether from you or from others,<sup>17</sup> **2:7** even though we could throw our weight around as apostles of the Messiah. Instead, we were gentle among you as a nursing mother takes care of her own children.<sup>18</sup>

**2:8** Thus, having so fond an affection for you, we were pleased to impart to you not only the good news of God, but also our own lives, because you became dearly loved by us.<sup>19</sup> **2:9** Remember, brothers, our labor and hardship. As we worked night and day in order not to be a financial burden to any of you, we proclaimed the good news of God to you.<sup>20</sup> **2:10** You and God are witnesses how, in a manner pleasing to God, uprightly and acceptably, we behaved towards you who believe.<sup>21</sup> **2:11** Just as you have appreciated, towards each one of you like a father towards his own children,<sup>22</sup> **2:12** we were encouraging, comforting, and imploring you to live worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.<sup>23</sup>

**2:13** Consequently, we are, indeed, repeatedly thanking God that, when you received the message of God that you heard from us, you embraced it, not as the message of men, but just as it is—truly the message of God, who also is working in you who believe.<sup>24</sup> **2:14** You, brothers, became imitators of the gatherings of God which are in Judea in the

Messiah Jesus, because you, indeed, suffered the same kinds of things at the hands of your own countrymen as they also did at the hands of the Jews,<sup>25</sup> **2:15** who, in fact, killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, persecuted us, are not pleasing to God, but stand opposed to all men,<sup>26</sup> **2:16** because they hinder us from speaking to the Gentiles in order that they may be saved. The result is that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath is coming upon them at the end (εἰς τέλος).<sup>27</sup>

**2:17** But we, brothers, having been separated from you for a short while (physically, but not in heart), even more so have done our best with great passion to see your face,<sup>28</sup>

**2:18** because we wanted to come to you, I, Paul, more than once, and yet Satan hindered us.<sup>29</sup> **2:19** Who is our hope or joy or crown of bragging? Is it not indeed you in the presence of our Lord Jesus at his grand appearance?<sup>30</sup> **2:20** You are our glory and joy.<sup>31</sup>

**3:1** Therefore, when we could endure it no longer, we were pleased to be left alone in Athens,<sup>32</sup> **3:2** and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker with respect to the good news of the Messiah, so that he could strengthen and encourage you as to your belief.<sup>33</sup> **3:3** Our purpose was so that no one would be shaken in the midst of these tribulations, because you yourselves know that we were destined for this.<sup>34</sup> **3:4** Indeed, when we were with you, we were telling you in advance that we were about to suffer affliction, just as both it happened and you know.<sup>35</sup> **3:5** Therefore, when I could indeed endure it no more, I sent to find out about your belief, lest somehow the tempter had tempted you, and our labor had been in vain.<sup>36</sup>

**3:6** However, now that Timothy has come to us from you and proclaimed the good news to us of your belief and love, and that you always have fond memories of us and greatly desire to see us just as we also greatly desire to see you,<sup>37</sup> **3:7** on account of this we have been encouraged, brothers, about you in all our distress and affliction, because of your belief,<sup>38</sup> **3:8** because now we live if you are standing firm in the Lord.<sup>39</sup> **3:9** What thanks concerning you can we pay back to God in return for all the joy with which we rejoice on account of you in the presence of our God,<sup>40</sup> **3:10** as we night and day keep asking more than ever to see your face and to complete what is lacking in your belief?<sup>41</sup>

**3:11** And now may God Himself, indeed our Father, and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you,<sup>42</sup> **3:12** and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another and for all Christians, just as we also do for you,<sup>43</sup> **3:13** in order that He may establish your hearts as being acceptable in a state of being set apart in the presence of our God and Father at the grand appearance of our Lord Jesus along with all His set-apart ones.<sup>44</sup>

**4:1** Finally then, brothers, we ask and encourage you because of the Lord Jesus, that just as you received from us how you must live and please God, just as indeed you are living, that you abound in this regard.<sup>45</sup> **4:2** You know what commandment we gave to you in view of the Lord Jesus.<sup>46</sup> **4:3** Indeed, this is the will of God, your being different—keeping away from sexual immorality,<sup>47</sup> **4:4** with each one of you knowing how to control his own vessel with holiness and honor,<sup>48</sup> **4:5** not with emotionally charged passion like the Gentiles, who do not know God,<sup>49</sup> **4:6** so as not to cross the line morally and take unfair advantage of his brother in the matter. This is important because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we told you before and solemnly warned you.<sup>50</sup> **4:7** God has not called us to immorality but to holiness.<sup>51</sup> **4:8** Therefore, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but God, who also gives His Holy Spirit to you.<sup>52</sup>

**4:9** Concerning the love of the brothers, you have no need for us to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another.<sup>53</sup> **4:10** Indeed, you do practice it towards all the brothers in the whole of Macedonia, and we encourage you, brothers, to abound in this regard.<sup>54</sup> **4:11** Make it your goal to live peaceably, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your own hands, just as we commanded you,<sup>55</sup> **4:12** so that you behave decently towards outsiders and not have any need.<sup>56</sup>

**4:13** On another subject, we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, concerning those who are dead, so that you do not grieve as do, indeed, the rest who have no hope.<sup>57</sup> **4:14** Because we believe that Jesus died and rose from the dead, it is just as certain that God also will bring with him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus.<sup>58</sup>

**4:15** This we say to you by means of the message of the Lord, that we who are alive, who remain until the grand appearance of the Lord, will definitely not precede those who have fallen asleep,<sup>59</sup> **4:16** because the Lord himself, when the command is given by means of the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God, will come down from heaven, and the dead in the Messiah will themselves rise up first.<sup>60</sup> **4:17** Then we, who are alive and who remain, will be snatched away together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord.<sup>61</sup> **4:18** Therefore, encourage one another with these words.<sup>62</sup>

**5:1** Concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you do not need for us to write to you,<sup>63</sup> **5:2** because you yourselves correctly know that the Day of the Lord is coming like a thief in the night.<sup>64</sup> **5:3** While they are saying, "Shalom and safety," sudden destruction will overtake them like birth-pains in the womb, and they will not escape.<sup>65</sup>

**5:4** But you, brothers, are not in darkness that the day would overtake you like a thief,<sup>66</sup> **5:5** because all of you are sons of light and sons of day. We are not of the night nor of the darkness.<sup>67</sup> **5:6** Therefore, let us not sleep like the rest, but let us be alert and sober.<sup>68</sup> **5:7** Those who sleep sleep at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night.<sup>69</sup> **5:8** But since we are of the day, let us be sober, putting on the breastplate of belief and love and the helmet of the hope of salvation,<sup>70</sup> **5:9** because God has not destined us for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus the Messiah,<sup>71</sup> **5:10** who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.<sup>72</sup> **5:11** Therefore, encourage one another and build one another towards the one, just as indeed you are doing.<sup>73</sup>

**5:12** And we ask you, brothers, to appreciate those who labor among you, who lead you with care in the Lord, and who admonish you.<sup>74</sup> **5:13** You should esteem them with love beyond all measure because of their work.

Be at peace among yourselves.<sup>75</sup> **5:14** Thus, we encourage you, brothers, admonish the disorderly, console the discouraged, help the weak, and be patient with all.<sup>76</sup>

**5:15** See that no one pays back evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good for one another and for all.<sup>77</sup>

**5:16** Rejoice always.<sup>78</sup> **5:17** Pray repeatedly.<sup>79</sup> **5:18** Be thankful in every situation, for this is the will of God for you in the Messiah Jesus.<sup>80</sup>

5:19 Do not cause the Spirit to stop functioning.<sup>81</sup> 5:20 Do not treat prophetic comments as worthless,<sup>82</sup> 5:21 but assess the genuineness of all things. Hold on to what is good.<sup>83</sup> 5:22 Refuse to become involved in any kind of evil.<sup>84</sup>

5:23 May the God of shalom Himself set you apart all the way to the end (ὀλοτελείς), and may your spirit be sound while your existence and body be kept acceptable at the grand appearance of our Lord Jesus the Messiah.<sup>85</sup> 5:24 Faithful is He who calls you, who will also do this.<sup>86</sup>

5:25 Brothers, pray for us.<sup>87</sup> 5:26 Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss.<sup>88</sup> 5:27 I put you under oath to the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.<sup>89</sup>

5:28 The grace of our Lord Jesus the Messiah be with you.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Παῦλος καὶ Σιλουανὸς καὶ Τιμόθεος τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ Θεσσαλονικέων ἐν θεῷ πατρὶ Ἕ καὶ κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ, χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη – This is Paul’s second letter (Galatians having been the first a few years earlier), written from Corinth during his 2<sup>nd</sup> trip west from Antioch, which had taken him through some of the cities in what is now Turkey and then through upper Greece (Macedonia), including the cities of Philippi and Thessalonica. The date is around A.D. 52.

Timothy was from Derbe/Lystra in Turkey and has been with Paul since he visited these cities at the beginning of this second trip (around A.D. 50). Timothy will go on to be one of Paul’s most faithful companions and strongest believers in Jesus as the Messiah.

Silvanus was one of the believers chosen by the apostles to accompany Paul and Barnabas back to Antioch after they had come to Jerusalem to discuss the issue of circumcision with respect to the Gentiles (Acts 15 around A.D. 49). His Aramaic name is Silas, and he very well may be Peter’s scribe of his first letter (cf. 1 Peter 5:12).

Thus Paul is writing to the Christian community who are “in God,” i.e., in the context where God operates by changing people’s hearts and causing them to believe and persevere in their belief for the sake of acquiring His eternal mercy and life.

<sup>2</sup> Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ πάντοτε περὶ πάντων ὑμῶν μνηΐαν Ἕ ποιούμενοι ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν ἡμῶν, ἀδιαλείπτως – As repeatedly as Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy pray, they are always concerned for all those who became believers through their telling them about Jesus as the Messiah. Thus, they always ask God to cause them to persevere in their belief to the end of their lives. They are also grateful, probably more than we can imagine, for the fact that these Thessalonian Christians are still believing in the midst of the intense persecution that started around a year ago when they were there and is continuing now. We will see that Timothy has reported that their belief is still genuine and strong (cf. 3:1ff.).

<sup>3</sup> μνημονεύοντες ὑμῶν τοῦ ἔργου τῆς πίστεως καὶ τοῦ κόπου τῆς ἀγάπης καὶ τῆς ὑπομονῆς τῆς ἐλπίδος τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν – After Thessalonica, Paul had gone with Silvanus and Timothy to Berea, but then he had to leave there and escape to Athens, because the unbelieving Jews from Thessalonica sought to put him to death. Silvanus and Timothy had stayed behind in Berea and then joined Paul after he had moved on to Corinth, probably reporting to him how the Christians were faring in Thessalonica and the rest of Macedonia. Paul is encouraged by the news that they bring him and can say that they truly have continued believing, while loving one another and placing their future hope in the promise of God of eternal life in the Kingdom of God through Jesus the Messiah. Therefore, it makes sense to Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy to continue remembering the Thessalonians’ response to their presenting the biblical message to them, because their response now is just as genuine as it was back when they first heard the message.

Their “work of belief” refers to the effort that they originally put into listening to these three apostolic workers as they spoke about the Jewish Messiah, Jesus, and then the effort that they put in from a human existential standpoint to changing what they believed to be true about the nature of reality. No longer did they believe the false ideas about the Greek pagan gods, but now they believed that the ideas about the transcendent Creator and His envoy and proxy, Jesus of Nazareth, was the only and correct way to think about reality. Obviously, they are continuing to work at believing in the midst of their persecution and the temptation to abandon the biblical ideas in order to stop the persecution.

Their “labor of love” refers to the great effort that they were putting into caring for each other as fellow believers in the Messiah, even while experiencing intense persecution because of it.

Their “perseverance of hope of our Lord Jesus the Messiah in the presence of our God and Father” refers to their looking forward with great expectation to Jesus’ return and ultimately advocating on their behalf before God when He fulfills His promise to Abraham to “bless” with eternal mercy and life him and those associated with him who have the same kind of genuine belief. Cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 3:13. Another option is that Paul remembers “in the presence of God our Father” the spiritual condition of the Thessalonians as he prays. But the syntax and purpose of Jesus by God for sinners lends itself to the first option.

<sup>4</sup> εἰδότες, ἀδελφοὶ ἡγαπημένοι ὑπὸ ὁ[του] θεοῦ, τὴν ἐκλογὴν ὑμῶν – The three men have become convinced that the Thessalonians are authentic believers, i.e., that God, while He was formulating the story of the cosmos before He began creating it, as mentioned in Genesis 1, chose to create them such that at some point in their own personal histories, they would become Christians and follow the Jewish Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. This also means that God loves and cares for them by ensuring that they remain believers and obtain His promise of eternal life.

Thus, the word εἰδότες, the plural active participle m. pl. nom. of οἶδα which typically means simply to know something, here means more to appreciate and value something. Paul and his companions appreciate what God has done by choosing these Thessalonians for His eternal kingdom. This meaning is in line with how Paul uses οἶδα in 5:12. And we ask you, brothers, to appreciate (εἰδέναι) those who labor among you, who lead you with care in the Lord, and who admonish you. As a result, Paul is implying and encouraging mutual appreciation between his readers and him as he will go on to point out in the next verse, 1:5—that is all of God’s doing!

<sup>5</sup> ὅτι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ἡμῶν οὐκ ἐγενήθη ἕως ὑμᾶς ἐν λόγῳ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν δυνάμει καὶ ἐν πνεύματι ἀγίῳ καὶ ὁ[έν] πληροφορία πολλῇ – These men got to see God fully engage the Thessalonians in their presentation of the biblical message by virtue of outward evidence that made this clear. This means that God powerfully changed their inwardness and made the truth acceptable to them, so that they no longer rebelled against it (cf. Romans 1). And, more than likely, the outward evidence that convinced Paul that these Thessalonians were in the process of embracing the truth of the

biblical message was their speaking in tongues along with the three things that they just mentioned, their belief, love, and hope. In addition, the Thessalonian believers exhibited a committed settledness in regard to the truth of this message and the value of embracing it, as they now go on to explain further.

<sup>6</sup> καθὼς οἴδατε οἰοί ἐγενήθημεν ὅ[ἐν] ὑμῖν δι' ὑμᾶς – As in 1:4 and 5:12, the word οἴδατε from οἶδα = know, includes the connotation of value and appreciate.

Paul is saying that, just as he appreciates the genuineness of the Thessalonians in their Christian faith, it is just like their appreciating the work and the manner of doing work of these three men who came to them from Philippi to proclaim to them the good news and salvation through the Jewish Messiah, Jesus. Here is the mutual appreciation between Paul and these new Christians in Thessalonica.

Paul and his apostolic co-workers encountered a lot of opposition to their message in Thessalonica. Cf. Acts 17:6,7 – “When [the hostile and unbelieving Jews] did not find them, they began dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, ‘These men who have upset the world have come here also; and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.’” Therefore, the new believers in this city had the opportunity to observe them as they faced into this opposition and to learn how to do the same thing.

Thus, Paul acted with great love towards the Thessalonians for the sake of their obtaining salvation through hearing the message of the gospel amidst being persecuted for being Christians and the threat of losing their own lives.

<sup>7</sup> Καὶ ὑμεῖς μιμηταὶ ἡμῶν ἐγενήθητε καὶ τοῦ κυρίου, δεξάμενοι τὸν λόγον ἐν θλίψει πολλῇ μετὰ χαρᾶς ἡ πνεύματος ἁγίου – Two options – 1) joy that is the result of a set-apart inner spirit; 2) joy that comes from the inner work of the Spirit of God when He provides a sinner with the full realization of the promise of God through Jesus.

#2 seems more profound and in line with what Paul is confident in thanking God. The great stress that the Thessalonians experienced was the same that Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy experienced, i.e., hostile opposition to the biblical message from unbelieving Jews in the city. They, like these apostolic workers, had to choose whether or not it was worth it to continue to embrace this message. Their choice was to do so, thus demonstrating to the three men that God truly was at work within them according to His choice of them. The result was their rejoicing in God's promise of mercy and eternal life. The implication of what Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy are saying is that God through His Spirit is the only one who can cause people to persevere in their belief and to rejoice in the midst of suffering for their faith. Morally depraved human beings, even inwardly changed human beings, do not have the independent ability to do so. We will naturally bail on God if He does not powerfully cause us to persevere in our faith.

<sup>8</sup> ὥστε γενέσθαι ὑμᾶς ἑτύπον πᾶσιν τοῖς πιστεύουσιν ἐν τῇ Μακεδονίᾳ καὶ ἐν τῇ Ἀχαΐᾳ – These men also know that the courage and belief of the Thessalonians, in the face of great opposition to their belief, became an encouragement to other believers in their area of northern Greece as well as in southern Greece, where they were now. How did their reputation spread? Probably as traveling Christians came in contact with them.

<sup>9</sup> ἀφ' ὑμῶν γὰρ ἐξήχηται ὁ λόγος τοῦ κυρίου οὐ μόνον ἐν τῇ Μακεδονίᾳ καὶ ἐν τῇ Ἀχαΐᾳ, ἀλλ' ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ ἢ πίστις ὑμῶν ἢ πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ἐξελέλυθεν, ὥστε μὴ χρεῖαν ἔχειν ἡμᾶς λαλεῖν τι – The courage and belief of the Thessalonian Christians has become a kind of proclamation of the message of Jesus as the Messiah to people even beyond Greece, with the result that Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy do not have to say anything about this message. It's as though they begin to tell people about Jesus as the Messiah, and the people say, “Oh yes, we already know, because we have heard [from traveling salesmen who are Christians] of the belief of the Thessalonian Christians.”

Paul's wording here, ἢ πίστις ὑμῶν ἢ πρὸς τὸν θεόν, is unusual. Only in Philemon 5 does he use the it – ἀκούων σου τὴν ἀγάπην καὶ τὴν πίστιν<sup>3</sup>, ἣν ἔχεις πρὸς τὸν κύριον Ἰησοῦν<sup>4</sup> καὶ εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἁγίους. While the basic meaning is probably belief in God, the additional notion is towards, that the Thessalonians are directing their belief towards God in that they are embracing as true everything that He has “said” to them through Paul and his proclaiming the gospel.

<sup>10</sup> αὐτοὶ γὰρ περὶ ἡμῶν ἀπαγγέλλουσιν ὅποιαν εἴσοδον ἔσχομεν πρὸς ὑμᾶς, καὶ πῶς ἐπεστρέψατε πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ἀπὸ τῶν εἰδώλων δουλεύειν θεῷ ζῶντι καὶ ἀληθινῷ – In fact, the news of the Thessalonian believers includes the important concept that it is necessary to abandon previous pagan beliefs and practices in order follow the one true God exclusively. And it is clear that the Thessalonians understand this because of the kind of reception that Paul and his companions received from them. They were wholeheartedly welcomed by them with open arms, which in a pagan society and in the midst of the Jewish persecution would have rather startling and yet revealing of the fact that God was truly at work within these people. It is a miracle anytime sinners embrace the truth of the gospel and those who present it to them!

<sup>11</sup> καὶ ἀναμένειν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν, ὃν ἤγειρεν ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν, Ἰησοῦν τὸν ῥυόμενον ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῆς ὀργῆς τῆς ἐρχομένης – This is the first time in the letter that the 1<sup>st</sup> person plural refers to the three men and the Thessalonian Christians—and certainly by extrapolation all believers in Jesus as their Messiah.

The news of the Thessalonian Christians also includes the important information about Jesus as high priest, that it is he who intervenes between God and morally depraved human beings when he returns to earth by either raising them from the dead of rapturing them (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:13ff.), thus enabling them to escape God's anger and eternal condemnation at the end of the millennial kingdom when God destroys all unbelievers and even death itself. Thus, Christians need to persevere in their belief and wait for Jesus' return, while pursuing moral obedience to God that includes repentance.

<sup>12</sup> Αὐτοὶ γὰρ οἴδατε, ἀδελφοί, τὴν εἴσοδον ἡμῶν τὴν πρὸς ὑμᾶς ὅτι οὐ κενὴ γέγονεν – There are at least two options for what Paul means by κενή – 1) That, based upon God's sovereignty, there is always the possibility that people will reject his message of Jesus as the Messiah, in which case they would consider their efforts to proclaim this message to

be “in vain,” i.e., for nothing, eternally speaking. This would be similar to 1 Thessalonians 3:5 and Paul’s use of the phrase εἰς κενόν. 2) That Paul’s coming into contact with these Thessalonian Christians was neither with information that was baseless in reality nor with motives for financial gain, i.e., trying to sell them something that was especially eternally useless.

By putting this sentence at the end of the paragraph of 1:7-2:1, I think that Paul is encouraging his readers to grab hold of just how significant it is that they have become Christians and continue to be such in the face of so much opposition there in Thessalonica. This is a profound thing, that these former pagan idolators and sinners have now become bona fide followers of the Jewish Messiah. It is practically unbelievable and can only have come about because it is what God has chosen to happen for them and has produced it through the overall work of His Spirit while also using Paul and his companions as human instruments of His love, grace, and mercy.

<sup>13</sup> ἀλλὰ προπαθόντες καὶ ὕβρισθέντες, καθὼς οἴδατε, ἐν Φιλίπποις ἐπαρρησιασάμεθα ἐν τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν λαλήσαι πρὸς ὑμᾶς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν πολλῷ ἄγῳ – Now, Paul begins a series of statements to defend and demonstrate what Timothy, Silvanus, and he brought to the table that resulted in these Thessalonians’ becoming Christians.

And again, the word οἴδατε from οἶδα has more the connotation of value and appreciate because of what these people truly know about Paul and the other two men with him.

Paul’s first statement of defense that he is all about eternal truth and divine morality is that he and his companions proclaimed the gospel to these Thessalonians even after being so harshly treated in Philippi. They did not let persecution from keeping them from continuing their responsibility of making this message available to others in the same kind of situation, i.e., extreme persecution.

Acts 16:11-40 tells the story of the troubles Paul and his companions bumped into in Philippi, including his imprisonment with Silvanus and yet success in seeing people believe in Jesus as the Messiah. In spite of their rather unpleasant experience in Philippi, Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy remembered that God had commissioned Paul to be the apostle to the Gentiles. Therefore, they all felt compelled to continue proclaiming the biblical message in Thessalonica, even when they encountered the same kind of hostility to it there. While, in Philippi, the antipathy came from Gentile pagans, in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-15), the source was religious and unbelieving Jews. But Paul’s position “in God,” in the grips of the sovereign God who has assigned him the responsibility to be the apostle to the Gentiles, gave him the courage to continue to proclaim this controversial message.

<sup>14</sup> ἢ γὰρ παράκλησις ἡμῶν οὐκ ἐκ πλάνης οὐδὲ ἐξ ἀκαθαρσίας ἴσχυρὸν ἐν δόλῳ – Paul’s second statement of defense is simply a statement to the effect that whatever he was seeking to persuade the Thessalonians to believe, it contains nothing that is false or immoral. Nor did they seek to gain some personal advantage by faking some of the information. Implicitly, Paul is accusing all presenters of any other worldview, as though it is worthwhile to embrace and should become the basis for all decision making, of all of these characteristics. They are in error. They are immoral and rebellious against God. And they are trying to pull the wool over people’s eyes, because every human being fundamentally knows the truth about the transcendent Creator (cf. Romans 1). And they are trying to gain some personal advantage through their lies—self-aggrandizement at the expense of other people’s being deceived. They are scammers using a dishonest scheme to get money, power, and prestige.

Therefore, Paul and his companions are declaring that they state only the truth, and that, by implication, there is only one truth—God’s that is found in the Bible.

<sup>15</sup> ἀλλὰ καθὼς δεδοκιμάσαμεθα ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ πιστευθῆναι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, οὕτως λαλοῦμεν, οὐχ ὡς ἀνθρώποις ἀρέσκοντες ἀλλὰ ὅτι θεῷ τῷ δοκιμάζοντι τὰς καρδίας ἡμῶν – Paul’s third statement of defense is that God gave him the message he is proclaiming, and he is always mindful of this by having his goal be to please God and not himself as he carries out this responsibility.

Paul and his companions are saying that God has placed them in enough difficult circumstances where they could have said, “Enough! We are not going to do this anymore!” and yet, they continued to commit themselves to Paul’s responsibility to make public the apostolic message of Jesus as the Messiah, that by now the result is that God has provided clear evidence to the effect that they are genuine believers and Paul is an apostle. The logical inference from all this clear evidence of Paul and his companions through suffering is that they are motivated by a desire to please God and not people. If they were more concerned about the latter, they would have avoided the apostolic message and the hostility that it causes for themselves in order to keep people on good terms and friendly with them.

<sup>16</sup> Οὐτε γὰρ ποτε ἐν λόγῳ κολακείας ἐγενήθημεν, καθὼς οἴδατε, οὔτε ἑν προφάσει πλεονεξίας, θεὸς μάρτυς – Paul’s fourth statement of defense is that the gospel does not flatter people as to how good they are. It does the exact opposite and first condemns them as sinners before revealing that God is gracious and merciful and will save them from His condemnation.

Paul and the other two men are implying that all other worldviews in some way flatter people so as to be attractive to them. For example, paganism, “Yes, you can please the gods through your religious efforts simply by performing these ceremonies.” Or Judaism, “Yes, you can please God through your religious obedience to the Mosaic Covenant.” Thus all other worldviews basically commend people for their moral and religious potential, in and of themselves, to do what is good and right before the gods or God. Christianity is not so magnanimous.

Paul also mentions greed as a possible motivation, which they have avoided. Perhaps they are referring to Sophists, who were still plying people with their “wisdom” 400 years after Socrates and Plato, claiming that they could educate the youth, so that they could become good human beings—for a fee! Apostolic wisdom was free, even though Paul argues in 1 Corinthians 9 that the value of the commodity that he is offering is so great that there is no problem with people feeling a moral obligation to support him financially. Yet, he never expects or demands to be supported and

remunerated for his “work.” In fact, to demand payment for it in an authoritarian manner would be to deny the gracious nature of the message.

<sup>17</sup> οὔτε ζητοῦντες ἐξ ἀνθρώπων δόξαν οὔτε ἀπ’ ὑμῶν οὔτε ἀπ’ ἄλλων – Paul’s fifth statement of defense is that he can honestly say that his proclamation of the gospel was never for the purpose of getting applause from his listeners. Impressing other people is not his goal. By inference, only pleasing God is.

It is pretty heady stuff to be commissioned by God through the King of the cosmos, the Jewish Messiah, to function as an authorized and inerrant spokesman on behalf of the Messiah. Paul could very easily have become so proud of himself that he would expect and demand that people practically worship him—or certainly pay him for his invaluable work. But he and his companions did not even come close to doing this.

<sup>18</sup> δυνάμενοι ἐν βάρει εἶναι ὡς Χριστοῦ ἀπόστολοι. ἀλλὰ ἐγενήθημεν ἡγήτοιοι ἐν μέσῳ ὑμῶν, ὡς ἐάν τροφὸς θάλπη τὰ ἑαυτῆς τέκνα – Paul’s sixth statement of defense is that, if anyone might seem to have the right to declare publicly his credentials so that people would be so impressed that they would grant him the respect that he actually deserves, it is he as an authoritative spokesman for the most important person in human history, the Messiah.

And his seventh statement of defense is how gently and carefully he treated the Thessalonians. He was like a nursing mother towards them.

Their position as apostolic workers of God’s Messiah to the Gentiles made them the most important persons in the Roman Empire, even more important than the apostles in Jerusalem, because their responsibility was to go out into the empire and convey the biblical message, thereby providing themselves with the opportunity to become much more well known than the Jerusalem apostles could be. However, Paul and his companions never saw themselves this way. They were always simply a humble and meek conduit of God for this message.

In addition, they were always subservient to the people to whom they spoke and who responded positively to the news of Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. In fact, Paul and his companions treated the Thessalonian Christians as though they were like newborn infants and they were their mother, who was responsible for providing them with sustenance in order to keep them alive. Indeed, their eternal lives depended upon their ingesting and digesting the food of the biblical message.

<sup>19</sup> οὕτως ὁμιροῦμενοι ὑμῶν εὐδοκοῦμεν μεταδοῦναι ὑμῖν οὐ μόνον τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰς ἑαυτῶν ψυχάς, διότι ἀγαπητοὶ ἡμῖν ἐγενήθητε – Paul’s eighth statement of defense is that everything he did in Thessalonica was obviously for these new Christians’ well-being and not for himself, because he sincerely loved them. Paul’s affection for people who responded positively to his message of Jesus was always very strong. Obviously, this made it quite easy to convey the news of the Jewish Messiah to them, to the point that Paul committed his whole being and existence to their spiritual, emotional, and even physical well-being. It was thus that he loved even the Thessalonian Christians.

<sup>20</sup> Μνημονεῦτε γάρ, ἀδελφοί, τὸν κόπον ἡμῶν καὶ τὸν μόχθον νυκτὸς ἑκαὶ ἡμέρας ἐργαζόμενοι πρὸς τὸ μὴ ἐπιβαρῆσαι τίνα ὑμῶν ἐκηρύξαμεν εἰς ὑμᾶς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ – Paul’s ninth statement of defense is that he worked at his trade, whatever it might have been, so that he never needed anything monetary or material from the Thessalonians. He earned his own living and did not rely at all on donations and support from them. And his intent was so that he would not burden them with giving what they needed for themselves to him and his companions. Plus, he still found time to teach them the gospel and mature them in their understanding of it.

Their desire to be subservient to the Thessalonians led them to avoid completely having to be supported financially by them. Instead, they worked night and day at another trade (or trades) in order to do so. Yet, they still took time to educate the Thessalonians in the most important ideas available to human beings, the information about the one true God, the transcendent Creator, and His Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. Cf. 1 Corinthians 9 where Paul argues his freedom to receive compensation or not for his work as an apostle, while he chooses not to receive in certain instances because he does not want to be a financial burden to people or because he wants to make sure he does not miscommunicate the central idea of God’s grace.

<sup>21</sup> ὑμεῖς μάρτυρες καὶ ὁ θεός, ὡς ὁσίως καὶ δικαίως καὶ ἀμέμπτως ὑμῖν τοῖς πιστεύουσιν ἐγενήθημεν – Paul’s tenth statement of defense is that certainly both God and the Thessalonians would have to conclude that how much he and his companions behaved with the highest integrity.

Paul’s way of loving the Thessalonians by not being a financial responsibility to them was not only the right thing to do, but it was also a manner of existing that was pleasing to God.

<sup>22</sup> καθάπερ οἴδατε, ὡς ἓνα ἕκαστον ὑμῶν ὡς πατὴρ τέκνα ἑαυτοῦ – If Paul was like a nursing mother to her children in his relationship with the Thessalonians (cf. 2:7), he knew that it was also appropriate to compare this relationship with that of a father towards his children.

<sup>23</sup> παρακαλοῦντες ὁμᾶς καὶ παραμυθούμενοι καὶ μαρτυρούμενοι εἰς τὸ περιπατεῖν ὑμᾶς ἀξίως τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἡγαλῶντος ὑμᾶς εἰς τὴν ἑαυτοῦ βασιλείαν καὶ δόξαν – Paul’s eleventh statement of defense is that he took on the role of a father towards them and instructed, encouraged, comforted, and sought to persuade them in the best manner possible to be obedient to God who would eventually grant them a glorious and eternal existence in the future Kingdom of God.

Thus, Paul and his companions were constantly instructing and exhorting these Thessalonians to obey their ultimate Father, the one and only God, their Creator, by living in a manner that would result in their entering into the future eternal Kingdom of God, which would be the final demonstration of God’s greatness and goodness when He transformed them into morally perfect beings with an eternal existence.

<sup>24</sup> Καὶ διὰ τοῦτο καὶ ἡμεῖς εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ ἀδιαλείπτως, ὅτι παραλαβόντες λόγον ἀκοῆς παρ’ ἡμῶν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐδέξασθε οὐ λόγον ἀνθρώπων ἀλλὰ καθὼς ἔστιν ἀληθὴς λόγον θεοῦ, ὃς καὶ ἐνεργεῖται ἐν ὑμῖν τοῖς



πιστεύουσιν – Paul’s twelfth statement of defense is his gratitude for the Thessalonians’ demonstrating clearly and explicitly through their changed behavior that they recognized that the gospel which he was proclaiming came from the one, true God and had not been fabricated by human beings for selfish reasons.

Whenever Paul and the other two men get the opportunity to address God directly, all the evidence of how they treated the Thessalonians and the Thessalonians treated them leads them to conclude that they genuinely received and embraced the biblical message that they presented to them, so that they understood that this was truth and information from the one transcendent God and not false ideas made up by man, which is the case with the pagan idolatry out of which they came. Paul also reminds them that the reason why they had such a positive reception to the news of Jesus as the Messiah was because God is the one who is causing it by operating powerfully within them to change their inwardness.

<sup>25</sup> ὑμεῖς γὰρ μιμηταὶ ἐγενήθητε, ἀδελφοί, τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν τοῦ θεοῦ τῶν οὐσῶν ἐν τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, ὅτι τὰ αὐτὰ ἐπάθετε καὶ ὑμεῖς ὑπὸ τῶν ἰδίων συμφυλετῶν καθὼς καὶ αὐτοὶ ὑπὸ τῶν Ἰουδαίων – Paul’s thirteenth statement of defense is that the Thessalonians, who may be mostly Jews according in line with the story in Acts 17, are experiencing the same kind of persecution in their city that the Jewish Christians experienced back in Israel when the Christian movement began after Jesus’ ascension.

So far, the experiences of Jewish Christians in the area of Israel and of both Jewish and Gentile Christians outside Israel in other parts of the Roman Empire has been difficult in the light of the level of hostility that unbelievers are demonstrating towards them. Thus, the experiences of both believing Jews and believing Gentiles has been very similar.

<sup>26</sup> τῶν καὶ τὸν κύριον ἀποκτεινάντων Ἰησοῦν καὶ τοὺς ἑπτὰ προφήτας καὶ ἡμᾶς ἐκδιωξάντων καὶ θεῷ μὴ ἀρεσκόντων καὶ πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις ἐναντίων – Paul indicts the Jews in the area of Israel for putting to death their Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. These same Jews also have persecuted the apostles. Therefore, Paul and his fellow apostolic workers can say that God is not pleased with the Jews who did away with their Messiah and that they are actually opposed to mankind, too, because they do not want the truth expressed to them.

<sup>27</sup> κωλύοντων ἡμᾶς τοῖς ἔθνεσιν λαλήσαι ἵνα σωθῶσιν, εἰς τὸ ἀναπληρῶσαι αὐτῶν τὰς ἀμαρτίας πάντοτε.

Ἐφθάσεν δὲ ἐπ’ αὐτοὺς ἡ ὀργὴ ἑως τέλος – Paul’s fourteenth statement of defense is that the long-term effect of the Jewish unbelievers who try to suppress the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles is that God will express His anger and condemnation towards them (either when Jesus returns if they are still alive so that they are killed by God’s judgments as described in Revelation, or at the Great White Throne Judgment of Revelation 20, or both).

These same unbelieving Jews do all they can to prevent Paul and his companions from speaking to Gentiles about Jesus, whose information would result in their being rescued from God’s eternal condemnation if they embrace it. This hindering the spread of the news of Jesus in a sense fills up the bucket of judgment for these Jews and will result ultimately in God’s condemning them and destroying them, which will include the The Great and Terrible Day of the Lord on the Jews in the land of Israel as they experience the ruthlessness and antipathy of the Man of Lawlessness (cf. Daniel 2,7-12; Joel 2; Malachi 4; 2 Thessalonians 2) and death when Jesus returns. It will also include destruction after the millennial kingdom at the Great White Throne Judgment of Revelation 20 (cf. 2 Peter 3).

<sup>28</sup> Ἡμεῖς δὲ, ἀδελφοί, ἀπορφανισθέντες ἀφ’ ὑμῶν πρὸς καιρὸν ὥρας, προσώπῳ οὐ καρδία, περισσοτέρως ἐσπουδάσαμεν τὸ πρόσωπον ὑμῶν ἰδεῖν ἐν πολλῇ ἐπιθυμίᾳ – The spiritual environment in Thessalonica in Acts 17 was so hostile that Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy had to flee for their lives. They then continued to Athens and eventually Corinth, from where they are writing this letter. Paul, especially, has been, for a short while, physically separated from the Thessalonians, and he is doing all that he can to get back to see them—as he will say in 3:10, to complete what is lacking in their understanding of the gospel and encourage them in their faith.

<sup>29</sup> διότι ἠελησαμεν ἔλθειν πρὸς ὑμᾶς, ἐγὼ μὲν Παῦλος καὶ ἄπαξ καὶ δις, καὶ ἐνέκοψεν ἡμᾶς ὁ σατανᾶς – However, the opposition in Thessalonica is still so intense that Paul cannot yet return there, even though Timothy has (cf. 3:1ff.). Satan has found a numerous following in the city to the effect that people are rejecting God and the gospel which Paul is presenting them.

<sup>30</sup> τίς γὰρ ἡμῶν ἐλπὶς ἢ χαρὰ ἢ στέφανος ἑκαυτήσεως – ἢ οὐχὶ καὶ ὑμεῖς – ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ ἐν τῇ αὐτοῦ παρουσίᾳ – Paul’s appreciation for the Thessalonians’ belief is so great that he considers them to be a genuine reason for his bragging (so to speak) as the apostle to the Gentiles when Jesus returns (his *parousia* = grand appearance as the king of Israel) and all believers and unbelievers are revealed through the resurrection and ascension of the former, i.e., those already dead and those still alive respectively. It will be like winning a race and “earning” a wreath of victory for having persuaded (on a strictly human level) sinners to repent and appeal to God for mercy. And the joy of receiving this crown is something for which he genuinely hopes, just as he hopes for his own salvation—a guaranteed expectation that he knows he only has to wait for and it will happen.

<sup>31</sup> ὑμεῖς γὰρ ἐστε ἡ δόξα ἡμῶν καὶ ἡ χαρὰ – Again, the Thessalonian Christians are reason for Paul and his companions not only to rejoice, but also to consider as bringing them a level of honor and recognition because of their positive response to their presentation of the biblical message. Nevertheless, Paul understands completely that their faith and lives are not really because of them, but only and ultimately because of God. It is just, from a human standpoint, that he would really like to be able to feel a sense of accomplishment after his life of fulfilling his responsibility as the apostle to the Gentiles is over. This is how important to him are these fairly new Christians. And the same can and should be true for any of us Christians, that we feel that we really have done something to bring about the kingdom of God by influencing people either to come to genuine belief or to persevere in their belief. We want to be able to pat ourselves on the back, not out of arrogance, but out of a very human and appropriate desire to feel that we have done something truly worthwhile in this world.

<sup>32</sup> Διὸ μηκέτι στέγοντες εὐδοκήσαμεν καταλειφθῆναι ἐν Ἀθήναις μόνοι – To make sense of the sequence of details in Acts 17-18:5, Paul must have sent word to Timothy in Berea to return to Thessalonica, and then Timothy with Silas, who remained in Berea, rejoined Paul in Corinth.

Consequently, the “we” of 1 Thessalonians 3:1 probably includes Luke and even some other unnamed coworkers, because Acts 17:14 says that Silas and Timothy remained in Berea when Paul had to flee to Athens. And then Acts 18:5 says that “Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia” to join Paul in Corinth. To fit all the details, the sequence of events must have been this –

- 1) Paul, Silas, Timothy, Luke, and others come to Thessalonica and then flee to Berea.
- 2) Paul, Luke, and others flee Berea to Athens, leaving at least Silas and Timothy in Berea.
- 3) Paul from Athens sends word to Timothy to return to Thessalonica and encourage the Christians there, while Silas probably remains in Berea. This leaves Paul, Luke, and the others “alone” in Athens.
- 4) Paul, Luke, and the others leave Athens and travel to Corinth.
- 5) Timothy finishes his assignment in Thessalonica, travels to Berea where he meets up with Silas to continue his journey, and the two together rejoin Paul and the others in Corinth.

Therefore, Paul, Luke, and the others keep hearing about the opposition that the Jews are continuing to express towards Jesus as the Messiah, such that they are rightly concerned about the perseverance of the belief of the Thessalonian Christians. Their concern is elevated to the level that they feel it necessary to send Timothy from Berea back to them to encourage them to endure in their faith.

Another way to look at this, though, is that for someone who believes in the sovereignty and faithfulness of God as strongly as Paul does, he sure got nervous in regard to the perseverance of people’s belief. This is similar to the situation in 2 Corinthians where Paul describes his leaving Ephesus and traveling towards Corinth to meet up with Titus who is bringing a report about the Corinthian Christians’ response to his third letter.

This also speaks to the fact that Paul could not tell 100% if people had genuine faith or not, which all the more should instruct us to judge carefully and humbly the authenticity of people’s faith so that we work to encourage them to persevere in their faith even if we are relatively convinced that they have it.

<sup>33</sup> καὶ ἐπέμψαμεν Τιμόθεον, τὸν ἀδελφὸν ἡμῶν ‘καὶ συνεργὸν τοῦ θεοῦ’ ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, εἰς τὸ στηρίξει ὑμᾶς καὶ παρακαλέσαι ἵνα ὑπὲρ τῆς πίστεως ὑμῶν – Timothy also had the ability to continue educating them in the information about Jesus, which would further help encourage them to persevere in their belief. Thus, Paul assumes that God will use Timothy in this manner.

Paul calls Timothy “our brother,” meaning their fellow Christian and coheir of eternal life. He also calls him “God’s coworker with respect to the good news of the Messiah,” meaning that God had given Timothy to Paul as someone who would join him in proclaiming the gospel of Jesus as the Messiah.

But is this not putting Timothy in harm’s way by sending him back to Thessalonica alone? Why would Paul do such a thing? It must be that Paul believes that somehow Timothy is capable to fly underneath the radar of those who are persecuting Christians in Thessalonica. Probably, the Jews recognized in Paul that he was the ringleader in this group of itinerant preachers. If they can get rid of him, most likely the group will fall apart.

<sup>34</sup> τὸ ‘μηδένα σαινεσθαι’ ἐν ταῖς θλίψεσιν ταύταις, αὐτοὶ γὰρ οἶδατε ὅτι εἰς τοῦτο κείμεθα – Paul and his apostolic workers explicitly state that their purpose in sending Timothy was so that the Thessalonians would not give up their faith, even though they were experiencing such a high level of antipathy towards Jesus and them, too. They also assert that Christians must expect this kind of negative reaction to their faith, because God has absolutely predestined the world to operate this way.

<sup>35</sup> καὶ γὰρ ὅτε πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἦμεν, προελέγομεν ὑμῖν ὅτι μέλλομεν θλίβεσθαι, καθὼς καὶ ἐγένετο καὶ οἴδατε – In fact, Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, before the persecution even happened, warned the Thessalonians of this, because this is part of their biblical worldview. Then, they all encountered hostility to the message as they said they would, so that the Thessalonians were able to experience it firsthand.

Thus, Paul probably had a sense that trouble lay ahead in Thessalonica even as they approached the city. The problem had been the Gentile pagans in Philippi, and the problem in Thessalonica was going to be the Jews.

<sup>36</sup> διὰ τοῦτο καὶ γὰρ μηκέτι στέγων ἐπέμψα εἰς τὸ γνῶναι τὴν ‘πίστιν ὑμῶν’, μή πως ἐπειράσεν ὑμᾶς ὁ πειράζων καὶ εἰς κενὸν γένηται ὁ κόπος ἡμῶν – Paul switches to the first person singular to highlight his anxiety level regarding the state of the Thessalonians’ belief, that it reached such a height that he just could not stand it anymore and sent Timothy to find out whether all the effort that they had put into presenting the biblical message to them was possibly for nothing. Satan as the primary opponent of God and His purposes to rescue undeserving sinners from His eternal condemnation often tempts people through difficult circumstances to abandon their belief in God and thereby give up the promised eternal destiny of mercy and life. Paul’s concern is that Satan as this master tempter had succeeded in dissuading the Thessalonian Christians from persevering in their belief. (cf. Matthew 6 and the Lord’s Prayer, “Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one,” i.e., save us from abandoning our faith.)

But fortunately God uses these same circumstances simply to test authentic believers and confirm and further solidify their faith which reveals to them that they do have genuine belief and therefore gives them “hope,” confidence in their expecting eternal life from God (cf. Romans 5:1-11). And God does this through His faithfulness to His promises to those whom He has chosen by working powerfully within them through His Holy Spirit.

<sup>37</sup> Ἄρτι δὲ ἐλθόντος Τιμοθέου πρὸς ἡμᾶς ἀφ’ ὑμῶν καὶ εὐαγγελισμένου ἡμῖν τὴν πίστιν καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην ὑμῶν καὶ ὅτι ἔχετε μνησίαν ἡμῶν ἀγαθὴν πάντοτε, ἐπιποθοῦντες ἡμᾶς ἰδεῖν καθάπερ καὶ ἡμεῖς ὑμᾶς – Timothy has returned to Corinth from Thessalonica and brought a very favorable report to Paul and Silvanus of the Thessalonian Christians’

faith—that it is genuine and accompanied by love for their fellow believers, along with a deep desire to see these three men again.

<sup>38</sup> διὰ τοῦτο παρεκλήθημεν, ἀδελφοί, ἐφ' ὑμῖν ἐπὶ πάσῃ τῇ ἀνάγκῃ καὶ θλίψει ἡμῶν ὅτι διὰ τῆς ὑμῶν πίστεως – The good report concerning the Thessalonians is now helping Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy to endure the additional experiences in Corinth of the Jews' hostility towards the biblical truth (cf. Acts 18:6-17).

<sup>39</sup> ὅτι νῦν ζῶμεν ἐὰν ὑμεῖς ἵστητε ἐν κυρίῳ – Indeed, Paul feels a great sense of relief and even life now that he knows how committed to the biblical message are the Thessalonians. He is invigorated in the midst of the additional distresses that the three of them are experiencing in Corinth due to the hostility of the world towards the biblical message.

<sup>40</sup> τίνα γὰρ εὐχαριστίαν δυνάμεθα τῷ θεῷ ἀνταποδοῦναι περὶ ὑμῶν ἐπὶ πάσῃ τῇ χαρᾷ ἣν χαίρομεν δι' ὑμᾶς ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν – Paul goes on to comment on how grateful to God he is for the Thessalonians and their genuine belief, so that he feels that there is no amount of thanks that he could say to God to pay Him back (so to speak) for the joy that he feels in the light of their authentic belief.

<sup>41</sup> νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας ὑπερεκπερισσοῦ δεόμενοι εἰς τὸ ἰδεῖν ὑμῶν τὸ πρόσωπον καὶ καταρτίσαι τὰ ὑστερήματα τῆς πίστεως ὑμῶν – The Thessalonians' faith also leads Paul and his apostolic workers to ask God that they may return to them and continue educating them. The expression “complete what is lacking in your belief” must be an idiomatic one that means that Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy would like to educate them to the point that they need no more education in the biblical message, i.e., that they would become like Paul specifically, having a complete and full understanding of God that is obtainable from the Bible and is the privilege of an apostle. Certainly, the Thessalonians' belief is sufficient to gain them eternal life. But the more knowledge and understanding of God the better. This is what all the apostles believe and write in their letters. Cf. 1 Peter 2:2,19; 3:16,21.

<sup>42</sup> Αὐτὸς δὲ ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ ἡμῶν καὶ ὁ κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς κατευθύνει τὴν ὁδὸν ἡμῶν πρὸς ὑμᾶς – As a sort of benediction with respect to this last section of 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3:10, Paul indirectly appeals to God to lead the three of them back to the Thessalonians.

<sup>43</sup> ὑμᾶς δὲ ὁ κύριος πλεονάσαι καὶ περισσεύσαι τῇ ἀγάπῃ εἰς ἀλλήλους καὶ εἰς πάντας καθάπερ καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς ὑμᾶς – At the same time, Paul would have God ramp up the Thessalonians' love for all believers in Jesus as the Messiah, just as God is causing to happen in Paul and his apostolic companions with respect to them.

<sup>44</sup> εἰς τὸ στηρίξει ὑμῶν τὰς καρδίας ἠμέμπτους ἐν ἁγιωσύνῃ ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ μετὰ πάντων τῶν ἁγίων αὐτοῦ, ὧς ἀμήν – The increase in genuine, biblical love for other believers within the Thessalonian Christians constitutes the verification of the authenticity of their inwardness and belief that means that they will find acceptance from God at the second coming of the Messiah. As a result, they will be considered different from others in the world who have rejected the biblical message. In addition, they will, for the first time, personally meet Jesus, who will be accompanied by all other genuine believers who died before his second coming and are resurrected at this second coming, as Paul will go on to explain in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11. cf. [Revelation 19:14](#) And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses.

<sup>45</sup> Λοιπὸν ὁὖν, ἀδελφοί, ἐρωτῶμεν ὑμᾶς καὶ παρακαλοῦμεν ἐν κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ, ὅτινα καθὼς παρελάβετε παρ' ἡμῶν τὸ πῶς δεῖ ὑμᾶς περιπατεῖν καὶ ἀρέσκειν θεῷ, ὁ καθὼς καὶ περιπατεῖτε, ἵνα περισσεύητε μᾶλλον – In the light of the Thessalonians' commitment to their eternal destiny that comes through the biblical message, Paul exhorts them to live accordingly, as apparently they already are, but Paul and his apostolic workers would have them definitely continue doing so. It seems that, as a general rule, people in the Roman Empire did not treat each other very well. The apostolic message required that believers live quite differently, and it may have been hard to change old habits. Thus, Paul (along with the other apostles; cf. 1 Peter) had to keep encouraging his new converts to love one another, even more and more and more, i.e., to keep going.

<sup>46</sup> οἴδατε γὰρ τίνας παραγγελίας ἐδώκαμεν ὑμῖν διὰ τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ – Indeed, the Thessalonians should consider the kind of human relationships that Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy were talking about to be a direct commandment from God Himself in light of His plans and purposes regarding the Messiah.

<sup>47</sup> Τοῦτο γὰρ ἐστὶν θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, ὁ ἁγιασμὸς ὑμῶν, ἀπέχεσθαι ὑμᾶς ἀπὸ τῆς πορνείας – Paul states explicitly that God requires of His believers that they shun sexual immorality, which was very different from the Thessalonians' religious, pagan culture that encouraged temple prostitution and, perhaps, even condoned to a degree adultery among married people, especially in the light of how women were viewed as second class citizens and thus poorly treated. This was not only simply part of the fabric of these new Christians' Thessalonian culture but also Paul knows a natural outcome of their own evil cravings originating in the defining essence of their moral nature that he feels it necessary to warn them away from continuing these practices within their newly formed Christian community.

<sup>48</sup> εἰδέναι ἕκαστον ὑμῶν τὸ ἑαυτοῦ σκεῶς κτᾶσθαι ἐν ἁγιασμῷ καὶ τιμῇ – Paul uses language here that indicates that sexual morality is personal treatment of an individual's body that demonstrates that he honors and reveres his body as that which has been created and given him by the morally perfect transcendent Creator.

<sup>49</sup> μὴ ἐν πάθει ἐπιθυμίας καθάπερ καὶ τὰ ἔθνη τὰ μὴ εἰδότα τὸν θεόν – The opposite of honoring one's body with sexual morality is to succumb to the natural human passions that lead a person to act contrary to morality, if these passions are fulfilled in a context other than that for which God has designed them morally. The pagan idolators, who engage in temple prostitution and culturally acceptable adultery, demonstrate, by their actions, that they do not grasp in their minds the significance of the transcendent Creator and the morality that He requires among human beings. They simply allow themselves to be led by their passions within giving them a second thought as to their goodness or morality in the light of their being a Creator.

<sup>50</sup> τὸ μὴ ὑπερβαίνειν καὶ πλεονεκτεῖν ἐν ἑαυτῷ πράγματι τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ, διότι ἔκδικος κύριος περὶ πάντων τούτων, καθὼς καὶ προείπαμεν ὑμῖν καὶ διεμαρτυράμεθα – In this verse, Paul seems to indicate that adultery is not only immoral, but is also a taking advantage of the weakness of one’s fellow believer who has not quite grasped the importance of God’s morality in the midst of a very immoral pagan culture.

And they are quick to remind the Thessalonians that they have already mentioned to them that God’s judgment and condemnation towards those who ignore His moral commandments is real and will be certain. Therefore, just as they warned them before, they say now that they ignore this to their eternal peril.

<sup>51</sup> οὐ γὰρ ἐκάλεσεν ἡμᾶς ὁ θεὸς ἐπὶ ἀκαθαρσία ἀλλ’ ἐν ἁγιασμῷ – God’s intent for believers is that they be different from the rest of the world, who remain hostile to the biblical truth and who demonstrate this through their immoral behavior, particularly their sexual immoral behavior.

<sup>52</sup> τοιγαροῦν ὁ ἀθετῶν οὐκ ἀνθρώπον ἀθετεῖ ἀλλὰ τὸν θεὸν τὸν ἁγίον εἰς ὑμᾶς – To shine God on in this matter is not to reject something that man has made up, which would be the case if the Thessalonians rejected their former pagan idolatry, or any worldview other than the biblical one. Instead, to engage wholeheartedly in sexual immorality is to reject the transcendent Creator Himself.

Paul also implies in this verse that, if God is working in the Thessalonians through His Holy Spirit, then they will embrace what they are saying. Otherwise, they are rejecting the very operation of God within them in addition to God in His transcendence.

<sup>53</sup> Περὶ δὲ τῆς φιλαδελφίας οὐ χρεῖαν ἔχετε ἡμεῖς γράφειν ὑμῖν, αὐτοὶ γὰρ ὑμεῖς θεοδίδακτοὶ ἐστε εἰς τὸ ἀγαπᾶν ἀλλήλους – Paul mentions the second important thing on their minds in regard to the way that the Thessalonians must live as a result of being authentic believers in Jesus as the Messiah. It is to love one another as fellow Christians. But exactly how are they taught by God? Two options—1) Paul is referring to what he and Timothy have taught them during the respective visits, so that it should be translated, “you are those who have been taught by God [through our visits and teaching you]”; 2) The natural, intellectual ideas that God has implanted in all human beings as to how they should interact with one another.

#1 makes more sense. Now that the Thessalonians have experienced a changed inwardness by the Holy Spirit of God, they should acknowledge even more willingly the way that they should treat one another as God has commanded them through Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy.

Thus, in the midst of resisting the sexual temptations that their culture encourages, they should do more and follow through on all that these men have taught them about how to treat one another.

<sup>54</sup> καὶ γὰρ ποιεῖτε αὐτὸ ὡς εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἀδελφούς [τοὺς] ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ Μακεδονίᾳ. Παρακαλοῦμεν δὲ ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, περισσεύειν μᾶλλον – Paul recognizes that the Thessalonians, based upon Timothy’s report, have been doing very well in the manner in which they interact with other Christians throughout the Macedonian (northern Greece) area, which probably includes Philippi. Thus, they encourage them to keep going.

<sup>55</sup> καὶ φιλοτιμῆσθαι ἡσυχάζειν καὶ πράσσειν τὰ ἴδια καὶ ἐργάζεσθαι ταῖς ἰδίαις χερσίν ὑμῶν, καθὼς ὑμῖν παρηγγείλαμεν – The religious and social climate in which these Thessalonian Christians are living is difficult and hostile towards the ideas that they have embraced and towards them as believers in these ideas. Paul and his apostolic workers tell them that the best way to handle the hostile environment is just to keep their heads down, to pay attention to their own lives and needs, and to work in a normal manner to meet these needs, thus living as peaceably as possible among those who would want to harm them. Paul reminds them that he has previously commanded them to do so in line with the biblical truth.

<sup>56</sup> ἵνα περιπατῆτε εὐσημόνως πρὸς τοὺς ἔξω καὶ μηδενὸς χρεῖαν ἔχητε – The quiet lives that the Thessalonian Christians should lead will allow them to behave in a proper manner among unbelievers and to provide for their own needs, so that they are not reliant on unbelievers for emotional, psychological, or physical support. The idea is for the Christian community to become as self-reliant as possible so as not to stir up any unnecessary antipathy towards them from the non-Christian community.

<sup>57</sup> Οὐ γέλομεν δὲ ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν, ἀδελφοί, περὶ τῶν κοιμηθέντων, ἵνα μὴ λυπηθῆτε καθὼς καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ ὅσοι μὴ ἔχοντες ἐλπίδα – It would seem strange that Paul and his companions had not previously taught the Thessalonians about the second coming of the Messiah, but, perhaps, they simply feel that it is necessary to explain it again in the light of the difficulties that they are experiencing. Thus, they are further encouraging them to persevere in their belief, just as they have been doing. The “dead” would be those who have already died physically and become non-existent in the present reality. Those with no hope who grieve are hit hard emotionally by the loss of loved ones, because they have no real basis to expect them to obtain eternal life and to see them again, most likely because their worldview does not include this on account of their pagan idolatry (as Gentiles) or lack of proper understanding of even the Mosaic Covenant (as Jews).

<sup>58</sup> εἰ γὰρ πιστεύομεν ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἀπέθανεν καὶ ἀνέστη, οὕτως ἡμεῖς καὶ ὁ θεὸς τὸν κοιμηθέντα διὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἄξει σὺν αὐτῷ – Paul’s logical conclusion from the death and resurrection of the Messiah is that believers in Jesus will have the same experience—death and then resurrection to eternal life. The clause τὸν κοιμηθέντα διὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ means those who have fallen asleep through their relationship with Jesus as authentic believers and what this means for them in the light of God’s eternal plans and purposes, i.e., that they rise from the dead and acquire both immortality and moral perfection in the Kingdom of God.

<sup>59</sup> Τοῦτο γὰρ ὑμῖν λέγομεν ἐν λόγῳ κυρίου, ὅτι ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες οἱ περιλειπόμενοι εἰς τὴν παρουσίαν τοῦ κυρίου οὐ μὴ φθάσομεν τοὺς κοιμηθέντας – By what Paul goes on to say, the issue of “preceding” has to do with “always being with the Lord,” i.e., remaining in the presence of the Messiah as living, eternal beings (cf. v. 17). Thus, Paul and his apostolic workers are explaining that the resurrection of those who have already died as believers and being brought

into the presence of the Messiah will take place before the ascending from the earth of believers who are still alive when the Messiah returns.

Paul's speaking of the possibility of his being alive when Jesus returns does not necessarily mean that he misunderstood the point that Jesus made for example in the Olivet Discourse of Matthew 24 that his return was a long way off, which Paul has either figured out from his study of the OT or learned from the other apostles. Instead, Paul is using himself simply as an example, if it were to happen, which he knows it will not.

<sup>60</sup> ὅτι αὐτὸς ὁ κύριος ἐν κελεύσματι, ἐν φωνῇ ἀρχαγγέλου καὶ ἐν σάλπιγγι θεοῦ, καταβήσεται ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ καὶ οἱ νεκροὶ ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναστήσονται ἴπρωτον – Here Paul states that the transcendent Creator will issue an explicit command by means of an “archangel,” a chief conventional angel that will be accompanied by the sound of a trumpet like the *shofar* of the Old Testament. The response to this command will be the resurrection from death of believers who have died prior to this event. At the same time, the “Lord,” who is Jesus in this case, will enter into the present realm from “heaven,” from his place of existence up to this moment, and he will meet the resurrected believers as they “rise up first” from the earth.

<sup>61</sup> ἔπειτα ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες ῥοὶ περιλειπόμενοι ἅμα σὺν αὐτοῖς ἀρπαγησόμεθα ἐν νεφέλαις εἰς ἅπαντησιν τοῦ κυρίου εἰς ἅερα· καὶ οὕτως πάντοτε ἴσὺν κυρίῳ ἐσόμεθα – cf. Hebrews 9:26-28, speaking analogically of a judgment. After dead believers are resurrected, living believers will themselves rise up from the earth in order to come into the presence of the Messiah Jesus, so that both resurrected believers and ascended believers will remain for all eternity in his presence, starting with reigning with him over the millennial kingdom on this earth and centered in Jerusalem and the land of Israel and ending with the eternal new heavens and new earth after the Great White Throne Judgment (cf. Revelation 20,21).

<sup>62</sup> Ὡστε παρακαλεῖτε ἀλλήλους ἐν τοῖς λόγοις τούτοις – Paul's purpose in relating this information is so that the Thessalonians can repeat it to each other as encouragement for their persevering in their belief under the very difficult circumstances of the persecution they are experiencing. It is as though they want them to say constantly out loud to one another, “Don't forget. We will rise up to meet Jesus in the air and be with him forever in the eternal Kingdom of God. So hang in there through these difficult circumstances.”

<sup>63</sup> Περὶ δὲ τῶν χρόνων καὶ τῶν καιρῶν, ἀδελφοί, οὐ χρεῖαν ἔχετε ὑμῖν γράφεσθαι – An obvious question is, when will the events that Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy have just described regarding the return of the Messiah take place? The beginning of their answer to this question is that the Thessalonians have no need for them to answer.

<sup>64</sup> αὐτοὶ γὰρ ἀκριβῶς οἶδατε ὅτι ἡμέρα κυρίου ὡς κλέπτῃς ἐν νυκτὶ οὕτως ἔρχεται – As in 4:9 regarding what Paul and his apostolic co-workers have already taught the Thessalonians regarding love, here he is also referring to what they have already taught them about the coming Day of the Lord.

The reason that Paul and his companions do not give an answer to the Thessalonians is because they cannot give them an answer, because they do not know when the second coming of Jesus will take place. This is exactly like Jesus himself, who said in Matthew 24 that he did not know, even though he is the Messiah (cf. Matthew 24:36 – “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone”). In addition, this event will sneak up on people the same way that a thief does not announce that he is breaking into someone's home so that they could be prepared for it.

Cf. Joel 2:31 – “The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the great and awesome Day of the Lord comes.” The “Day of the Lord” refers to the events whereby God doles out His anger and justice on the Jews who have rejected Him, resulting in their destruction on the land of Israel. Cf. Isaiah 13 where God calls the “Day of the Lord” the end of the Babylonian Empire when it was conquered by the Medes in 539 B.C. In other words, there have been at least one other Day of the Lord, but certainly here Paul is referring to that of Joel 2.

The way Paul is speaking here does not have to mean that he expects Jesus' return to be soon. Instead, he is encouraging the Thessalonian Christians to live their lives as if Jesus were returning soon, which Paul must know from his instruction by Jesus is not the case.

In addition, Jesus' coming like a thief in the night is not referring to there being no obvious signs of his appearance (cf. Revelation) but to the dullness of the hearts of unbelievers that prevents them from being willing to interpret the signs correctly and repent of their sin. This is coherent with what Paul says of the Thessalonian Christians in 5:4,5, that they are “sons of light” and not “of darkness,” that they have embraced the truth and will not reject the obvious signs leading up to Jesus' return. This is also in conjunction with the statements in Revelation to the effect that the Jews especially will continue to reject God even as He brings His judgment and suffering on them. So their being caught off guard will not be because of the lack of obvious signs, but because of their impoverished subjectivity. They will be unwilling to acknowledge that God is in the process of finishing the present age before the millennial kingdom and fulfilling His promise to the Jews to make them a great nation of believers in Jesus.

<sup>65</sup> ὅταν ἡ λέγουσιν εἰρήνην καὶ ἀσφάλεια, τότε αἰφνίδιος ἄυτοῖς ἐφίσταται ὀλεθρος ὡσπερ ἡ ὄδιν τῇ ἐν γαστρὶ ἐχούσῃ, καὶ οὐ μὴ ἔκφυγῶσιν – cf. Matthew 24:37-40, “For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. As in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be.”

Paul is saying, as Jesus said, that the people in Noah's day who were destroyed by the flood will ignore the signs that God is sending to warn them of the impending disaster of His judgment. Noah's building the ark was a clear sign to them that something catastrophic was going to happen, but they ignored this sign from God. Likewise, the Jews on the land of Israel who will be destroyed by God at Jesus' second coming will not be completely surprised by this event and its consequences, because many signs will be given them through the seven trumpets and seven bowls of wrath of

Revelation. Instead, they will be hardhearted and stubborn so that they refuse to believe that all is not well for them eternally right up to the moment when Jesus appears and they find themselves confronting the final wrath and destruction of God on this earth before the beginning of the millennial kingdom.

cf. Jeremiah 23:17, “[The false prophets] keep saying to those who despise Me, ‘Yahweh has said, “You will have shalom.”’ And as for everyone who walks in the stubbornness of his own heart, they say, ‘Calamity (ἡ πῆτ) will not come upon you.’”

<sup>66</sup> ὑμεῖς δέ, ἀδελφοί, οὐκ ἐστὲ ἐν σκότει, ἵνα ἡ ἡμέρα ὑμᾶς ὡς ῥαβδίου καταλάβῃ – Paul reminds and encourages his readers that they know as much as one can know about this historic and catastrophic event and that they are characterized by hearts of faith who subjectively grasp that Jesus is returning to save those like them and destroy those who reject God and him. Thus, they will not be surprised, because they have embraced the truth of these ideas and will recognize the signs (cf. Revelation).

<sup>67</sup> πάντες γὰρ ὑμεῖς υἱοὶ φωτός ἐστε καὶ υἱοὶ ἡμέρας. Οὐκ ἔσμὲν νυκτὸς οὐδὲ σκότους – Paul labels the Thessalonian Christians and themselves as people who are able to see clearly what the future holds, just as people can see clearly where they are going during the day but find it difficult, if not impossible, to find their way at night because it can be so dark outside. This “clear sight” that Christians have is because of what they know from the biblical message taught them by Paul and because God has caused them inwardly to embrace these ideas. People of the night may see physically what is going on around them, but they are hostile to God’s plans and, therefore, willfully and intentionally blind themselves to what God is doing and will do with respect to His judgment and either eternal life or eternal death.

<sup>68</sup> ἄρα οὖν μὴ καθεύδωμεν ὡς ἡ οἱ λοιποὶ ἀλλὰ γρηγορῶμεν καὶ νήφωμεν – Here Paul and his companions liken unbelievers to those who are sleeping their way through the present realm by not waking up to the fact that Jesus will return and destroy them because of their unbelief. They are like drunkards who do not and cannot think clearly about reality so that they face into God’s coming judgment and the possibility of both salvation and destruction, depending on how a person is relating to God.

Thus, Paul exhorts the Thessalonians and himself not to live life like unbelievers who are completely ignoring that eventually God is going to bring judgment on all of humanity. Instead, they should move through every moment aware that the day of judgment is coming and they want to be prepared by being authentic believers in Jesus and acting as such also.

The task of a human being is to prepare himself for the judgment.

<sup>69</sup> Οἱ γὰρ καθεύδοντες νυκτὸς καθεύδουσιν καὶ οἱ ῥαβδίου μεθύουσιν – Thus, Paul confirms that people who are asleep to the biblical truth are also people who are drunk enough on false ideas that they cannot think clearly about the reality of God and His plans of judgment and mercy leading to the eternal Kingdom of God. This is in line with the Thessalonian (and Roman) culture that enjoyed sleeping after getting drunk as part of their living out their evil cravings in their pagan culture.

<sup>70</sup> ἡμεῖς δὲ ἡμέρας ὄντες νήφωμεν ἐνδυσάμενοι θώρακα πίστεως καὶ ἀγάπης καὶ περικεφαλαίαν ἐλπίδα σωτηρίας – To be “of the day” is to be not only knowledgeable of God’s plans for Jesus as the Messiah to return, but also to embrace these plans with authentic belief and to wait patiently for God to complete His promises. It also means not getting “drunk” on the false ideas of the world, but remaining committed to the truth of the biblical message.

Paul then uses military imagery to encourage his readers to protect themselves from the weapons of falsehood, e.g., the breastplate, what we would refer to as a bulletproof vest, of genuine belief in Jesus as the Messiah and love for one another as Christians, as well as the helmet of being certain of God’s future mercy and entrance into the eternal Kingdom of God. These protect the Christian from buying into the lies of Satan in this world and from despairing instead of eagerly looking forward to the eternal Kingdom of God regardless of what happens in the present realm.

<sup>71</sup> ὅτι οὐκ ἔθετο ῥαβδίου ὁ θεὸς εἰς ὀργὴν ἀλλὰ εἰς περιποίησιν σωτηρίας διὰ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Ἐπιφανίου – Paul and his companions present the reason for complete confidence in one’s future salvation as God’s predestination of those whom He will rescue from His anger and condemnation. They had mentioned this in chapter 1—1:4 We appreciate, brothers, who are loved by God, His choice [that is the same as His predestination] of you.

<sup>72</sup> τοῦ ἀποθανόντος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν, ἵνα εἴτε γρηγορῶμεν εἴτε καθεύδωμεν ἅμα σὺν αὐτῷ ῥαβδίου – Jesus is the means to eternal salvation because he has qualified to be our high priest and advocate at the final judgment. Paul indicates that this means that those who are still alive, i.e., awake (switching the reference of his metaphors of sleep and wakefulness), when Jesus returns, or who have died, i.e., are asleep, will always exist together in the presence of Jesus in the eternal Kingdom of God.

<sup>73</sup> Διὸ παρακαλεῖτε ἀλλήλους καὶ οἰκοδομεῖτε ῥαβδίου τὸν ἕνα, καθὼς καὶ ποιεῖτε – Here, by the one (τὸν ἕνα), Paul and his companions mean either 1) unity of existence with Jesus or 2) Jesus that results in obtaining the fulfillment of God’s promise of eternal mercy and life (cf. 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4) or 3) the one truth of the destiny of believers which is eternal life with Jesus. The context points to #3.

Even though the Thessalonians are together whenever they gather as a community of believers, Paul would have them continue working towards a unified understanding of the truth of their common destiny of eternal life as fully committed followers of Jesus and what it will be like to be in Jesus’ presence in the Kingdom of God, living in a morally pure and perfectly loving manner. He is also convinced that they are already continuing this work.

<sup>74</sup> Ἐρωτῶμεν δὲ ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, εἰδέναι τοὺς κοπιῶντας ἐν ὑμῖν καὶ ῥαβδίου ὑμῶν ἐν κυρίῳ καὶ νοουθετοῦντας ὑμᾶς – Here the word εἰδέναι as the perfect active infinitive of οἶδα, which typically simply means know, has more of a connotation of appreciate and respect. Paul wants the Thessalonians to appreciate the valuable role

that these men are playing in regard to their eternal destinies and salvation.

cf. 1:4 We appreciate, brothers, who are loved by God, His choice of you,

cf. 2:1 Certainly [By inference], you yourselves appreciate, brothers, that our entrée into you as a group has not been in vain.

cf. 2:2 Yet, as you also must appreciate, after suffering beforehand and being scoffed at among the Philippians, we had the courage in our God to speak to you the good news of God in the midst of a great conflict.

cf. Acts 14:23, “When they had appointed elders for them in every church (χειροτονήσαντες δὲ αὐτοῖς κατ’ ἐκκλησίαν πρεσβυτέρους), having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.” Paul must have done the same thing in Thessalonica, and he encourages his readers to continue to listen respectfully to the men whom *they* selected as Christian leaders among them so as to appreciate the valuable role they are playing in their lives for the sake of their eternal salvation.

The Greek word χειροτονήσαντες seems to be formed from the two words χειρ = hand and τείνω = stretch out.

Therefore, these men were hand-picked by Paul as an apostle and Barnabas as an apostolic worker with Paul. It is also most likely that he would have said to them face to face, “Do not teach anything other than what I have said to you and taught you regarding Jesus as the Messiah and how he relates to all the other information in the Bible, i.e., the OT” (which would have been all that existed in Paul’s day). However, after the apostles had died, there was no one with their authority or accuracy of understanding of the biblical message who could appropriately appoint elders.

Consequently, since the time of the apostles, leaders within the Christian community cannot be said to be actual, biblical elders. At best, they are simply discussion leaders who are as dependent on only the apostolic documents as their followers, and they can never be said to have an accurate understanding of them and their message as Paul, Peter, et al. would have concluded about the men whom they personally appointed.

The word “elder” is first used to refer to leaders of a community in Genesis 50:7, in regard to the leaders of Egypt (אֲנִי־וְאֶלְדֵּרֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל) (οἱ πρεσβύτεροι τῆς γῆς Αἰγύπτου) who accompanied Joseph to the land of Canaan to bury his father Jacob. Then, in Exodus 3:16, God commands Moses, “Go and gather the elders of Israel (אֲנִי־וְאֶלְדֵּרֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל) (τὴν γερουσίαν τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ) and say to them, ‘Yahweh, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, has appeared to me.’” The Greek word γερουσία is made up of γερ = old and ουσια = being (nominative singular feminine present active participle of εἰμι). The Greek word πρεσβύτερος is first used to refer to the elders of Israel in Exodus 17:5 (אֲנִי־וְאֶלְדֵּרֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל).

<sup>75</sup> καὶ ἡγήσῃται αὐτοὺς ὑπερεκπερισσοῦ ἐν ἀγάπῃ διὰ τὸ ἔργον αὐτῶν. εἰρηνεύετε ἐν ἑαυτοῖς – Because of how priceless is that task of helping other sinners understand and believe in the one, true God for the sake of their eternal salvation, Paul wants his readers to esteem (ἡγήσῃται = think, consider, regard) the men whom he handpicked to continue to lead them in his place.

Also in this verse, Paul points out that part of loving one another is to interact without resorting to harsh words and impatient behavior.

<sup>76</sup> Παρακαλοῦμεν δὲ ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, νουθετεῖτε τοὺς ἀτάκτους, παραμυθεῖσθε τοὺς ὀλιγοψύχους, ἀντέχεσθε τῶν ἀσθενῶν, μακροθυμεῖτε πρὸς πάντας – Life is not easy for these Thessalonian Christians. Some are probably getting discouraged and even becoming weak in their faith. Paul encourages all of them to support one another and help each other pursue obedience to God. In other words, this is not a commandment to only the elder/leaders. The responsibility to admonish, console, help, and be patient falls on the shoulders of each person in the Christian community.

<sup>77</sup> ὁρᾶτε μὴ τις κακὸν ἀντὶ κακοῦ τι ἀποδῶ, ἀλλὰ πάντοτε τὸ ἀγαθὸν διώκετε ὁ[καὶ] εἰς ἀλλήλους καὶ εἰς πάντας – By the stories that we have in Acts, it seems that people in the Roman Empire were in the habit of paying each other back in kind if they were mistreated. This unbiblical behavior required a major correction for those who had come to believe in Jesus as the Messiah. Instead, Christians were required to be forgiving and to pay each other back with only grace and mercy. And they were also to pursue this in their relationships with the “all” = those outside the community of believers.

<sup>78</sup> Πάντοτε χαίρετε – In the context of the whole letter, it makes sense that Paul would have these Thessalonians be glad with a viable joy in the midst of God’s promise of eternal mercy and life. They should live their lives with a sense of joy at all times, because they are those who will gain eternal life. The joy is because of what God is doing within them and for them that will culminate in their gaining the eternal Kingdom of God.

<sup>79</sup> ἀδιαλείπτως προσεύχεσθε – In the context of the whole letter, it also makes sense that they are encouraging the Thessalonians to pray that God will cause their belief to persevere, in order that their authentic Christianity will survive the harsh persecutions that they are experiencing and they obtain eternal life. And they encourage them to do so as often as they get the opportunity to address God directly in the midst of everything else they are doing in their lives. As Soren Kierkegaard has said, “Prayer does not change God, but it changes the one who prays.”

<sup>80</sup> ἐν παντὶ εὐχαριστεῖτε· τοῦτο γὰρ θέλημα θεοῦ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ εἰς ὑμᾶς – The promise of eternal mercy and life should also naturally result in a viable level of gratitude even in the midst of the discouraging and difficult circumstances that the Thessalonian Christians find themselves. And this is for them who are “in the Messiah Jesus,” i.e., ensconced with genuine faith in the presence of and instruction of Jesus as their head and leader.

<sup>81</sup> τὸ πνεῦμα μὴ σβέννυτε – Assuming that Paul is referring to the Spirit of God, and assuming they know that it is impossible to stop God from accomplishing His eternal plans and purposes in people’s lives through the work of His Spirit within them, and in regard to the fact that Paul uses a term that sometimes refers to fire (“do not quench” (μὴ σβέννυτε)), he is encouraging the Thessalonian Christians to continue thinking and acting in line with the apostolic message so as to attest to the genuineness of their faith. He wants them to persevere in their authentic belief. If they do

not, they will not quench the fire of the Holy Spirit within them and among them as they live out their Christianity and encourage each other to persevere in the faith in order to obtain God's gracious gift of eternal life. This sounds irrational but makes sense in the light of the dynamic of God's sovereign grace and human beings' personal accountability and responsibility before God.

This is especially clear in the light of their next statements.

cf. [Revelation 2:2](#) 'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; 3 and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary. 4 'But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 5 'Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place — unless you repent.

<sup>82</sup> προφητείας μὴ ἐξουθενεῖτε – Paul along with Silvanus and Timothy were God's prophetic voice to these Thessalonians vis-à-vis the biblical message. They were authentic spokesmen for God because of Paul's calling as the apostle to the Gentiles. Thus, they taught them that their message should remain the most valuable information to them, so that they never shy away from it or reject it.

<sup>83</sup> πάντα ὅδε δοκιμάζετε, τὸ καλὸν κατέχετε – Indeed, the Thessalonians should see their lives as a demonstration of the truth of God's instructions to mankind through the OT and Jesus' teaching while on earth. This should include their grasping and not letting go of that which can be considered by God to be good and moral and right. Consequently, the "good" here incorporates both that which they think in line with the apostolic message, i.e., the truth, and that which they do in line with God's moral commandments to the Jews.

<sup>84</sup> ἀπὸ παντὸς εἴδους πονηροῦ ἀπέχεσθε – The flip side of the coin is that they should shy away from falsehood and evil, anything that is contrary to what God has stated as truth and called people to do and be.

The NAS95 translates this, "Abstain from every form of evil." I have translated εἴδους as kind. Paul's admonition is most likely for these followers of Jesus to avoid any kind of evil that comes along as a temptation to them in their culture.

<sup>85</sup> Αὐτὸς δὲ ὁ θεὸς τῆς εἰρήνης αγιάσαι ὑμᾶς ὀλοτελεῖς, καὶ ὀλόκληρον ὑμῶν τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ τὸ σῶμα ἀμέμπτως ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τηρηθεῖ – The vocabulary in this verse is difficult, Paul is saying the same thing in three different ways.

I think that ὀλοτελεῖς refers to the Thessalonians' completing their goal and destiny as believers in the biblical message. Cf. [James 1:4](#), "And let endurance have its perfect result (ἔργον τέλειον = goal completing effect (?)), so that you may be perfect and sound (τέλειοι καὶ ὀλόκληροι = those who inwardly are sound in their sanctification and belief in order to complete their goal and reach their destiny), lacking in nothing."

Also cf. Hebrews 5-10. Thus, he is saying that he hopes and expects (αγιάσαι – optative) that God will sanctify, make different from the world his Thessalonian readers all the way to end of their lives in this realm and their achieving eternal life.

If we understand the spirit as our essential conception of ourselves originating in God's mind, i.e., what a human being is going to be all about in the mind of God, then Paul wants this concept to be sound with a genuine orientation towards God and the truth vs. its being unsound and therefore characterized by an orientation towards lies and unbelief if it were. Thus, the person is someone who is committed to biblical goodness and morality because his heart/spirit/mind is truly oriented towards God. It would also mean that the person would be a noble specimen of a human being.

Then, thirdly, Paul wants their personal existence, the expression of them as persons (each one a ψυχή = their existence as a living creature with thinking, feeling, and doing of acts by the choices they make with their wills) in bodily form (which actually is essential for someone to be a person), to be such that they are kept acceptable to God until Jesus returns and advocates for them when he inaugurates the Kingdom of God. As a result, they will express their freedom, character, and ideology (which is really their theology) in a manner that demonstrates that they are sanctified by God as individuals. Their soul is referring to their existence as human beings with a particular spirit and heart that is either dedicated to obeying God or not, and their body is referring mainly to that which contains their spirit and existence. If God keeps their existences and their bodies which reveal what is going on inside them acceptable, then He is keeping them without any disqualifying defect up to the time of the parousia of Jesus, his grand appearance as the king of Israel and the Kingdom of God. This will be the same as being of sound spirit, mind, and heart.

<sup>86</sup> πιστὸς ὁ καλῶν ὑμᾶς, ὃς καὶ ποιήσει – Paul states that God always fulfills His promises and will do so in the case of the Thessalonian Christians, making sure that they reach their goal of eternal existence in the Kingdom of God in the manner he has described and hoped for with the optative verbs in v. 23.

<sup>87</sup> Ἀδελφοί, προσεύχεσθε ὅ[καὶ] περὶ ἡμῶν – Paul would have the Thessalonians pray also for the enduring of their belief, as well as for God's providing them with opportunities and success in their role as the apostolic workers for the sake of strictly the Gentiles.

<sup>88</sup> Ἀσπάσασθε τοὺς ἀδελφούς πάντας ἐν φιλήματι αγίῳ – Paul also wants the Thessalonians to receive with open arms those whom he sends to them, especially because they are bringing this letter.

<sup>89</sup> Ἐνορκίζω ὑμᾶς τὸν κύριον ἀναγνωσθῆναι τὴν ἐπιστολὴν πάσιν τοῖς ἄδελφοῖς – Switching to the first person singular, Paul considers the ideas that he is presenting in this letter to be so important that he requires that all the Christians in Thessalonica get the opportunity to read it or hear it read.

<sup>90</sup> Ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ μεθ' ὑμῶν – Of course, God's grace through the Messiah, specifically Jesus as the Messiah, is what Paul wants ultimately for his readers, because it is the actions of God towards morally depraved human beings on the basis of His willingness and desire to rescue them from His condemnation that results in their salvation.