

1 THESSALONIANS

The following is adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, forthcoming).

1 Thessalonians 1

1:1

Because most of Paul's letters begin with a note indicating his relationship with the Lord as either His servant or prisoner or, much more frequently, as His Apostle, the absence of such a note here is arresting. The reason for its absence is likely that the challenge in other branches directed at the legitimacy of Paul's ministry and authority is not a concern for his converts in Thessalonica. As a result, his station had not reached the precarious state that it did later in his career. This situation also explains why he attributes the letter to others besides himself. He could include his fellow missionaries because he did not have to spend time justifying himself.

He directs his letter to the Church in the city of Thessalonica. The salutation shows that he has in focus not just the leadership but also the entire membership. Further, the Greek word translated "church," *ἐκκλησία* (*ekklēsia*), though denoting in its secular usage both a general gathering of people and those summoned for political purposes, indicates in this case the establishment of an actual Christian community that met together for worship.

Paul next uses a theologically stunning phrase denoting the spiritually high station of this Church. It is *in* both God, who is also the Father, and Jesus, who is also Lord and Christ. The preposition "in" is telling, and its association with "God" is startling because of the rareness of the phrase. This rareness sharpens Paul's point that these Saints dwell in a heightened, more spiritual existence that is all enveloping. The

sense of the phrase is somewhat analogous to the expression “being in love” that points to the fully enveloping nature of the state. These early Saints no longer dwelt in the world but in God, for His Spirit and power are ever with them.

But Paul adds another dimension, one that is extremely important: they are also in Jesus. In his other letters, Paul emphasizes this condition.¹ In doing so he witnesses that Church members are under the Savior’s power and the atoning grace that makes the relationship with the Father possible.

These converts would have already been familiar with pagan gods being referred to by the titles “father” and “lord.” What the missionaries did was correct their understanding of both terms. First, they taught that there was only one true God who is the Father of all creation, including humankind, and that He is revealed in the scriptures and in Christ Jesus. Second, they taught that Jesus is the true Lord who gives laws to and governs the Church.

Though familiar to Jewish converts, one title would have meant little to many of the gentile converts. This is the title Christ (*Χριστός*, *Christos*). To the uninitiated in Christian terms, it indicated only someone who had been rubbed down with oil. As a result, the missionaries had to introduce them to the scripturally loaded nuances of term and how it applied to the Savior. At the same time, they had to properly redefine its meaning and importance to the Jewish members as well. These were familiar with the Hebrew term מָשִׁיחַ (*māšîaḥ*, “messiah”), denoting a king or priest set apart through an anointing process and also referencing a future servant of God who would act under His authority and power. A major task of the missionaries was to bring their fuller understanding of the nature and work of the Messiah to the Jewish members. Using scriptures with telling effect, they showed that the Anointed One had to suffer and die and be raised from the dead. They needed to add but little else likely because their hearers were in sync with the idea that the Anointed One would have divine authority, the right to rule, and ultimate judgeship.

Paul’s use of the whole expression “the Lord Jesus Christ” is very telling. It indicates that a deep understanding of Jesus and His mission originated before the Apostle’s missionary service began and that from early on, the Saints already understood much about the divine nature and mission of their spiritual Leader and Savior. This epistle shows that this understanding was not, as some modern theologians contend, a later development imposed on the Gospels.

Paul ends his greeting with a prayer in which he invokes the two important terms *grace* and *peace*. His use of the terms echoes the salutation common in both the Greek *χάρις* (*charis*), “grace, or an obliging gift,” and the Jewish *שָׁלוֹם* (*šālôm*) “peace,” but he recasts them with heavy theological overtones denoting the downflow of divine favor with the resultant concord with God that promises of ultimate salvation by means of a relational, reciprocal, covenantal relationship established through God’s gift that ensures peace.

1:2

In 1 Thessalonians 1:2, the Apostle declares his heartfelt prayer of thanksgiving. Because he always keeps both his and his audience’s focus on God, he directs his thanks not to the Thessalonians for their divine

place but to the Father. In this way, he witnesses to his hearers that he recognizes the good that flows from God to these people as they have responded to His word. In doing so, the Apostle take no credit from these faithful souls, for as the next verses show, he fully recognizes what they have done. He does, however, publicly acknowledge the role God has and does play in their lives. Those who listened to his letter as the appointed person read it to them would have viewed his opening words as a real and very heartfelt prayer, not as some pro forma introduction.

1:3

In 1 Thessalonians 1:3, Paul reveals that his life is bound to the welfare of these Saints and, hence, that a major source of his happiness is their wellbeing. In this verse, the Apostle also notes three areas that have generated his delight in and admiration for these converts. The first is his appreciation for their work as it springs from faith. The seat of that faith is in Christ Jesus, and it expresses itself in the kind of activities he would do. This kind of faith, therefore, is characterized by and manifests itself in good works.² Though faith in itself denotes work, here Paul uses it to connote that faith *does* work “by producing a change of life and a cheerful courage under trials” and ultimately faithfulness (compare Galatians 5:6). Such faith transforms an individual, by degrees, into the very likeness of the Savior, with the result that she or he does what the Savior would. Paul’s words show that that these Saints are actively doing the work of bearing the weight that being a Christian has placed upon them.

The second area that generates Paul’s delight in these Saints is their labor driven by love. The noun *κόπος*, “labor,” points to hard toil and suggests that great difficulty can come with it. The phrase points to the cost of their love, not its result. The phrase as a whole shows that these Saints understood that with or without success, they had to give of themselves unstintingly to one another and to those around them.

That Paul modifies “labor” with “love” is telling. Though a number of Greek words denote aspects of love, the earliest Christians adopted one that had been barely used before, *ἀγάπη* (*agapē*). In doing so, they were able to shape its meaning and breathe fire into it. As a result, they were able, through the context in which they used it, to express exactly how they understood what it revealed about God, Christ, and what they themselves should be.

The Church leaders insisted that the source of such love is not human but divine. It reveals its nature in the action of the Father, who did not wait to give His Son until people showed merit or even a willingness to love and obey Him (1 John 4:9–10). God acted first.

Three insights come out of this selfless act. The first is that neither a child’s worthiness nor lack thereof influences the depth of God’s love for her or him. God’s love for His children is there no matter what their spiritual state may be, whether high or low.

The second is that love motivates Him to reach out to them and provide the means of their salvation. Only by truly understanding what this divine love cost the Father can one appreciate what it really is. He gave His worthy Son totally over to the brutal anguish of spiritual death—even removing His own spirit

from His Beloved Son—and then to the vicious agony of physical death by scourging and crucifixion. During the Savior’s hours of crisis, the Father never directly supported Him. We can only imagine the agony that it cost God. How could He have endured it? Because of His love for the rest of His children, and in this alone can we fathom the nature and depth of divine love. The suffering of the Father, as revealed in the agony of the Son, was necessary because it was the primary means through which He could coax His children into having trust, developing faith, being obedient, and giving devotion to Him.

The third insight comes from understanding that God’s pure, selfless, and giving love places heavy responsibility upon its recipient, for God’s love will not allow Him to let His children alone. Once they understand what divine love really is, God forces them to make a decision. Either they must yield to that love and the transforming power that comes therewith or they must reject it and suffer the damning consequences. Godlike love compels each individual to personally make that decision.

The Thessalonian Saints had accepted the responsibility of that love, evidenced by the labor they performed. Given the nuance that Paul placed on the phrase “loving labor,” he was referring to their undaunted missionary work.³ Rudeness, snubs, rebukes, loss of employment, forfeiture of social standing, and ostracism could not dissuade these people from reaching out to others in an effort to share the joy they had found.

The third area that generated Paul’s delight in these Saints was their steadfast hope. The noun *ἐλπίς* (*elpis*), “hope,” generally denotes an anticipation of something good. In its Christian context, it looks more specifically at salvation in association with the Resurrection. It is never egocentric. Its focus is always on God and Christ and on what they can bring to those who follow them. During the earliest period of Christian history, its major focus was on what Christ would do and bring when He appeared again among the faithful. The adjective Paul used to modify it, *ὑπομονή* (*hypomonē*), “patience, steadfastness,” gives a very positive cast that highlights the constancy with which the Saints practiced it. The Apostle is doing more than expressing some mere formal or voluble belief or a hope which could not persist in the face of delay and discouraging hardship, just as he is not suggesting that a display of Christian love amounts to no more than a simple emotional or fitful expression of goodwill. Rather, he is saying that these people expressed hope’s depth in their willingness to endure hardship, all the time giving their selfless love (compare Colossians 1:4).

1:4

Paul expresses his deep feelings for these people twice in 1 Thessalonians 1:4. One is by his addressing them as “brothers and sisters” (*ἀδελφοί, adelphoi*), a sincere and inclusive term nuancing the close affinity of family members. The other is by noting their envious station as those “being beloved of God.” Paul’s phrase emphasizes the ongoing and uninterrupted nature of that divine love. It is that godly force that has made the brotherhood and sisterhood of these converts possible. This is because of love’s transforming power that changes one’s heart to deeply care for others. Still, such a profoundly spiritual relationship

has an exclusive element in that it refers more specifically to those who call God Father because they have been born “unto God again” and have become part of His earthly family.

Though important to Paul, this warm address actually stands in second place to his intent. His real emphasis, as shown by placing the phrase “we know” as the first elements in the sentence, gives it priority. He uses these strong words to stress his witness that these people are “chosen of God.” In other words, they have come under divine approbation and full acceptance by the Father and Son. The idea of divine election (*ἐκλογή*, *eklogē*) is one of the great concepts of the Bible. It always denotes divine action that results from God’s great love (compare 2 Thessalonians 2:13). Though it most often denotes one’s accepted station before God while in mortality, its ultimate expression is exaltation.⁴

1:5

In 1 Thessalonians 1:5, Paul explains just how it is that he and his missionaries know these people have become the elect of God. It is because of their attention to and acceptance of the three authenticating forces that attended the missionaries’ preaching of the gospel. Paul lists these as “power,” “the Holy Spirit,” and “great conviction.”

The noun *δύναμις* (*dynamis*), “power,” in the present context likely does not refer to the gifts of the Holy Ghost or to miracles performed by the missionaries but to the people’s courage, sincerity, honesty, dedication, earnestness, and consistency in preaching the gospel (1 Thessalonians 2:2, 4, 5, 7, 8–10). The Holy Spirit refers to the third member of the Godhead, whose task is to act “as the convincing power of God of the truth of the gospel.” The phrase “great conviction” highlights the selfless dedication and devotion which Paul and the other missionaries exhibited as they preached the gospel to the Thessalonians. This display of righteous living was of such a nature that the converts took it as a sure authentication of the gospel message.

Paul now brings his witness to a close by noting their witness about him and his fellow missionaries. “You know,” he says, “what kind of people we were among you for your sake.” Paul’s point is that the Thessalonians have the same commensurate and sure knowledge about the missionaries—and thus their message—as the missionaries have about them. It is based on the converts’ dealings with the missionaries. In every aspect of their associations, the conduct of these preachers of the gospel has been sterling and selfless, leaving these people with an absolute and unquestionable witness to the authenticity of the gospel message they brought.

1:6–7

In 1 Thessalonians 1:6–7, Paul returns to praising these people. His purpose in doing so at this point appears to be to put down a positive foundation so that they will neither misread his upcoming and somewhat pointed counsel nor reject it.

That Paul wants his audience to imitate him suggests that he sees himself as a kind of mediator between the convert and Christ. In short, “his life provided the model of a Christ-like life for those who had no first-hand knowledge of Christ” and so gives them a realistic and doable model to follow.⁵

In these verses, Paul only hints at the troubles their conversion caused these early Saints, but it was not inconsiderable. It arose due largely to the success that the missionaries had in the area. Initially, Paul and his companion began their evangelical work among the Jews. For the space of nearly a month, they used the synagogue as the platform for preaching about Jesus and proclaiming Him to be the long-awaited Messiah. Paul also taught his hearers about Christ’s Atonement and the Resurrection. The center of his teaching, on the surface, resonated well with ideas held by the Pharisees, and his testimony struck a chord among a number of the congregants including both Jews, proselytes, and God-fearers. Quite taken with the gospel, one of the Jewish members, Jason, had the missionaries stay with him, and it is likely that his house became a meeting place.

Unfortunately, the popularity of the doctrine these men taught caused extreme jealousy among a faction of the Jews. Seeing the inroads the missionaries were making and fearing they would take more people away from the synagogue and its teachings, this group resorted to mob action. Worked up into a near frenzy, the mob assailed Jason’s residence. When they did not find the missionaries there, they hauled Jason and some other locals before the magistrates. Jason and his fellow believers assisted the missionaries in slipping out of the city undetected. Paul and Silas merely moved on to Berea, where they were again able to preach with much success (Acts 17:1–12). Meanwhile, the Thessalonian members had to put up with the fallout. Over time, persecution was enhanced as local pagans joined the Jews against them (2 Thessalonians 2:14).

In 1 Thessalonians 1:7, Paul notes the wide influence this branch was having due to their faithfulness in the face of affliction. They have become a pattern or type to other Saints in an area larger than two Roman provinces. The Apostle’s reference to their faithfulness, however, is not to any particular feature but to the whole pattern of their lives. Like Paul and the Lord, they have remained faithful to their mission in spite of the cost.

The word Paul used, *τύπος* (*typos*), meaning literally “type or pattern,” does not denote an action to be copied but denotes the kind of mold used to make an impression. Examples would be the signet that impresses a symbol into a wax seal on an envelope that validates its contents and to an iron stamp that puts a design on a metal blank, thus turning it into a legitimate coin. The word, however, had an even more insightful nuance. It came to denote a condition wherein the characteristics of the original were so fully bestowed on the recipient that the two could not be distinguished. The theological implications of this idea are breathtaking. The Spirit, acting as the stamping agent, imprints the image of Christ on those who will fully accept Him. In this way, they become like Him and thereby receive all that He has.⁶ In this sense, Paul is using himself as one who has been molded by Christ so that he can then be a mold for others. Because the Thessalonian

Saints have allowed such molding to happen to them, they have now also become such a mold. What is more, they are shaping others even as they continue to experience rather acute duress.

1:8–10

The material found in 1 Thessalonians 1:8–10 reveals much about the doctrines the missionaries taught that so resonated with many of those who would listen that they were willing to forsake their old life and embrace a new one even though it cost them much in social standing and acceptance. Though Paul clearly states that these converts responded to “the word of the Lord,” he does not say anything about its content. Even so, these verses reveal some portions of it. On this subject, it is helpful to keep in mind that Paul is writing from Corinth, where he is actively setting up yet another branch of the Church. In his later epistles to this branch, we see a number of doctrines delineated, some of which likely formed part of Paul’s teaching to the Thessalonians.

Paul’s statement in 1:8 gives evidence to the ever-widening spread of the gospel. Not only had it reached the two Roman provinces of Macedonia and Achaëa but it also went well beyond them. His words show that the reputation of the Thessalonians had also moved concurrently and did so with such fullness that the missionaries could add nothing to it. Though it is possible that the Apostle is using some hyperbole here, it seems very likely from other statements about the Macedonian Saints in general that it is close to the truth.⁷ These Saints’ model for faithfulness under duress would have been particularly appreciated by those who were not experiencing persecution but could relate to the threat.

In 1:9, Paul continues his focus on the Thessalonians’ warm reception of the gospel. In this verse, he notes how fully they accepted the missionaries. But for our purposes, the real insight comes from his statement about what they did because of it. Paul contrasts his converts’ preconversion life, in which they followed idols, to their new one, in which they serve “the true and living God” and “await the Son from heaven.” His statement is important because it evidences that the salvific nature of the Lord’s death, Resurrection, and exaltation as God’s Son and the promise that He would rescue His Saints “from the coming wrath” was understood by the Christian community very early in the Church’s history.

Paul’s language proposes that the majority of the recipients of the letter were Gentiles. The implications are telling. Because of the gospel, they both turned and were turned from false worship to true. The act of conversion was very different for a Gentile than a Jew. For a Jew, conversion was a matter of refocusing from the law to Christ, but much of the theological framework remained intact. For a Gentile, the step was much greater. For them, accepting Christianity required an entire and rather severe reorientation of their understanding of the nature of the cosmos and the role deity played therein. It also forced them to accept the implications of the mortality of Christ as it was manifest in the nature of His ministry, death, and Resurrection.

In 1:9–10, in addition to giving us a glimpse at the core doctrines that the missionaries taught, as noted above, we also see the evangelical strategy they used to make converts. The missionaries’ first objective

was to convince the hearers that idols were nothing and that they should follow the way of the only real and trustworthy God.

Paul's central emphasis is, surprisingly, not on the work of the Son but on nature of the Father. In this epistle, God is mentioned three times more often than Jesus either by name or title. The Apostle's emphasis, however, is exactly where he wants it. He in no way takes anything away from the Son, whom he brings into the picture in the paragraph's last clause. But it is the fact of the Father's existence as the only real and living God that is the core of the Apostle's preachment. If the Father is all that Paul witnesses, then worshipping and following any other being is at best foolish and at worst fatal. Further, the reality of Jesus as Messiah and Son and the necessary work that He accomplished only works if His Father is God. Though both have vital parts to play, it is the role of the Father that is paramount, for all power emanates from Him. Conversion must express itself in the acceptance of and the obedience to the Father as the one and only supreme God.

The missionaries' second objective was to have the people accept Jesus as the Son of God, as particularly expressed in His death, Resurrection and exaltation. Their last objective was to convince their hearers that Jesus was about to return, bringing judgment upon all—reward to the righteous and punishment to the wicked.

In sum, these verses reveal that the proclamation of the gospel included the promise of the Lord's return as the culmination of the events growing out of the Atonement and the Resurrection. But it was not the return alone that appealed to these people but the promise that through Christ they could avoid the wrath that God would mete out against those who rejected His ways and fought against His people.

By stressing a hope in the Resurrection coupled with a fear of the godly wrath that would accompany it, Paul ably instilled three things in his audience: a resolute faithfulness, a heightened motivation for correct behavior, and a determination to spread the word. In this way, he greatly contributed to the lasting stay of the movement.

1 Thessalonians 2

2:1

In 1 Thessalonians 2:1 Paul puts his stress on the unique position of his audience as special witnesses to the realities of his ministry and his teachings. By calling upon them as such, he accomplishes two tasks. First, he shows his full confidence in them as being fully converted to the Lord and, thus, able to distinguish truth from error. Second, it places his solid reputation on facts that his audience could fully support because they were actual witnesses to how he and his companions operated. No one who knew these facts could disparage the missionaries in their work or their word.

Here he stresses that his work among them was not in vain. He is contrasting his method of preaching against the professional rhetors who made great displays of their eloquence but really had nothing of substance to say. Many among the educated branded this style of declamation as empty.

2:2

In 1 Thessalonians 2:2, though they were well aware of it, Paul reviewed for his audience his maltreatment in Philippi. There were very few Jews in Philippi, and therefore the city boasted no synagogue. Paul sought out those who were there and in process met the wealthy Jew Lydia. She was converted to the gospel and led the way for her entire household (including servants) to enter into the Christian Church. Thus, they became the first known Christian congregation in all Europe.

Paul's message, as elsewhere, attracted quite a number of people, many of whom became converts. Satan, however, tried to hinder his work (see Acts 16).

It is in light of the uncalled-for severity of their punishment that Paul brings the matter to the attention of the Thessalonian Saints. Despite the missionaries' previous abuse, they did not stop preaching boldly and freely soon after they arrived in the city. The reason they did so, the Apostle emphasizes, is because God, not circumstances, stood behind their bold behavior.

Thus, though opposition followed Paul into Thessalonica, forcing him to preach "in spite of strong opposition," he was unimpeded. The word he chose (*ἄγων*, *agōn*, literally "much a contest or conflict") denotes not a tepid struggle or token opposition but the essence of battle. Through its use, Paul declaims what is necessary in fighting the good fight—an all-out effort (see also 1 Timothy 6:12; 2 Timothy 4:7). He is also able to point out that anyone knowing the adverse conditions under which he and Silas operated could not seriously claim they did so out of impure motive.

The Apostle calls what he so fearlessly proclaimed "the gospel of God." The phrase allowed him to emphasize the theocentric core of his preaching.⁸ Even though Paul's good news centers on the Atonement of Christ and His Resurrection and earthly return, the Apostle gives preeminence to the Father. He, after all, is the one who set the whole process in motion and whose power made the resurrection possible. Paul never lets his readers forget the initiatory and continual role God plays in the salvation process. The focus of their preaching, therefore, can be neither on themselves, the Thessalonian Saints, nor, interestingly, on Christ nor the work of the Spirit. It is on the initiative of God in reaching out to these people that they have become one with Him and now enjoy His redeeming power. The missionaries' preaching is, therefore, not just about God but comes from God.

2:3–6

In 1 Thessalonians 2:3–6, Paul gives us a glimpse into the social conditions that he and his fellow preachers bucked against and thereby used to gain a great deal of cachet with those who were attracted to their preaching. At the time, some areas of Greece were plagued by charlatans who made their way from city to city peddling their philosophical or religious nostrums and living, for as long as possible, off the donations of whomever they could bilk. Given that, it is possible that some detractors claimed that Paul and Silas were no more than another class of these vagrant preachers. Whether Paul is objecting to actual

charges made against him and Silas or addressing standard stereotypical claims is unknown, but his need for self-defense points to the seriousness of the charges.

During their ministry in Thessalonica, Paul and Silas very carefully and deliberately set themselves apart from the fraudsters working in the area by giving generously of their time and means while refusing any assistance. In 2:3, Paul reminds his audience of that fact. By contrasting his *modus operandi* with that of the orators and perhaps philosophers, he is able to stress that where these others were motivated by greed or praise, he and his fellow missionary are not. Further, unlike the usual pack of rhetors, he uses neither flattery nor deception but is transparent in all that he does.

Next, the Apostle addresses the spiteful view that the missionaries' appeal was animated by corrupt motive. He denies three charges that were either made or could possibly be made against them. The first was that their message was based on error (*πλάνη, planē*) due to their being misled at some earlier point. The second was that they were motivated by impure and even despicable intent (*ἀκαθαρσία, akatharsia*). The final accusation was that they used guile or trickery (*δόλος, dolos*) to gain an audience.

In 2:4, Paul continues to defend Silas and himself. He bases his defense on God's call and invitation as an appeal to faith in the preacher that is grounded in God's prior act through which He has and does reach out to people. The invitation is, therefore, insuperably connected to the good news of what God has already done and what He continues or intends to do. The crux of Paul's defense is that all this depends on the worthiness of those whom God has assigned to declare it.

Not surprisingly, then, Paul focuses on God's attitude toward the missionaries. The divine has found them worthy to be entrusted with His word, and on that basis they were commissioned to preach it. They act according to their God-given responsibility and authority with no attempt to pander to their hearers.

To seal his point, Paul makes one more very important observation. God has tested him and Silas in every aspect of their being and continues to find them fit because their focus ever remains exclusively on Him and His message. Paul's observation brings out an interesting if tacit insight; God is not a gentle, soft, tractable being who acts leniently toward both sin and sinner. On the contrary, He is one who thoroughly tests those with whom He entrusts His gospel and whom He holds fully accountable for what they do (see also 1 Corinthians 9:16).

In 2:5–6 Paul continues his defense but shifts his thrust in order to set the missionaries apart from the local hucksters. He does so by noting three negative qualifications that define what they are not (and by implication, what the others are). First, he is not guilty of dealing out the flattery and empty praise (*κολακεία, kolakeia*) that some shamelessly use to manipulate their audience to their own ends, often in order to make a living off the generosity of the easily persuaded. Admittedly, he is at this point praising his audience, but it is for God's ends, not his own. Further, the missionaries may have received some acclaim, and they definitely deserved it, but they were not guilty of seeking it. Second, they are not guilty of evil motive spawned by greed (*πλεονεξία, pleonexia*), the noun pointing to a desire for material possessions well beyond one's need. This was a vice that motivated many in Luke's narrative of Acts. Finally,

they are not guilty of seeking glory or fame from anyone, a commodity of high value in this honor- and shame-based culture and, thus, a point Paul needs to stress lest his motives be misread. Instead, as he points out, he labors with his own hands so as not to burden anyone.

Paul now focuses on his love for the people and its result. He begins in 2:7 by noting that though he and Silas held the station of Apostle, they did not take advantage of it. This is the only place in the letter where Paul uses the term *ἀπόστολος* (*apostolos*), “apostle.” He does so in such a way as to include Silas. The term in secular Greek denoted any messenger or delegate acting far away under the authority of another. Its broad range of referents therefore included every position from a mere debt collector to an august ambassador. The text suggests that Jesus used it on the basis of its secular meaning as the messenger of God the Father but gave it an enhanced cast (Luke 6:13; John 15:16). For Him, it denoted persons set apart with extraordinary power to carry out explicit responsibilities. The Twelve were God’s messengers specifically ordained to travel far and wide, bear witness of Him, and assist Him in carrying out His ministry (see Matthew 28:19–20; Doctrine and Covenants 107:23–24).

2:7

In 1 Thessalonians 2:7, Paul stresses that despite the missionaries’ title and the privileges that came with it, they made no demands. On the contrary, they were gentle and kind. His imagery points to the nursery and the loving attitude of those women who caringly attend to the needs of little children. The word especially connotes the strong feelings of a nursing mother whose deep love and willingness to sacrifice for her little ones is legendary. Many in Paul’s target audience would view the maternal, nurturing dimension of womanhood in an extremely positive light, providing an example of ideal womanhood. The imagery, however, conveys more than gentleness; it includes the idea of protection. Thus, the Apostle may have used the image to also invoke his protective care for these, his dear friends.

2:8–9

With 1 Thessalonians 2:8–9, Paul focuses on what motivated him as an Apostle not only to give up privilege of support but also to work for his own sustenance. It is because he loves these Saints so much that he not only did not want to take what he did not need but also wanted to impart all that he could.

It is to emphasize this last point that Paul asks the Thessalonians to remember how he and Silas gave their time and effort in sustaining themselves so as not to be a financial burden on anyone. Though many of the upper-class Gentiles despised manual labor and those who had to do such work, the Jews felt otherwise. Even the revered rabbis had to earn their living, for being paid for teaching was against their law. Therefore, a well-rounded life consisted of both spiritual and physical labor. Paul and Silas were following this ancient protocol and apparently it did them little harm, even in this gentile city.

Paul’s undertaking played an important role in his ministry not only in this city but everywhere he proselytized. It did so by furthering his efforts in several ways. Among them were (1) preventing people

from being converted who feared it might demand a considerable financial sacrifice on their part, (2) promoting an understanding of the self-sacrifice and love that being a follower of Jesus demanded, (3) reinforcing the idea that the missionaries were working not for self-interest or financial gain at the convert's expense but for the people's spiritual and temporal good, and most importantly, (4) keeping Paul free from any obligation to or undue pressure by persons contributing to his care.

The Apostle does not say what his work was, but according to his statement in 1 Corinthians 4:12, he was a skilled manual laborer. Acts 18:3 informs us that he was an artisan, working primarily with leather and wool products. The words he used to describe his efforts, *κόπος* (*koros*) and *μόχθος* (*mochthos*), stress both the discomfort and difficulty of the missionaries' daily toil. Together the words underscore that the missionaries' work was not some mere token effort meant primarily for show. Though it took skill to do what they did, such work did not pay well, thus demanding long hours to make a living. That being the case, Paul's words should be taken seriously; the missionaries put a lot of time and effort into taking care of themselves.

The Apostle continues to emphasize this point with the phrase "night and day." The words portray the normal workday of a manual laborer—that is, from sunup to sundown. In Paul's case, however, he could be noting that he began work before sunrise so that he would have time for preaching in the afternoon or evening.

To reiterate for emphasis, Paul's point is that the missionaries' willingness to engage in such strenuous work when they could have legitimately had it otherwise gives strong evidence of their love for these Saints.

So dear to Paul are the members of his audience that he calls them his "beloved" (*ἀγαπητοί, agapētoi*). The strong, if not overwhelming, love that these missionaries felt propelled them to give one more important item: their very souls (*ψυχή, psychē*). The image he chooses represents the whole of their lives, including their time and energy as well as the depth of their feelings.

2:10–12

In 1 Thessalonians 2:10–12, Paul continues his defense by stressing the very publicly known and sterling behavior of the missionaries while working in Thessalonica and listing the virtues that stood behind their actions. In 2:10, he confidently calls both the Saints and God as witness to the conduct of the team. By invoking deity as a witness, Paul heightens the truthfulness of his point while giving it a solemn tone. Paul could be defending himself and Silas from direct attacks then being leveled against them, but it seems more likely that he is using his activities as an example of how the Saints should act on the basis of the missionaries' own behavior.

In 2:10, he singles out three virtuous ways they acted. The first, "devoutly" (*ὁσίως, hosiōs*), points to an individual who "is generally devoted to God's service"; the second, "uprightly" (*δικαίως, dikaiōs*), points to an individual "who has reached a certain standard of righteousness"; and the third, "blamelessly" (*ἀμέμπτως, amēptōs*), points to a person who "in light of a given norm is without reproach." The combination meets the full corpus of both divine and human standards of correct behavior.

These attributes would have not only met Christian standards but also resonated with many people in pagan culture. There the act of devotion expressed in proper conduct, according to societal mores, maintained the balance between the human and divine worlds.

By exhibiting these high standards, the missionaries' activities should have brought no censure on members of the nascent Church by their non-Christian neighbors.

With 2:11, Paul indicates how individualized the missionaries' work was as they responded to each and every person. His words also suggest that he and Silas preached primarily to individuals rather than to groups, though public speaking and even meetings in members houses cannot be ruled out.

To emphasize the care he and Silas took, in 2:11 the Apostle introduces new imagery—that of a father with his children. Paul earlier cast himself as a caring mother to stress the tenderness he felt toward his converts (2:7). The change of images allows him to stress a different point. In Greco-Roman society, the mother was normally responsible for nurturing the children, while the father was primarily responsible for their moral instruction as well as their social behavior (compare 1 Corinthians 4:14). Further, in middle- and upper-class society, it was a father's responsibility to socialize them such that they comfortably fit into the economic strata and follow the cultural mores of their station. Through taking on this image, Paul reveals much about his understanding of his relationship with the converts within Christ's new covenant.

The Apostle's words suggest he sensed that the new converts had needs in this regard, and of necessity, he took the task of meeting them. He had to resocialize them into a very different order than the one they grew up in. The new one had distinctive beliefs about God with the added role played by Jesus, introduced new ethical and moral values, and presented an essentially different view of social structure with its interpersonal relationships. The heavy task the missionaries had taken upon themselves encompassed not only the destruction of old understandings, behaviors, and social and religious practices but also paved the way into the new social and highly spiritual order. To hold these new Saints, the new order had to have deeply personal as well as social meaning and give them direction and hope. Further, it had to do so in such a way that they would resist the temptation of leaving it due to heavy social opposition to their new lifestyle.

In addition to revealing the role and responsibility that Paul and Silas assigned themselves, Paul's metaphor also shows his understanding of his relationship to the converts. It is hierarchal and one in which the Apostle holds a loving but superordinate position. As such, he expects his "children" to respond to his requests, instructions, and yes, even demands, as children do with their earthly fathers. He, with Silas, fulfilled this role in large part, as he notes in 2:11–12, through both imploring and encouraging the Saints to walk worthily before God.

The high standard of behavior Paul exhorts his converts to emulate was but a proper response to God's continual offer of salvation. Even now, He calls them to share in His kingdom and glory, and even though they must wait to receive its fullness, they can and are receiving many of its benefits. Thus, there is a commensurate connection between call and response, giving the Saints a dynamic rather than a static answer to God's outreach. Paul shows that the converts cannot ignore the commandments of the Lord

to be faithful within Christ's new covenant. For him, living the spirit of Christian teachings also means walking in them, the figure of speech stressing the need to apply gospel principles to the whole of one's lives (Galatians 5:25). Only in this way can the Saints "walk worthily of God."

The noun *δόξα* (*doxa*), "glory," in early and secular Greek denoted "reputation, renown" and eventually "honor, fame," all the nuances dealing with one's position in society. Under the direction of the Savior, Christians were not to seek the honors of men no matter how appealing (John 5:41; 8:50). In both his life and teachings, Paul reinforces this idea (1 Thessalonians 2:6; 2 Corinthians 8:8–21). He taught that the Saints were to seek the glory of God and thereby gain eternal life (Romans 2:7, 10; 5:2). In doing so, they would take on this divine quality.

The religious element in pagan society built on the ideal of supreme worth as expressed in the idea of glory and expanded it to include the nature of the deities. From there it took on the purely spiritual nuance of their visual manifestation in "light, glory, radiance, splendor." The Septuagint picked up this physical distinction and coupled it with manifestations of the power associated with Jehovah. Through this source, "the glory of God" connoted not only God's fame and might but also the whole of His divine nature, including a light-filled body. But such glory was not the domain of God alone. Indeed, He could share it not only with angels but also with mortals. In all cases, it evidenced the presence of the power of God dwelling in its recipients.

The missionaries' objective in all their admonishing, pleading, and teaching was for the faithful converts to catch the vision of God's call with its promise of a glorious and celestial resurrection, eternal glory, and exaltation. That imagery hinted that the ultimate reward was *theosis*—that is, becoming fully as God. Such a vision and the hope it engendered would have undoubtedly strengthened these righteous but persecuted people.

2:13–14

In 1 Thessalonians 2:13–14, Paul asks his readers to link themselves, through their experience, to the Church in Judea, who are also "in Christ Jesus." Though there were other congregations much closer geographically and culturally to Thessalonica, the Apostle reaches across these in an attempt to unite his converts to the Palestinian Christian Jews as coreligionists. In that way, the western Saints would identify with the greater cause of Jesus and bind themselves to a larger organization and identity. In the process they would find, on the one hand, strength to resist falling away and, on the other, a determination to promote God's kingdom.

In 2:13, Paul expresses his delight in the kind welcome (*εἰσοδος*, *eisodos*) the missionaries had received during their initial visit. He states his special appreciation for how the converts perceived them; that is, not just as welcome visitors but as true representatives of God.

Having expressed his delight with these people, he switches his focus to the Thessalonians themselves. They, having recognized it as the word of God, accepted it without reservation and endured the almost

instant opposition and oppression it brought upon them. In this way, they stood with their Judean counterparts, who also had to endure harassment and ostracism.

Paul's pleasure with and thanksgiving for these people is because of their endurance of public censure and, specifically, the reason behind that endurance. They understood that the message did not originate with mortals (including the missionaries), nor was it about God. Rather they accepted it because its source was God. For these Saints, though the missionaries were the immediate source of the message, these men, in fact, were no more than intermediaries in proclaiming the truths that God had given to them and that made the message both authentic and very attractive. Their strength came because God was active, involved, and reaching out to people. In sum, these Saints' earnest response was no mere acknowledgement of the theological correctness of the doctrines but was the wholehearted investment of the fullness of their entire lives in it. So sure were they in the source of the word—and therefore its promises—that persecution could not drive them away.

In 2:14, the Apostle introduces a major feature of his personal ethic: the Christian life follows or imitates (*μιμητής, mimētēs*) that of the Savior. As examples, Paul lists not just the missionaries but also the earliest converts to the Christian movement: the Judean Saints. To these, he now links his own faithful converts. They, too, suffer the same thing from their countrymen as the Jewish Christians have from theirs.

His words here suggest that he sees himself with the Saints as experiencing prophecy being fulfilled (see Matthew 10:16–18; 23:31–36). One of these conditions, and an important one, is that persecution is the lot of the Saints and will be to the end time. The Apostle accepts the traditional understanding of the kingdom's future and interprets events and conditions through that lens.

2:15

In 2:15, Paul integrates his subject matter through the theme of the persecution of the prophets. His point is based on the fact that the prophetic proclamation of God's word has always generated both faith and opposition. His gratitude lies in the Thessalonians' acceptance of the gospel despite having to suffer because of it. As a result, they have lined up with their fellow Judean Saints who have suffered at the hands of the Jewish leadership. This situation evokes from Paul a stern denunciation echoing that of the biblical prophets upon those who opposed their work. In the process, he underscores the biblical message that suffering for righteousness's sake is the unalterable pattern for the course of believers. In following this path, the Thessalonians have joined a noble and God-blessed company. One of Paul's goals is uniting the Gentile and Jewish branches of the Church. As a result, he points his converts to that far-off branch as having historical primacy and with whom they should be doctrinally in agreement. Paul unites the two parties by noting both are fellow sufferers and follow the path of Old Testament prophets and the Lord Himself.

The Apostle, however, does not take their persecution and suffering philosophically. His anger at the heinous crime that certain Jews did to the Lord and continue to do to His people reveals itself in the strong language he uses in this sentence. Indeed, he speaks with uncharacteristic vehemence against the Jews

for killing Jesus and their own prophets and for their continued persecution of the Christians. Though some modern scholars have taken his strong words to suggest an antisemitic streak in the Apostle, a close reading of the text shows that his spleen is vented not at Jews in general (with whom he actually personally identifies; see, for example, Romans 9:1–3) but only at that rebellious faction who had plotted against and killed Jesus and persecuted His covenant people.

2:17–20

Paul begins the last section of the pericope with a statement of how hard it was for him and the other missionaries to be forcefully separated (*ἀπορφανισθέντες*, *aporphanisthentes*) from these beloved converts. There is good reason why he must emphasize his deep feelings for these Saints. It is so that he can fulfill a major purpose of writing this epistle—to correct some misunderstanding among them. This he will do in the next chapter. By making sure his audience understands how much they mean to him and Silas, his mild reproach will be seen in its proper light and accepted. The imagery he uses here, though rendered as “separated,” also refers to being orphaned. The verb carries all the pathos and anguish expressed by the English word and exactly captures the Apostle’s painful feelings in having been driven away from these highly esteemed Saints.

He assures them that this separation in no way softened his feelings for them—indeed, it only made the people spiritually stronger. He shifts mid-sentence from focusing on the feelings of missionaries as a whole to his personal feelings, emphasizing the particular nature of his yearnings to see these people again.

He explains that he and his fellow workers had not returned, despite efforts to do so, because of the adversary, thus tacitly suggesting that the devil himself is behind the suffering all felt and hinting at the work’s importance. Though Paul fully believes that all Christians, “including himself, must make their own decisions and accept responsibility for them,” they are not, however, made in neutral territory “but always under the pressures of a struggle in which the power of God and the demonic powers of Satan are operative.”⁹

Paul’s rhetorical question and answer found in 1 Thessalonians 2:19–20 reveal the depth of his feelings toward these people. He assures them that they are the seat of his hope in the enduring nature of the gospel, the source of his joy due to their faith and strength, and the “wreath of rejoicing” that is the quintessential sign of his fulfilling the assignment the Lord personally gave him as being *the* missionary to the Gentiles (Acts 13:47) and gaining full victory, just as the laurel wreath denoted the winner in an athletic contest that proved himself or herself master of the skill. But for Paul, the celebration is not because the winner has beaten everyone else but because she or he has successfully finished the race. It is on this that both his joy and hope are based (compare Philippians 4:1).

In this statement and his expanded note in 1 Thessalonians 4:14–17, Paul introduces the term *παρουσία* (*parousia*), “coming, advent,” from which the English word *Parousia* is derived. In the present context, the Apostle uses the term in a special sense to denote what Christians commonly call the Second Coming. This, however, is a misnomer since no early Christian ever referred to the Savior’s mortal ministry as his first Parousia. The idea would have been foreign to them since the noun connoted grandness, honor, success,

triumph, and celebration. The earliest converts viewed the Lord's earthly ministry, though ending in tremendous victory due to the Resurrection, as filled with sorrow, suffering, discouragement, and in the end, an ignominious death (for example, see Philippians 2:6–9). This was a far cry from the general nuance of the term in the Hellenistic world, where the emphasis was on the grand visit of either a high official or imperial ruler accompanied by full pomp and circumstance. In its religious context, it denoted the visit of a god or goddess to their cultic followers with blessing flowing. This imagery, with all its glory, renown, splendor, and promise of reward fully matched what the Christians viewed as major parts of the Christ's future advent—His Parousia when all would be required to give Him honor and glory and submit to His will (compare Philippians 2:10–11; 1 Corinthians 15:23–28).

In 1 Thessalonians 2:20, Paul answers the question he posed in 2:19 concerning his hope, glory, and crown. He asks, “Is it not you?” and answers in the affirmative, paraphrasing, “You are because you are our glory and our joy.” In today's vernacular, his thought is that they brought him much credit.

With his last two verses, the Apostle links his full confidence and feelings of joy and pride in these early Saints with the full expectation of the coming of the Lord and for what it would mean to both him and them. For them, it would mean the full vindication of their faith and the reception of the eternal reward. For him, their rebounding faith would be the seat of his personal honor and glory because they vindicate his calling and work as the Apostle to the Gentiles. Had they failed, it would also mean he had failed (3:5). He likely meant this admission as a means of encouraging these converts to remain faithful to him as their Apostle and especially to Christ as their Savior.

1 Thessalonians 3

3:1

Paul's statement in 1 Thessalonians 3:1 adds material to his second mission that is not found in Luke's account. According to Acts 17:14, Paul came to Athens alone, leaving both Silas and Timothy in Berea. During his missionary work in this city, he sent for his two companions (Acts 17:15). Before they arrived, however, he had moved on to Corinth, and it was there that the three were united (Acts 18:1). This passage shows that at least Timothy, if not also Silas, had met Paul in Athens and that it was from there that the Apostle dispatched Timothy back to Thessalonica. Luke likely did not include this item since it was not important to the story he was telling. It was, however, important to Paul so that the Thessalonian Saints would understand his feelings and motives, and therefore, he included this brief point of history.

Paul's note that he decided to be left alone in Athens carries some pathos. Paul avoided personal loneliness whenever he could, always rejoicing among and finding, as he did, energy in Christian fellowship. The heavily intellectual atmosphere in the ancient capital of Greece likely stifled any feelings of welcome, friendship, or acceptance by the inhabitants. It is easy to see why he would not relish having to work by himself in this environment.

3:2

In 1 Thessalonians 3:2, Paul accomplishes two tasks. First, he either establishes or reinforces Timothy's credentials. The biblical text does not mention Timothy playing any role in the events at Philippi or Thessalonica (Acts 17:1–13). His first mention in the Macedonian ministry is in Berea, where he and Silas continued to minister after Paul left for Athens (Acts 17:14.). If he was not with Paul at Thessalonica, then the Apostle is establishing Timothy's authority to act. Otherwise, he is reinforcing it.

Paul assures his audience that his coworker is a brother in the faith and, more importantly, that Timothy is "God's fellow-worker in the gospel of Christ." This phrasing is striking because it links the missionary directly to God—not to Paul. Paul repeats this idea of a partnership between the One who calls and the one called in some of his later epistles (see 1 Corinthians 3:9; 2 Corinthians 6:1). In doing so, he reveals his understanding that the ministry is a cooperative venture that partners God and his servant. Paul's audience would have likely understood that Timothy had divine authority to do as instructed.

The second task that Paul completes is expressly stating of what Timothy's mission consists: he is, through his authority, admonition, and witness, to encourage these Saints by buttressing their faith in the Lord.

Concerning the purpose of Timothy's mission, it does not seem to rest on countering heresy. Paul does not seem overly worried about the orthodoxy of these Saints. Deviation from his teachings does not seem to be a problem among them, though there is obviously some misunderstanding of points of doctrine. Therefore, part of Timothy's job and that of this epistle is to increase these converts' understanding of both their role and that of Christ in the salvation process. His biggest task, however, is to see if external forces, which may have in some cases expressed themselves in violence, pressured some to withdraw completely from Church activity or to keep a low profile. For the Apostle, true faith will not allow the Saints to withdraw into themselves by creating some kind of private spirituality. Faith, as faith, must be public, active, and demonstrate faithful discipleship.

3:3–4

In 1 Thessalonians 3:3–4, Paul addresses the issue of the Saints having to go through trials and persecution. He fully recognizes, as do they, that their troubles go beyond that which is the common lot of humankind living in a less-than-kind and too often dangerous world. Their difficulties are an addition peculiar to living in a pagan society with its very different set of values.

The Apostle wants his converts to understand that the situation they are in is not unexpected, strange, or arbitrary. In fact, what they are experiencing is a necessary part of the unfolding plan of God in bringing about his divine purposes on the earth. Though the suffering will eventually end in vindication, glory, and reward, for the present, it is an unfortunate necessity that the righteous must endure. Because of social and religious circumstances, persecution is inherent in the Christian life and will be until the end. This difficult condition does serve a divine purpose. It develops those qualities of character that make these refined individuals invaluable in God's work (see, for example, 2 Corinthians 1:4). Therefore,

though at times hard to endure, opposition should not be regarded as either monstrous or alien. Because God allows it, there is always an attribute to be gained or a lesson to be learned. A further upside is that opposition from the world confirms that these Saints are among those who are the elect of God and furthering His cause.

The last part of 1 Thessalonians 3:3 and all of 3:4 constitute a digression in which Paul stresses that there should be nothing surprising about their current circumstance. Note that he switches from the first-person plural to the first-person singular at this point in order to emphasize his personal participation in this condition.

Paul's words emphasize the point he has already made concerning the certainty of affliction. The Saints' current condition, the Apostle states, shows that his words were not empty sounds, for in very deed, his predictions have come fully to pass. He even hints that their suffering had come by divine appointment.

3:5

In 1 Thessalonians 3:5, Paul returns to the subject that he began in 3:1–2, explaining why he sent Timothy to visit and instruct these converts. That is the reason for the amount of repetition found here. His primary purpose was to see how the Saints were weathering the storm of opposition, but his secondary purpose was to ascertain the depth of their faithfulness.

It was not just to external pressures that Paul feared the Saints might fold but also to the malicious work of the tempter. As evidenced in his statement to the Corinthians, the Apostle is well aware that Satan is hell-bent on destroying the Church.¹⁰ In the general apocalyptic view of this age, the powers of evil have become both concentrated and intensified because they clearly understand their time is short (see Matthew 8:29; Revelation 12:12). Paul reveals the adversary's work by calling him "the god of this age" who "has blinded the minds of unbelievers." He has done so, Paul states, to keep the people from accepting the gospel of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:4; compare 2 Thessalonians 2:9–12).

As Paul lays out his apocalyptic theology, he views Satan as usurping God's power. In doing so, he has become the ruler of this period of earth's history. His rule, however, will not last, for his reign God will overthrow at His coming. Tacitly Paul also demonizes those who are afflicting his converts by making them the mortal agents of Satan's temptations. The result, as the Apostle likely wanted, further separated the new and struggling Saints from the world from which they had removed themselves and bound them more fully to God's newly established community.

3:6

At this point, the letter's tone changes from concern and worry to reassurance and hope. With this abrupt change in tone, Paul is able to enhance the depth of his worry with the height of his relief that Timothy's report had now brought him.

He begins by expressing his delight with Timothy's report that the Saints not only have stood firm in their faith but have also made progress therein. So thrilled is he that shortly after the missionary's arrival, he dictated this letter to express his love and appreciation for the wonder of his converts' faith.

Given the content of the rest of the letter, however, it would appear that Timothy reported on problems and issues that Paul needed to address. Even so, that Paul describes Timothy's message as "the good news" is telling. The New Testament, with but few exceptions, uses the Greek verb *εὐαγγελίζω* (*euangelizō*) in the sense of the "good news of salvation through Christ." As a result, the word carries the nuance of the best possible kind of news. It may be that color that caused Paul to use it to communicate how deep his delight was about the missionary's report.

In this verse, Paul enumerates three points. The first consists of his concern that the Thessalonians' faith may not have held up against the strong resistance they were facing (1 Thessalonians 3:2, 5). He knew personally the courage it took to remain faithful to the Lord, and therefore, he was much relieved to find that they had not wavered in their devotion to God.

The second looks to their love toward those around them. For Paul, love was no mere human emotion but a feeling that revealed itself in action (Romans 13:9–10). For him, that which has power and meaning "in Christ is faith working through love" (Galatians 5:6). Such love expresses itself in service and in acting, not reacting, to what others do (see 1 Thessalonians 1:3). He was delighted at how well these people had executed this high and difficult requirement.

The third centers on their attitude toward Paul himself. Their affection for him could have been damaged in any number of ways. One reason could have been the necessity of his quick departure from their city. His premature and forced exit could have left the newly formed congregation ill prepared for what followed. Another could be that they were caught off guard, thinking all would be well with them. Unfortunately, the good news turned into bad news as opposition arose. The third is that these Saints may have felt deep disappointment, even resentment, when Paul did not return right away to spiritually nurture them.

3:7

In 1 Thessalonians 3:7, the Apostle identifies the situation in which he has found himself since his forced departure from these beloved converts. It consists of both distress (*ἀνάγκη*, *anankē*) and tribulation (*θλίψις*, *thlipsis*), the former connoting unpleasant internal pressure and the latter connoting difficult external pressure. Timothy's positive report, more especially that which focused on the Saints' continual faithfulness, has proven to be a source of personal encouragement to Paul. The paucity of the historical record leaves no trace as to just what pressures Paul was going through at the time. No doubt much was psychological, but given the list of Paul's trials in 2 Corinthians 11:23–28, there is plenty of room for unpleasant external forces and events to be at play during this time. Ironically, Paul sent Timothy to encourage these early Saints in their affliction (1 Thessalonians 3:2), and they ended up encouraging the Apostle in his.

3:8

Paul explains just how the Saints encouraged him in 1 Thessalonians 3:8. He uses the imagery of quality of life and the necessity of the actions of these converts in connection to his own. What gave his life meaning, strengthened him, and made him rejoice was that these Saints remained ever true to their belief in the gospel.

But another aspect of Paul's intent here must not be overlooked. It is admittedly tacit, but it still plays a very important role. Further, it works because of the love and respect these people continue to have for Paul. He is seeking to encourage them by linking their persevering (*στήκετε*, *stēkete*) "in the Lord" to his own life-giving effort (compare Philippians 4:1). By this means, he imputes greater meaning to their own convictions and efforts in righteousness.

3:9

In 1 Thessalonians 3:9, Paul again returns to his theme of thanksgiving (see 1:2–3:13). His words reveal that Timothy's report not only satisfied his concerns but also intensified his desire to see these beloved converts once again.

Paul's love and concern for these early Saints, whom he knew were going through their trial of fire, comes clearly through. To show the depth of his respect for their faithfulness, he rhetorically asks what depth of thanks he could possibly render to repay God for the joy these people have brought him and his companions. The verb he uses, *ἀνταποδίδομι* (*antapodidōmi*), "repay," denotes "a recompense that is both due and adequate." Paul's use stresses his sincere feelings that whatever his thanksgiving might be, it would be most inadequate.

It is noteworthy that as is Paul's wont, he does not give thanks to the Thessalonians for their faithfulness. Instead, he gives it to God. For that reason, the Apostle never lets his audience forget the active role God plays in their spiritual lives, providing through the downflow of His grace both strength and direction (compare 2 Corinthians 4:15). Even so, we must give these early converts their due. They have proven that they have not only accepted God's gift but have also made very good use of it. It is this that fills Paul with joy. Such joy, however, has come to Paul during a period of personal troubles (see 1 Thessalonians 3:7). His words show that even life's harsh vicissitudes cannot quash the delight God is able to shed upon the hearts of the righteous (compare 1:6). This is because such joy is not dependent on physical surroundings but is a wondrous spiritual state of divine origin.

3:10

Though Paul was overjoyed with the faith these Saints continued to exhibit, "he was not oblivious to the sterner realities of the situation" and greatly desired to remedy "the defects that were in that faith."¹¹ The plural of the noun he used to indicate the trouble Timothy's report revealed (*hysterēmata*, "deficiencies") evidences that more than one problem was affecting and threatening the spiritual welfare of the branch. In expressing his concerns, however, the Apostle is neither denigrating the Saints' faith nor

saying that it is defective. Their show of steadfastness to the Christian cause had certainly demonstrated their strength. He is, however, stressing that their faith still has deficiencies that must be filled in, which the missionaries can do. In sum, their gospel understanding needs deepening while their core Christian values need strengthening. In this way, as Paul sees it, their faith will become complete.

The weak doctrinal condition that these Saints faced likely arose due to the forced departure of the missionaries that left them with no time to lay down the full doctrinal foundation on which these converts could judge proper Christian behavior. Even so, these Saints seem to be doing much that was right, but there were some activities that were improper and some beliefs that were wrong. Both needed correction. Since he could not come immediately, Paul sent both Timothy and this epistle as a means of starting to address the problems. Nonetheless, he fully intended to complete the instruction himself at some point.

3:11–13

Beginning in 1 Thessalonians 3:11, Paul offers a prayer that runs through 3:13. This prayer evidences the continuing break between Christians and Jews, for the latter invoke only the name of God in prayer while the former also includes that of the Lord Jesus. Further, placing Father and Son side by side shows that the early Christians put both Father and Son on the same honorific plane.

This one long sentence points back to all Paul has said in 1:2–3:10 and makes a nice, if brief, summary of his personal desires for these people. In the forepart (3:11), he prays that deity will make it possible for him to see the Saints once again. His words echo his thought in 3:10, in which he states the sincerity of his desire to see them. In the latter part of his prayer (3:12–13), he petitions the Lord to increase their faith and love and to strengthen them such that they will stand blameless. His words actually expand his thought in the last part of 3:10, in which he expresses his desire to fix (*καταρτιζω*, *katartizō*) the deficiencies in their faith.

Paul's earnest prayer that God will prepare the way for him to return to Thessalonica can be taken in two ways. One is as a request for God to direct his way in the sense of leading him along. The other is as an appeal for God to clear the way in the sense of removing obstacles that have thus far hindered the Apostle. Of note is that if there are no omissions in the account in Acts or Paul's other letters, his prayer will not be realized for a few more years. Only when he eventually returns to Corinth from Ephesus will he be in a position to visit the Macedonian branches.¹²

It is likely that Paul was not despairing for their welfare during this whole period. This is because, as his prayer in 3:12 reveals, he is putting the responsibility of the Saints' growth in love and care in God's hands. It is He who would cause them to love one another and also "all people." Where there was love, the gospel would thrive. Such love fortifies the Saints' resolve and allows them to withstand all pressures.

The direction that kind of love takes is first to those within one's own covenant community, but not in the sectarian way that reinforces belonging by demonizing any outside that circle. Even so, the initial target of such love must be to those within that community—that is, in the branch of the Church Paul had

established. It was, however, unlike that of the highly stratified society in which it was located. Members of this community came from various walks of life and socioeconomic classes. Further, they were likely mostly unacquainted with one another before their conversion. As a result, as Paul seems to have fully realized, they must first learn to love all within the newly formed family of Christ wherein all are loved by God. Only then could such love expand to include all others.

This broadened love for those outside the faith had two main and very practical purposes. First, it provided the means by which, hopefully, the Christians would not give offense to others and thus help them avoid persecution. Second, it could be the catalyst that attracted others to the community of the faithful. In Paul's concluding note, he asks God to give his converts love for each other as the missionaries have for the whole community (3:12). In that way, he presents the example of what such love looks like.

This brings us to Paul's desire that God strengthen the Saints' hearts so that they become "blameless in holiness." Paul's expressed desire underscores the Lord's role as the initial author of the Thessalonians' spiritual advancement. The state of the heart is at issue. The symbol of the heart, unlike that in English, does not connote the seat of feelings but rather looks to the whole of the inner being of the person. Thus, using Paul's metaphor, the heart and the heart alone must pass an eschatological test by being found blameless through holiness in God's sight at the time of Christ's Second Coming. At that time, the righteous who remain on the earth must be in the same blameless state through their holiness as those coming with Christ.

Though the two nouns carry a close relationship, they actually cover two different semantic fields. *Blamelessness* denotes a state of being faultless, guiltless, and undeserving of reproach or of punishment. *Holiness*, on the other hand, denotes a state that stands opposite of what is common, profane, defiled, impure, and worldly. Its central nuance is that of purity as defined by the standards God Himself has set and demands of His people. More importantly, it defines the very nature of God. Thus, one whom God makes holy gains an attribute of the divine and is drawn into unity with the Father and the Son in quality of life and in quality of love. As God and Christ are, so they become (1 John 3:2; 4:8, 16). Thus, Paul's desire can mean nothing less than that these converts will conform, through Christ, to the very character of God.

To whom Paul was referring when he stated that Christ will come "with his Holy Ones" is unclear. The term could refer to the righteous Saints in the various branches whom Paul referred to as "the holy ones" (*hagios*, usually translated as "saints"). The Old Testament, however, uses the term to refer exclusively to angels. Thus, Paul's statement in other passages that it is the angels who will come with Christ conforms to the Old Testament view. In this model, once the Lord arrives with His angels, the dead in Christ shall rise first, and after that the living Saints will be caught to meet them in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:15–18). It is also possible, however, that Paul understood that it is the righteous dead as spirits who would return with the Lord and then reunite with their bodies. Whatever the case, the living are caught up next.

Restoration scriptures give a slightly different order on what happens at the Second Coming, sometimes known as the Rapture in Protestant theology. According to Doctrine and Covenants 88:96–97, the living Saints will be caught up to meet Jesus, and either at the same time or very shortly thereafter, the

graves of the righteous dead will be opened, and they will be resurrected first and “also shall be caught up to meet him in the midst of the pillar of heaven.” Because neither the living nor dead will come initially with the Lord, it appears that the holy ones are heavenly angels. Matthew 25:31 refers to them directly as such while Revelation 19:14 refers to them as “the armies which are in heaven.”

We must add, however, a note of caution. No one should take any of these positions dogmatically. When dealing with apocalyptic imagery, all must understand that its purpose is “evocative rather than purely descriptive and literal.”¹³

1 Thessalonians 4

4:1–2

As noted earlier, Timothy’s report carried not only good news about the strong resistance of the Saints to those forces that could have pulled them from the Lord but also noted certain deficiencies that beset the branch. The problems arose in part, as Paul would also find in Corinth, because his converts were “exposed to the penetrating taint of life in a large seaport.”¹⁴ As a result, some had not fully separated their ideas and practices from those of certain pagan religions. Beginning in this chapter, the Apostle exhorts his readers to follow the ethical instructions on the authority of the Lord Jesus because He will judge their actions (1 Thessalonians 3:13). Even so, Paul’s instructions show that he “is not dealing with new or different information, nor is he asking them to change course and to go a different direction.” His purpose is to simply remind them to continue on the spiritual road that he and the other missionaries set them on. His purpose, as he makes clear, is to have them continue to do what they have been, but to do it “still more and more” (*perisseuete mallon*).

The way of life that the missionaries taught the Saints was based on teachings or “formulated laws of Christian morality.” Such a life, Paul continually emphasizes, “is not in any sense inherited by him from human bearers of revelation, but that he has received it directly from the Author of this revelation on the Damascus Road.” Nonetheless, it adheres to what the Church authorities have been teaching from the beginning of their ministry.

4:3

In 1 Thessalonians 4:3, the Apostle brings his readers’ attention to their state of sanctification, or holiness (*ἁγιασμός*, *hagiasmos*). His purpose in doing so seems to be to remind them of the sacred position they have obtained and to warn them that it can be lost. Paul looks at a specific demand that living a sanctified life requires—sexual purity in all its forms. He emphasizes its importance by stating such a life is God’s will and that the Saints’ continued status as holy people depends on its observance. To cease to live to that standard would mean losing the state of holiness and the concomitant relationship with God.

There is little wonder that Paul felt the need to address this issue. The city was rife with pagan ideas and practices, many of which centered on immoral sexual expressions of various kinds, including ritual prostitution. Further, given the questionable morality of the Greek and Roman gods and goddesses, it is not surprising that virtue was not highly prized among a large segment of the population. Adding to the problem was that Thessalonica, like Corinth, was a port city that had a disproportionate amount of sexual promiscuity and institutions that promoted it.

4:4

In 1 Thessalonians 4:4, Paul provides his first reason why the converts need to avoid sexual immorality. This verse has caused a good deal of scholarly debate because it can be understood in two ways. One translation is so that the Saints “understand how to control your own body in holiness and reverence,” while the other would be “that each one of you know how to take a wife for himself in holiness and honor.” The problem centers on what Paul meant by the phrase *σκεῦος κτᾶσθαι* (*skeuos ktasthai*), literally “to get a vessel.” The verb *κτάομαι* (*ktomai*) nearly always means “to acquire, obtain, get.” The noun *σκεῦος* (*skeuos*) denotes a “dish, jar, vessel, implement,” but figuratively it often refers to the human body and, in a few instances, to a wife.¹⁵

Either of these translations work, but the context slightly favors the former because Paul’s issue is that of self-control when dealing with sexual matters. Whatever the case, Paul notes that in the area of human sexuality, all should be done in recognition of its intrinsic holiness and the reverence demanded. Paul’s point is that both sexual desire and its physical expression are associated with the divine and, therefore, need to be hallowed, respected, bridled, and guarded.

4:5

To push his point, in 1 Thessalonians 4:5 Paul contrasts the Christian position with that of certain unbelieving Gentiles whom he describes as having an inordinate desire for unbounded sexual pleasure (*πάθει ἐπιθυμίας*, *pathei epithymias*). His words point out that his converts were living in a society where sexual promiscuity was normal and accepted but looked down upon. It should be kept in mind, however, that many wise individuals in the Greco-Roman world recognized the perniciousness of immorality and prized marriage.

This verse is as arresting as it is important. It shows that the missionaries not only stressed a high moral standard for converts but also explained why it was necessary. This was because immorality is sinful, is detrimental to God’s plan of happiness for individuals and families, and will be met with punishment. The point is that just because the unbelievers do not know God, they will not be exempted from paying the price. To stress, due to the sacred and holy nature of sexual matters, neither ignorance nor denial of God and His laws will bring absolution.

4:6

In 1 Thessalonians 4:6, Paul gives the second and third reasons why the Saints must avoid sexual immorality. One cannot break moral rules without in some way cheating another. Paul's counsel emphasizes that "sexual looseness represents an act of injustice to someone other than the two parties concerned. Adultery is an obvious violation of the rights of another within marriage and erodes the sanctity of the family unit and confuses children. But promiscuity before marriage represents the robbing of the other of that virginity which ought to be brought to the marriage. The future partner of such a one has been defrauded."¹⁶

Therefore, the second reason for strict morality is that it guards against taking advantage of another due to the situation in which the Saints found themselves. Having been raised in a very permissive society, it is easy to see that sharing in an intimate fellowship, meeting in individual homes, participating together in the sacramental meals, and greeting each other with a holy kiss could lead to temptations yielding to the improper expression of intimacy. The Apostle's words evidence he expects strict monogamy and sexual morality from his converts. Each person is to limit her or his sexual life to his or her spouse alone with all due respect and honor, not treating them like a mere sex object.

4:7

Having expressed the negative reason why his converts need to abstain from taking advantage of their fellow Christians, especially in the area of illicit sexual activity, Paul now provides a very positive reason. He does so in the context of their godly call. Here the reference is not to God's initial act (the call) but to the kind of life He expects them to live. The call, Paul reminds his audience, was not to unholiness or moral uncleanness (*ἀκαθαρσία, akatharsia*).

The call, rather, is into a state of holiness. The Saints are to maintain that state by continued dedication to God and His ways. Paul's use of the phrase "into holiness" (*ἐν ἁγιασμῷ, en hagismō*) is telling. It looks not at the purpose of the call but at the atmosphere it entails. This atmosphere consists of the settled condition—holiness—into which God has placed these Saints and expects them to continually abide.

In addition to fully rejecting their former lifestyles, their task now includes avoiding the pitfall into which much of Judaism had fallen. Though the idea of cleanliness always carried a moral undertone, among these people it was eclipsed in favor of cultic and ritual practices. The result was a system in which outward performance overshadowed inner righteousness. The Christians, having rejected both Jewish and pagan cultic and ritual performances as necessary for righteousness and therefore oneness with God, must now emphasize moral purity, including, if not emphasizing, sexual conduct. In sum, the state of holiness was something they were not to obtain but rather to retain. Remaining apart from the immoral practice of the pagans played a big part in that.

4:8

Consequently, Paul affirms in 1 Thessalonians 4:8 that disregarding these instructions will lead to severe recompense. The reason is that anyone who rejects them is not violating the will of some human (likely, Paul) but in reality is rejecting God Himself. The critical point is that sexual sin, though considered but a trivial matter tolerated by local standards, is a rejection of the divine, demonstrates a lack of concern for others and future children, and signals “a relapse into the idolatry from which they had been delivered (1:9–10).”¹⁷ Idolatry was associated with sexual sin in Hebrew and pagan social contexts. Paul is directing his remarks to anyone who would hold sexual sins with little, if any, consequences. The root cause of their attitude, however, is that they think little of God, reject His will, and do not care about God’s children. Paul’s point is that these people will find that their belief that they can neglect or ignore God with impunity will find out the full meaning of His position as an “avenger” (see 4:6).

4:9

At this point in the epistle, Paul changes subject to filial love. He uses two terms for this type of love. The first is the noun *φιλαδελφία* (*philadelphia*), often translated as “brotherly love” but better rendered as “filial love” since this includes both brothers and sisters. The second is the verb *ἀγαπάω* (*agapaō*) and its noun *ἀγάπη* (*agapē*), which Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 13 (translated “charity” in the King James Version) and which Moroni calls “the pure love of Christ” (Moroni 7:47). Paul may have done so as a means of again praising the Saints for their mutual affection and the respect they had for one another and to encourage them to not only continue such but to increase its range and depth. His introduction, “now concerning,” however, suggests that he may have been responding to a question the community has raised and which Timothy reported to him. The question concerns how broadly filial love should be extended. The question could have arisen because conditions were forcing the Saints to ask what the limits of such love should be. On the other hand, Paul may just be signaling he is introducing a new subject. Either way, he makes a smooth transition.

Paul’s counsel takes an interesting turn, for as he insists, these Christians do not need further instruction on the matter. Why? Because they have been “taught by God.” The phrase should not be taken to mean that the missionaries never addressed the subject of love but rather that there was a higher confirming source that so powerfully and fully taught the principle that it precluded any further need for comment.

The Apostle does not say just when or how God taught these converts about Christianized filial love, but it was likely part of the converting and transforming power that they felt as they initially investigated and then committed to the family of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 2:13; Galatians 5:22). Paul’s words suggest that as God has given His Spirit to abide in them, that very intimate and commanding influence has also shown them the way to love. An insight into the breadth of these people’s love is a statement found in Paul’s second preserved letter to the Corinthians. It was written some years after his work in Thessalonica and reveals that the Macedonian Saints’ love continued to abound. The evidence was the amount of funds

they gave the missionaries for the beleaguered Saints in Judea even in their poor condition. Paul used their unselfish and generous act to promote liberal giving among the Corinthians Saints (2 Corinthians 8:1–5).

4:10

Paul's statement in 1 Thessalonians 4:10 concerning the depth of the Thessalonians' love suggests that there was communication and mutual support among the congregations. The record notes there were branches also in Philippi and Berea (see Acts 16–17), but given the proselytizing nature of these early Christians, there could have been additional groups in other cities of the province. Timothy, Silas, and Luke (in addition to Paul) all spent some time working in the entire area and likely set up other units.

Since Thessalonica was the administrative seat of the Roman province as well as a thriving port city and commercial center, the local Saints would have had many opportunities to be loving hosts to other Christians visiting or doing business there. They expressed their love through such concrete acts as prayer, providing food, clothing, and financial support when necessary, and opening their homes to missionaries and others.

They must not, however, as Paul teaches, confine their love only to the circle of the faithful but extend it to the larger community of humanity. Noteworthy is that Paul, twice in such short space (3:12; 4:10), speaks of love as needing to abound. Paul understood that "Christian love should never become complacent, as though a certain level of love were sufficient to please God."¹⁸ Further, his words expose his understanding that Christian life, properly understood and lived, has an exuberant quality that as opposed to what so many wrongly think, gives to mortal existence meaning, purpose, and joy.

That Paul urges them to expand love's reach reveals his deep feelings that their light must shine ever brighter and further than ever before. Just why he does not say here, but he will in his next letter as he addresses the dreaded coming Apostasy.

One of the missionaries' objectives was to unite the various congregations within the region for the purpose of mutual support.¹⁹ By doing so, each unit could provide to others precisely the kind of encouragement that would allow all to succeed in a hostile environment.

4:11–12

Paul's commands in 1 Thessalonians 4:11–12 address some real and potential concerns while working toward defusing already existing problems. Noteworthy is that what the Apostle now writes is not a mere suggestion, as he clearly states, but a reemphasis of what he has already commanded (*παραγγέλλω, parangellō*) these people. What he asks of them, however, in no way breaks *proper* social norms. He wants them to live unobtrusively and to do their own work such that they make their own living. These social virtues were popular ideals within certain elements of the Hellenistic culture. By following these high standards, the Saints would give no unneeded offense to nonmembers.

The Saints already had detractors who were ever ready to take offense. Since the Christian hope was in the coming kingdom of God and they met in assemblies (*ἐκκλησία, ekklēsia*) to worship their Lord (*kyrios*), their theology was loaded with political overtones that could easily set pagans off. By leading quiet and productive lives, they would not feed the fire of persecution. That is not to say that they were to cave in to improper social norms. They had been called into a new order from which they could not retreat without serious spiritual consequences. Accordingly, pleasing outsiders was not their main goal; pleasing God was (4:1). Nonetheless, public opinion still counted.

There was another aspect of Greco-Roman society that self-sufficiency and living a quiet life protected the Christians from. Much of public acceptance and social advancement was dependent on benefactions in the patron-client relationship. That demanded getting out and working for one's benefactor to the extent that it sometimes precluded living a quiet life.

Paul's strong counsel acts as a countercultural stand in this regard. He insists that the conventional forms of status seeking and pursuing social honor be not considered the highest priority as they were in the gentile world. When done, it would protect the Saints from having to kowtow to anyone and especially those who might demand that they engage in activities that would compromise their moral status as followers of Christ.

This position did not mean, however, that they were to withdraw into their own little enclaves, nor were they obliged to draw undue attention to themselves. Their daily activities, however, must be driven by the force of filial love (*φιλαδελφία, philadelphia*) evidenced in mutual care and compassion. In that regard, Paul's injunction is communal, not individual. By its independence, the Church can make a good impression on outsiders as it takes care of its own needy.

4:13–18

In this new section, Paul addressed two issues: the fate of those who have died in Christ and how the living should prepare for the Second Coming. His purpose in addressing this singular historical event is not to elaborate on the future but to bring comfort to these Saints while exhorting them to faithfulness in the present. The latter shapes the thrust of his encouragement that these Saints continue in faith, love, hope, self-control, and alertness.

It is Timothy's report that brought to Paul's attention these Church members' deep and troubling concerns. These focused primarily on the future of the faithful dead. The euphemism Paul uses, *sleep*, to replace *death* is a good one, for it emphasizes the temporary nature of that state in contrast to faddish Epicurean tenets. Paul's use of the word *sleep* underscores the fact that "death is no longer that adversary whom no person can resist, that tyrant who brings all worthwhile existence to a horribly final end."²⁰

These early-day Saints' problem does not center on the idea or doctrine of the Resurrection as such but is based on the connection between the Resurrection and the Second Coming and the blessing associated with the latter. They appear to take doctrine of both the Second Coming and the Resurrection at face

value. The question they have is whether the faithful who have died, even though they will be resurrected, will enjoy the same benefits as the faithful living at the time of the Second Coming. Since the faithful dead had suffered for their loyalty to the gospel and may even have paid the ultimate price with their lives, the thought that they might miss their justified reward for doing so caused their living kindred a great deal of stress.

The imagery that Paul uses for the coming of Christ (*παρουσία, parousia*) in 1 Thessalonians 4:15 would have resonated with these formerly pagan people because it paralleled an actual experience many of them had. It centered on a stately visit to a city from a high-ranking official with his entourage. An important part of the event was the city's delegates coming out to meet him and then properly escorting him to his temporary abode. Often the exact timing of these visits, at least initially, was unknown, thus creating an atmosphere of anxiety and somewhat paralleling the Second Coming.

Paul's purpose is, therefore, to fill in missing revealed doctrine about the afterlife so that the Saints will not feel the same hopelessness and bereavement as do the pagans. Paul's counsel here ties to his broader subject of how the Saints should comport themselves in public. To express hope, confidence, and optimism during their funerals, as the Apostle advises, would stand in patent contrast to the woeful, tear-filled grief and pathos that marked pagan services. The result of the Saints' conduct could attract outsiders to investigate the Christian religion and find the hope and promise it contained.

Beginning in 4:15, Paul sets up his answer and does so on a very firm basis. He has received this information from the Lord. Just how he received it, he does not say. It could come from information he received from leaders of the Church about what Jesus taught on the subject. Some scholars see much of this phrase as a creedal statement taught widely by Church leaders everywhere and therefore an important part of the missionaries' teachings to the Thessalonians. The statement, however, could also come from a source of sayings that Paul had access to. It could have also come from information he received during his visions of heaven and the works of God as well as current and personal revelation (2 Corinthians 12:1–4). The point that must not be overlooked is that the Apostle is sure of his material, so he grants his audience a sense of certitude of its truthfulness.

After addressing what will happen to "those that remain," he looks to "those who have fallen asleep." He does not say here that they will be resurrected, but that state is strongly assumed and the assumption evidences that these Saints fully accepted the fact of the Resurrection and therefore needed no convincing.

The comfort Paul wants to bring to these Church members in Thessalonica hinges on his assurance that the once-dead will precede (*φθάνω, phthanō*) the living when it comes to greeting the Lord. The word denotes doing something before someone else so that the doer will have an advantage. The phrase reveals the major concern of the Thessalonians. They feared that those who had died would somehow lose out on the rewards associated with the Lord's Second Coming.

In 4:16, Paul explains why the living need not worry about the place of the dead at the time of the Second Coming. Paul's focus is on the initial order of events associated with the Second Coming. In this verse, he identifies the first and second events that will occur at the time.

The first event is the heavenly announcement of the Lord's coming. The imagery he uses to describe this event emphasizes the exciting and terrifying nature of the public proclamation. That imagery has the feel of the battlefield with shouts of commanders, the roar of the soldiers, and the trumpet signaling the order of attack. Paul's language here is apocalyptic and as such is not the literally descriptive, referential language that one finds in a newspaper. The three images presented here likely describe the same sound but are used to emphasize its magnitude, its inability to be ignored, and its purpose (which Paul identifies in the next verse).

The second event is the resurrection of the righteous, or those who "died in Christ." The phrase refers to those who at the moment of death were yet faithful to their Lord. These are they who will "receive a crown of righteousness, and [will] be clothed upon, even as I [Christ] am, to be with me, that we may be one" (Doctrine and Covenants 29:13).

In 1 Thessalonians 4:17 Paul reveals the third event that will happen. It is the raising of both the living and the resurrected by means of the cloud to meet the Lord in the air (compare Revelation 12:5; Acts 8:39). Paul's statement shows he expected the Saints' kindred dead to be resurrected at this time. He has carefully designed his words to assure the Saints that the departed will have the same advantage as the living. All will be on the same footing.

Here Paul deliberately co-opts imperial rhetoric and applies it to the coming of Jesus. The imagery of 1 Thessalonians 4:13–17 follows the sequences of a royal visit. Such were announced by both trumpet blasts and the proclamation of a herald, at which point delegates went out to meet the dignitary and then escorted him into the city. The noun Paul uses, *ἀπάντησις* (*apantēsis*), "meeting," carries the nuance of a royal welcome. It refers more specifically to the actions of the greeting committee as it meets the guest on his way. Paul's imagery likely sparked in the minds of his audience the moment when the righteous host will go out to meet the Lord and escort Him to earth, where he will take up his public role as King.

That Paul speaks of those who remain as "meeting the Lord in the air" has an important implication. Based on the presumption that the term "remainder" follows the usual nuance of referring to the minority of a group, its use suggests that Paul felt that most Christians will have died before the Second Coming occurs and, therefore, that the event was some time off.

Interestingly, Paul does not state what happens to this great host of Saints after they meet the Lord. He notes only that they will be with Him forevermore. Some commentators believe that at this point, Jesus will take these righteous souls back to heaven. Context, however, suggests that the destination is not heaven but the earth. First, the place of meeting is in the air—that is, in the immediate region above the earth. This places the event in the terrestrial, not celestial, sphere. Second, the Saints are also with Him in the cloud.

The imagery of clouds is associated regularly with theophanies. Finally, the event is described as a *parousia*, which always indicates the coming of a dignitary into the city, not taking people away from it.

As he concludes this portion of his epistle, the Apostle admonishes the Saints to comfort one another with the wonderful doctrine he has now imparted to them (4:18). His words suggest he wants these people to spread this teaching so that others may also find comfort and joy in the gospel.

In conclusion, Paul's counsel in these verses provides insight into how seriously these earliest of Saints believed in the Resurrection and in the belief that they would likely live to experience it. However, as noted above, the latter always remained a hope, not a dogma of fact. They in no way held a fanatical excitement bordering on a pathological emotionalism as some suggest. Rather, they took the doctrine seriously, and therefore, when the Lord did not come during that first generation, the Church remained stable and continued its course, making the necessary adjustments in its beliefs concerning the Second Coming. As they encouraged one another with the confirmation of this doctrine, the first-century Saints not only united in its spread but also participated in their own healing.²¹

1 Thessalonians 5

5:1–3

Having addressed the doctrine of the Second Coming, Paul now uses the certainty of the Messiah's coming as a means of getting his audience to put greater effort into the quality of their daily lives. Before getting there, however, he pauses to address the timing of that event.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:1 Paul states he should not have to write them on this subject. In 5:2 he explains why he is doing so. He begins by reminding the Saints that they have already been instructed in this matter, likely because he has already covered the material while he labored among them and, therefore, they should already know what they needed to about it.

In describing the period between the present and the future, Paul uses "times" (*χρόνοι, chronoi*) and "seasons" (*καιροί, kairoi*), the former denoting the flow or sequence of events and the latter looking at the nature of those events. Taken together, Paul uses them to mean "when exactly things are going to happen," and his point is that no one knows.

The Apostle's words reveal that his audience had no trouble accepting the idea that Christ would come again. In fact, it appears to have had broad and very positive appeal to them. The problem arose when some of the converts died. This raised double questions, one concerning the timing of the Second Coming and the other that of the status of the recently dead and, for that matter, that of any who died before the Lord appeared.

Paul's response in 5:2–3 addresses the first concern. To do so, he uses three vivid images. The first was the unknown timing of a thief's attack. It appears that these Saints did not understand the point the missionaries had made when they used this analogy. The Lord had used it in His own teachings as did His Apostles.²²

We infer here, as well as at Paul's statement in 4:15, that the imagery had become a basic part of the missionaries' teachings on the subject. One reason was likely that it set the proper attitude concerning the Second Coming and defined the task of the Saints related thereto.

Paul also uses the imagery to make and emphasize his point: the futility of trying to date the Second Coming. From the earliest period of Christian history, the doctrine has stressed the unknown aspect of the timing of the Second Coming.²³

The phrase "as a thief in the night" is an excellent metaphor for the Second Coming. It will sneak up on the unbelievers. This is because there will be no warning signs indicating the nearness of the event that the unbelievers will recognize and respond to. The irony of their condition results from a blindness that seems almost self-willed in an era that will be replete with portents and signs.

Paul's use of the phrase "the day of the Lord" in 5:2 reverberates with ideas of grandeur, power, and might, as well as fear and terror as the Lord makes bare His holy arm before the nations. With its variants, the phrase refers to the eschatological promise of the Old Testament prophets and points to the day of judgment. Christians adopted the idea but applied it to the Second Coming of Jesus and the purpose of that coming: to reward and to punish. Paul's writings carry both themes, but here the emphasis is on the threatening nature of that judgment.

It is a period in which God, through His Son, will manifest His power as never before, and of this great day many placed great hopes in the good that would befall them at that time. But given the many faceted nature of the events associated with that day, it is not surprising these Saints had questions about just how events would flow and how people would be affected. There was, however, tension, and it runs through the whole of the New Testament. On the one hand, the Lord's coming is certain; on the other, it is unexpected. Though it will happen "soon" (Revelation 22:20) no one can know when (Mark 13:32), and therefore it will be as unanticipated as a thief's attack.

The second imagery Paul uses to address the Thessalonians' concern is the common deceptive phrase that the unbelievers will use to reassure themselves that all is well: "peace and security." Paul may have picked up the phrase from imperial propaganda that was ubiquitous at the time. In every locale in the Roman world, inscriptions abounded attributing the local peace and security to the power of its army and to the benefits of the *Pax Augusta* (peace established by Augustus Caesar). Taken as a whole, the phrase indicates a condition of both inner tranquility that feels no sense of alarm and outer safety that is neither interfered with nor compromised and thus unshakable. In sum, the feeling is that "all is well" and will continue to be so. Paul's warning assures the audience of the stupidity of the unbelievers' false comfort, for even as they say these very words, destruction will fall upon them. Indeed, the all-embracing catastrophe provides clear evidence of their universal spiritual blindness. The very serious tone of the Apostle offers a powerful rebuttal against such worldly propaganda.

The third image Paul uses to emphasize his point to not speculate on the timing of the Lord's coming is that of travail. Paul, however, does not use the imagery to reinforce the point he made above concerning

the unexpectedness or unpredictability of the Second Coming. From early on in her pregnancy, a woman is aware of the approximate time of the birth, and it is here where Paul's point lies. The event is going to happen, and nothing can stop it. Of note is that though the day comes with equal speed to both believers and unbelievers, it is only the unbelievers who are surprised at its arrival. The reason is that they have not paid attention to the signs of the times.

The imagery of birth pangs also carries another idea that reaches back into the Old Testament. There it is used to indicate the period of suffering that precedes the coming of the messianic age.²⁴ The Christian leaders, including Paul, confirmed this idea, showing that the hard labor was indeed to bring forth the new millennial creation.²⁵

Paul closes this section with the declaration that “none shall escape” the consequences of the event. As the Second Coming is inevitable, so too is the associated destruction. Paul does not say just what constitutes that destruction, but it is sudden. The Greek word he uses (*αἰφνίδιος*, *aiphnidios*) “basically means ‘unforeseen’ or ‘unexpected.’ But ‘sudden’ does not here mean ‘soon’—Paul uses no time estimate in teaching about Christ’s appearance.”²⁶ The destruction he has in mind is certainly not annihilation. It likely connotes the loss of association with God and therefore a kind of spiritual death or separation from the divine.²⁷ Paul’s very realistic view underscores that the choice is between either life with the Lord or the eternal loss of that relationship.

One last note seems in order. In this section it becomes clear that Paul is not a social crusader out to reform the Roman Empire. His emphasis, rather, is on the work of God and Christ to bring about social change and thereby right the wrongs he and his converts are experiencing. Even so, Christian living forms the backbone of this movement. This is because the order of life the Lord demands of the Saints leaves the opposition without justification for their perverse actions and thereby opens them up for the destruction God’s justified anger will bring upon them.

5:4–11

Up to this point, Paul has addressed the concerns of the Saints about the Second Coming and the state of those who participate in it. He now redirects and thus corrects what their major concern should be: the quality of their own discipleship in the meantime. The Apostle pleads with the Saints to be constantly prepared spiritually and temporally. And given Paul’s imagery, it is the unknowingness of the timing of the thief’s strike that gives punch to the Apostle’s admonition.

Having laid down his doctrinal base, Paul now begins the “so what” section of his discourse. His excellence as a writer can be seen in how carefully he has laid down his base so that his audience will feel the urgency of heeding his counsel.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:4–5, Paul contrasts the spiritual condition of the Saints with that of the unbelievers and the effect that will have on each at the Second Coming.

Using the metaphor of light and darkness, Paul reveals that the Saints “are neither in a state of darkness, nor is darkness the source of their existence.”²⁸ Night symbolizes the period when the senses are dulled and reality loses its hold as a time of preparation for the labors of the day. It is the time when being surprised by a thief is most probable. Because they live in this state, the Second Coming will take them totally by surprise as well as their judgment and condemnation (compare 2 Corinthians 6:14–18).

On the other hand, the Saints are not part of either the night or the darkness. They live in the light and in the day. Day represents the time when the senses are at their height and reality is clearly seen and responded to and when a thief is less likely to take one by surprise. Because the Saints live in the light, they will not be surprised by the Second Coming even if it arrives unexpectedly. By being prepared, these souls will definitely not be surprised at the coming of the thief but will be fully capable and ready to thwart his efforts. So, too, the Saints will be fully ready to receive the Lord and partake of His blessings.

Paul’s statement that his converts are both children of the light and children of the day reveals a core concept in his eschatology. The light appears to be the establishment of the gospel, including its transforming power of which these early Saints are partaking. The day refers to the time when the Lord will come and these converts will participate fully in the blessings of His return. Paul’s analogy shows their close association with the events that will happen then.

Paul’s teachings likely gave his audience a sense that they had inside information that would prepare and protect them from the day of wrath (compare 1 Thessalonians 5:9). As for the outside community who opposed them and lived in chosen darkness, they will remain ignorant until they are suddenly and startlingly swept away by the coming of the Lord.

Having established the difference between the state of the faithful and the unbelievers at the time of the Second Coming, in 5:6 Paul begins his exhortation. His point is that the Saints’ behavior must be different from those others who are carelessly asleep (*καθεύδω*, *katheudeō*). The Saints, on their part, must not only be alert (*γρηγορέω*, *grēgoreō*)—that is, aware of what is going on—they must also be ever attentive to the responsibility of living “up to their privileges and position towards the Lord.”²⁹ In addition, they must exercise self-control (*νέφω*, *nephō*). Though sometimes translated as “to be sober,” the verb does not stand in contrast to being drunk. Rather it denotes being in control of one’s thought processes and thus not being in danger of irrational thinking. The idea of being self-controlled looks at the need for the Saints to exercise ethical restraint. In sum, the word indicates being sober-minded or well composed in mind. Out of this comes the attached ideas of behaving with restraint and moderation as well as acknowledging the reality of God and the need to adhere to His revelations in worship and work as expressed through love, hope, and even righteous warfare.

With 5:8, Paul states the consequences of being of the day, which entail being serious, self-controlled, wakeful, vigilant, and properly armored. All this is a means of dealing with the trials associated with the Christian life. In contrast to the belief of some Jewish sects, the armoring of the Saints is not for participation

in the final eschatological battle. There is no need, for that battle has already been won. No, their armor-ing is for protection in the present.

Exactly how Paul makes the connection between being of the day and wearing the armor of the soldier is hard to see. It may be that his mention of vigilance brought to his mind the imagery of the sentry fully equipped and wholly vigilant while standing at his post. This suggests the Apostle sees daylight, the period the Church is now entering, as the time of potential trouble and battle, therefore creating the need to be armed and on guard. Supporting this idea is Romans 13:12–13, in which Paul notes that being in the day demands putting on the “armor of light.” Paul seems to have chosen his imagery with care. The elements he lists—faith, love, and hope—fully arm the Christian soldier for all eventualities.

The imagery of the breastplate and helmet being associated with righteousness and salvation respectively goes back to Isaiah 59:17. That verse states that the Messiah will “put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head.” Paul changes the imagery somewhat, associating the breastplate with faith and love and the helmet with the “hope of salvation.” The change of the latter is telling, for it subtly reveals Paul’s understanding of the timing of the Second Coming. Salvation for the Saints is yet future and therefore can be no more than an object of their hope in the present. Even so, that hope acts to keep them ever vigilant and ready for Christ’s coming.

In battle, the head is the most vulnerable to a death blow. It is the spiritual helmet of the hope of salvation that acts to protect one from the deadly blow of spiritual indolence and carelessness. Hope is the fuel that energizes and pushes faith forward. Hope not only gives protection under present circumstances but also courage to face with optimism the upcoming judgments associated with the Parousia.

Also in battle, the chest area must be protected. The protective breastplate consists of faithfulness and love. This type of love is the concern for others’ well-being since all Roman armor was meant to protect the formation of fellow soldiers in the *testudo* battle formation.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:9, Paul gives the reason why his audience must be ever prepared: God has appointed them (*ἔθετο, ethetō*) not to suffer divine wrath, as will the unbelieving, but to obtain eternal salvation. In doing so, Paul appeals to more than the converts’ self-interest but also to the promise of ultimate well-being despite present circumstances. There is a caveat, however: that appointment is conditional. Though their destiny is different from the sleepy and the drunken, it is not assured. Indeed, it is possible for the sleepy to wake up and the drunken to become sober and thereby receive a reward. Likewise, those of the day can lose their way and enter into the night. For that reason, they must stay vigilant until death or the coming of the Lord. Thus, only those who endure to the end receive the gift. Paul is quick to point out that obtaining the gift comes only because of the saving act of Christ, but, and here is Paul’s point, one must stay connected to Him.

But what is it exactly that God has appointed the Saints for? What exactly does *σωτηρίας (sōtēria)*, “salvation,” mean? The word carries both temporal and spiritual aspects. On the temporal side, it referred to protection or deliverance from danger and apprehension. Jesus rescues humankind from sin

and death eventually. There is no immediate status of salvation in mortality, as held by most Protestant commentators, because there is a Final Judgement. On the spiritual side it denotes God's power to deliver one from the bondage of sin, the result being an eternal deliverance granted by God to those who accepted His conditions of repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus, the sole source of this state. In the present context, however, the idea goes beyond the mere escape from the negative effects of sin and includes the divine quality of life given to all those who "live together with" the Lord.

Paul's wording emphasizes his understanding that the act of salvation is theocentric—not "Jesus alone," or "God and Jesus," but "God through Jesus." As important as the Atonement is, which Paul never lets his audience forget, he also keeps their attention on the central fact that salvation centers on the Father, who as another Apostle testified, "so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16, authors' translation). Though Paul personally knew and loved the Savior, he also understood and testified that salvation ultimately rests upon the Father.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:10, the Apostle explains why Jesus died: "on behalf of us." Paul, however, places his emphasis not on Christ's Atonement but on its result at the time of the Resurrection. He does so to meet the particular needs of these people: to know, whether the Saint is alive or dead, that at the time of His coming, a union with Christ will take place. The reason is that the Lord already paid the price, for all who believe, to make it happen. That union means that all the faithful will live together with Him. For the Apostle, to live with the Lord does not mean simply to exist at the same place He does. Life implies that quality bestowed by the Resurrection and into which the faithful enter through the transforming power of the Atonement by means of obedience to His laws and ordinances and thereby receive a celestial resurrection. While all will be resurrected in time, the faithful will be resurrected first in the resurrection of the just before the Millennium, while the wicked will also have to suffer for their own sins for another thousand years and receive a resurrection of other degrees of glory. The fact that he has brought up this point again indicates that he has consistently kept his audience's concerns in mind throughout his speech.

Paul's assurance that "whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him" tacitly shows that he does not know if he or any of the Thessalonians will be alive at the time of the Second Coming. Because he is unsure and unwilling to speculate on the event's timing, he puts his emphasis on Christian behavior and so deflects the need to know because it does not matter if one is fully prepared for the event.

Of note is that Paul is not dealing here with a dysfunctional branch of the Church, even though the Saints are under public fire. As a result, he can build on their strength and encourage them to continue to move forward. As his admonition in 5:11 indicates, he wants his readers to reach out in a more intimate way than just in group meetings. His words underscore that faith and progress are best made, maintained, and advanced when they are assisted by others (compare 1 Corinthians 14:13). It is a group-building process in which the bonds of care, faith, and love are exercised and strengthened. The result is that all are edified together.

The phrase “just as you are also doing” exhibits another instance of Paul’s “fine courtesy and tact. He is careful to recognize the Thessalonians’ attainments, even while stirring them up to further effort.”³⁰ Paul’s counsel here reveals that this is a progress-oriented letter, not a problem-solving one. His stress is on having his audience continue to do what they are doing but to do it better and more broadly.

He ends this section with a repetition and extension of the counsel he gave in 4:18 that these people use their understanding of the promise and power of Christ’s Atonement to both encourage and build each other up. The Apostle’s instruction likely produced the same sense and assurance of future well-being and security that he did in 4:17, where he assured his audience that at the Second Coming they would meet Christ in the air, descend with Him, and remain in His presence forever.

5:12–22

Paul’s closing section is revealing. In the forepart of the epistle, he praised the valiance, faithfulness, and steadfastness of the members of the branch. The overall view he presents suggests that though the Saints were suffering from outside pressures, inside all seemed to be going rather well and needed some bolstering to keep it that way. The final section of his letter, however, gives a fuller view, showing that there were members who were less than supportive of Church leaders, sowed discord, were weak in Jesus’ new covenant, were discouraged because of current conditions, and were impatient with others. Paul’s desire to have the members esteem and love their leaders for the unselfish work they perform and that all be at peace with one another suggests he feared that some might foment disorder by, at best, carping and, at worst, outright insubordination. In short, his counsel shows he is dealing with imperfect but spiritually growing people whom he loves and for whom he wants the best. The fact that Paul treats the problems with brevity suggests that he is not dealing with major issues, but with problems that are creeping in.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:12–13, Paul reveals a budding problem in the branch. His words suggest that some members may have had hard feelings toward Church authorities. The problem may have been more nascent than active. Nonetheless, it must be acknowledged and addressed.

The word Paul uses to describe their position (*προϊστημι*, *proistēmi*) suggests these people could have acted on their own as protectors and caregivers of the community of Saints. In that case they would not have been formally appointed but rather would be patrons who rose to positions of authority due to their ability to protect and lead other members of the branch. The text leaves no room for an ordained, professional clergy. All were lay leaders who, as Paul views their condition, operated under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The Apostle does validate the position of these caregivers by noting that both he and the Lord were standing behind them, and his admonition indicates they had the responsibility of admonishing the branch in its moral and ethical responsibilities not unlike that of the Apostle himself. The word he uses, the verb *νουθετέω* (*noutheteō*), suggests his intent is “designed to correct while not provoking or embittering” his audience and doing so by imparting understanding so that all are edified together.

Specifically what Paul asks of the Saints initially is to acknowledge (that is, show respect for) those who were toiling and caring for as well as admonishing them. Not satisfied with this request, in 5:13 he strengthened it. He made it imperative that they hold these noble and generous souls to the highest degree possible (*ὑπερεκπερισσοῦ, hyperekperissou*) and to do so based not on their authority but on sincere love, growing out of recognizing and appreciating what they were doing. His words betray that the Apostle understood that effective leadership rests on effective following.

Paul ends the section with a direct command: “Live in peace with each other.” Though this appears to be one more requirement pressed upon the Saints, it actually forms the conclusion of his whole treatise on the relationship between leader and follower. Through this demand, he takes no sides but addresses all those concerned equally. As all the members put this command into practice mutual respect would be maintained and harmony prevail in the branch. The result would be a relationship that not only prospers all but that importantly also allows the Spirit full sway with its attendant gifts and blessings.

In 5:14, Paul addresses other spiritual and social challenges he requires the branch members to take care of themselves. Noteworthy is that he does not address the need for action to the leaders only (even though he has sustained their right to admonish all) but to the entire congregation. In doing so, he demonstrates that even the rank and file have a duty for the orderly conduct of the congregation.

First on his list are the those who refuse to be disciplined and follow Church order. Just how that is expressed there is hard to say. The word Paul uses (*ἄτακτος, ataktos*) ranges from the near rebellious to the very lazy. Paul uses the same word in 2 Thessalonians 3:7, 11, where it points more directly to idle behavior. Whatever the case is, it carries the tone of insubordination. Given the need for harmony among leaders and followers, such a malady could prove deadly to the young branch. Thus, it is not surprising that Paul counsels that they be admonished or warned against any such attitude or behavior. The word he uses (*νουθετέω, noutheteō*), however, denotes a gentle rebuke, suggesting that the condition has not yet got out of hand and that he wants it to stay that way.

Next, he looks at the discouraged or fainthearted (*ὀλιγόψυχος, oligopsychous*), or those who due to external pressure have lost their zeal for the gospel. For these he requests comfort (*παραμυθεομαι, paramytheomai*), the giving of strength and hope. Since the word *discouraged* includes not just those who are suffering from persecution but also those who are mourning the loss of a loved one, the Apostle could be pointing back to his positive teachings concerning the condition of the dead at the time of the Second Coming and asking his audience to use his teachings on that subject to help those who need help in this area.

Next, he focuses on the weak (*ἀσθενής, asthenēs*), which literally means “those who are not strong” in Greek. These are they who, due to no fault of their own, are not self-sufficient. They cannot take care of themselves either physically, emotionally, or spiritually. Since the maladies he covered above point to various forms of spiritual weakness, here he likely has the physically and emotionally struggling Saints in mind. These are to be supported (*ἀντέχω, antechō*) in whatever way necessary.

Finally, the Apostle, with a deep sense of human weakness, broadens his appeal to include everyone. He admonishes each individual to be patient with every other member of the branch. The verb he uses (*μακροθυμέω*, *makrothymeō*) carries the nuance not only of forbearance but also of bearing up even under provocation. In dealing with people such as Paul describes above—those who can be somewhat offensive or overly demanding—patience would be a very needed virtue.

In 5:15 Paul begins another series of exhortations. They continue, however, the same theme he developed above—that the responsibility for the Church’s spiritual and temporal welfare falls not just on the Church leaders but on the whole congregation. Here we find a paraphrase of the golden rule that forbids retaliation and demands doing good to all. It carries the idea of eschewing negative forms of reciprocity but encouraging positive ones that were associated with grace, or *charis*. Since the idea was known in both Jewish and pagan circles, whether Paul received the idea indirectly from Jesus is unknown. Whatever the source, the ideal carried weight with a broad spectrum of people but should be practiced particularly among Christ’s people. That this principle was not only taught but widely accepted by this particular group who faced constant ill-treatment is quite remarkable. That many willingly put it into practice is even more so.

The notion that the Christian is to love the universal “everyone” does gain ground in Paul’s counsel. There is no room here for generalized, bland, undirected care and affection. Rather, Paul’s counsel shows that love is manifest in concrete acts toward those in the circle of one’s neighborhood, whether friend or foe. In sum, the expression of love remains personal and specific but includes all within the ever-expanding circle of one’s friendship, care, or concern.

Paul’s call in 5:16 for the Saints “to be glad” or “rejoice always” in face of their grieving for the loss of family members, external oppression, and internal tensions stands in sharp contrast to the feelings of general gloom that infused pagan society. In sum, Paul is not asking his audience to rejoice because of their harsh circumstances but rather to rejoice in view of what it means to be in Christ and have the power of the Spirit in their lives.

Closely related to this attitude is Paul’s exhortation in 5:17 to pray unceasingly. But how is this to be done? Here Paul is likely following the idea in Amulek’s admonition to the Zoramite people that when they have finished formally calling upon God, they should “let [their] hearts be full, drawn out in prayer unto [God] continually” (Alma 34:27). This makes it possible even during the commonest of duties or recreational activities of life to pray, for the act is less something we do and more something we are—ever mindful of the power of God in our lives and our dependence on Him.

Paul’s exhortation in 5:18 to be grateful for everything does not mean to be grateful for all circumstances but to be grateful in all circumstances. The Apostle is asking people to be grateful not for hard times and deep sorrows but for the hope that is in Christ and the sustaining power they receive from Him during those times. In sum, when the Apostle speaks of giving reciprocal thanks for all things (*ἐν παντί*, *en panti*), the idea, though broad in compass, is restricted to divine blessings.

The attributes Paul encourages in 5:16–18 (rejoicing, prayer, and thanksgiving) are signs of the presence of the Spirit dwelling in both the hearts of the members and the branch as a whole.³¹ Such recognition, as Paul notes, is the will of God and the proper response to being spiritually in Christ.

In 5:19 Paul introduces another set of exhortations. Here his focus is on God speaking to and through believers and how they should respond thereto. The Apostle begins by instructing the Saints to guard against quenching the manifestations or gifts of the Spirit. As the Apostle indicates in 1 Corinthians 14:32, the utterance of the local prophets is subject to higher powers to which they must bow. No uncontrolled ecstatic utterances, be they manifest as prophecy or glossolalia, are to be part of the worship service. That is not to say, however, that any spiritual manifestation was to be ignored or suppressed. In fact, it could be dangerous. This is because at this time in the Church's growth, the meetings were less structured than they would become.

The center of Paul's concern is not known for sure, but it appears that he is dealing with a potential problem opposite that which he would later find in Corinth. In that branch, people were going to excess in their expression of the gifts of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:7–27; 14:1–18). In this case, it appears that some of a more stolid nature were discouraging the public expression of such gifts. The cause of their alarm may be that these manifestations roused concern and suspicion or gave offense among some in the non-Christian populous.

Paul's exhortation leads directly into the next two that appear to be an explanation of what not quenching the Spirit entails (5:20–21). The first is treating prophecy as having little or no worth and so quashing it. There is little wonder for concern.

The second is carefully testing such statements against the known standard. Paul knew that both true and false prophecies circulated within the general Christian societies (see, for example, 1 Corinthians 14:29). Just because a statement or teaching seemed to derive from a spiritual phenomenon did not make it true. Divine, satanic, and human influences were all at play (see 1 John 4:1–2). Such an environment demanded that some criteria was necessary to tell truth from error. As far as true prophecy was concerned, Paul himself had and continued to set the standard. He showed that such built up, encouraged, and consoled his audience (1 Corinthians 14:3, 31). From the beginning of his ministry among the Thessalonians, he had spoken prophetically under the power of the Holy Spirit with such force that these Saints accepted his word as the very word of God, not that of a mere man (1 Thessalonians 1:5; 2:13). In doing so, he gave the Saints a demonstration of both the kind of prophecy they can trust and what its content should be.

Paul's appeal to hold fast to what is true leads to his warning in 5:22 to avoid all that is morally wrong and hurtful to self and society (*πονηρός, ponēros*). Context suggests that he is likely linking the idea to his desire that the Saints test all seemingly prophetic statements that come their way. It is little wonder he is concerned, because actions based on what a person believes to be true gain energy and adherence and a refusal to accept evidence to the contrary. It is little wonder then that the Apostle feels it is important to

make sure of a teaching's truthfulness before adopting it. The issue he encounters here appears to be that overall, these Saints were excessively willing to dismiss any manifestations or expressions of the Spirit.

In the whole of this section, Paul's exhortations are to the whole congregation and designed to prescribe the necessary conduct that would yield to cohesion among all the members. The strength of this branch, as well as all others, depends on certain modes of social interactions and structures that define the nature of its being and, to be effective, needs to be taken for granted by all. Thus, by his demands, Paul is hardening the foundation on which the Christian community rests and on which it finds its strength and unique place in the world.

5:23

In 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Paul pronounces a prayer for these beloved Saints denoting the conditions he desires them to have at the time of the coming of Christ. He addresses his appeal to "the God of peace." The noun, in this instance, extends beyond its usual denotation referencing a state of peace, harmony, and well-being. Here it indicates a comprehensive fulfillment reaching to a state of completion beyond that which humans can achieve without divine assistance but which God the Father and Christ possess on Their own. In using this phrase, Paul reminds his audience that true and lasting peace comes only from the Father.

His prayer falls into two parts: one for holiness and the other for blamelessness. In the process, Paul emphasizes the necessary role of the Father in the Saints' process of obtaining these two characteristics. God is the one who makes it possible. Paul does not say here just how God does that, only that such is the case. His emphasis, however, is that the endowment is an act of divine will.

Paul mentions first his desire for their holiness. Of importance is the adjective he uses to describe the desired state: "fully, completely" (ὁλοτελής, *holotelēs*). The word denotes a condition that meets and completes all expectations, with an emphasis on finality. There are degrees of holiness, and Paul's prayer reveals he has the highest in mind. In sum, with the endowment of complete holiness, the person becomes, in this aspect, like God in that he or she is fully holy (Leviticus 11:44–45).

Paul's second prayer describes the condition that makes this degree of holiness possible: total blamelessness in spirit, soul, and body at the time of the Lord's coming. The adverb (ἀμέμπτως, *ameptōs*), "blamelessly," indicates a condition that is irreproachable or faultless in all its dimensions.

Paul's tripart division of the person is unique in scripture. Most usually the division is soul and body, with the former indicating either the life force or the inner self and the latter indicating the physical aspect of a person. It appears that here the spirit (πνεῦμα, *pneuma*) refers to the non-physical, life-giving element, while the soul (ψυχή *psyche*) denotes the inner feelings, emotions, and intellectual center and the body (σῶμα, *sōma*) indicates all of one's physical characteristics. Taken together, the soul encompasses the whole of the individual. That Paul breaks these down shows that blamelessness must reach every aspect of the person, which includes not just how she or he acts but what he or she is. By using the

adjective “whole, complete” (*ὅλοκληρος, holoklēros*), Paul underscores the depth and breadth that such blamelessness takes.

5:24

Such a condition may have caused the Saints some concern given their self-awareness of their somewhat limited spiritual strengths and their propensities to give in to human weaknesses of the natural man and woman. The loving Apostle, however, seemingly aware of that concern, gives them full assurance in 1 Thessalonians 5:24 that they need not worry about such. The reason is that by trusting God and having a relationship with Him, they receive the light and the special gift of the Holy Ghost which will enable them to become like Jesus.

5:25–26

In 1 Thessalonians 5:25–26, Paul ends his epistle with two requests. The first is for the Saints’ prayers on behalf of the missionaries. This plea would become one of his common requests, which underscores his faith or understanding in the value of getting needed divine assistance through the appeal of faithful people.³² The entreaty itself would also have other beneficial effects. For example, it would likely not only act as a bonding agent between the one praying and the ones prayed for but would also motivate the prayer to do his or her part in assisting those who are the object of their prayer. Though Paul does not indicate just what he wants them to pray for, the fact that he and his fellow workers are engaged in missionary work suggests that he is asking his audience to plead for divine help in the missionaries’ endeavors. In doing so, he is tacitly engaging the interest of the Saints in Thessalonica in the continuation of the work elsewhere.

Paul’s second request is that the Saints greet each other with a holy kiss. The phrase suggests a warm exchange of welcome between parties. That the kiss must be holy guards against any impropriety in the action. Little is known about this greeting ritual, which is a bit surprising since it seems to have been a central practice among various branches of the Church and endorsed by Paul (see 1 Corinthians 16:20). Though it is not certain, it is likely that such a kiss was not mouth to mouth but mouth to cheek. That the gesture was often used by students to honor their teachers underscores that it was a show of respect and even reverence. It was likely also designed, ideally, to quell contention and bring unity among the members. Further, in a society rife with rather strict social hierarchies best manifest in the patron-client relationship, this Christian act of love, properly motivated, could transcend these social boundaries and work toward establishing a family of equals.

5:27

Before his final benediction, Paul makes one more demand. The fact that the Greek text at this point changes from the third-person plural (“we”) to the first person singular (“I”) is significant: it suggests that Paul is no longer dictating the letter to his scribe but has taken over writing the final items himself,

thereby giving it even more demanding force. He uses the emphatic command *ἐνορκίζω* (*enorkidzō*), “I adjure you,” a word denoting the serious taking of an oath. Paul gives his demand even more punch by invoking the title of the Savior. What he wants is that those who initially receive the letter ensure that every member hears the full text of his epistle. This demand tacitly indicates that the success of the mission in the city now required that meetings be held in several house churches. Paul wants the leadership to make sure that all the members in each community hear and obey the gospel principles he has written of.

Just why he uses such strong language is unclear. It may be to ensure that every member is fully apprised of the epistle’s content so that the doctrine is so well established that no confusion remains. In this way, all the Saints would receive the comfort he designed the epistle to give.

Further, his demand indicates that he sees himself as the leader and Apostle of the whole congregation and that what he has to say applies to all. They are all brothers and sisters, and therefore his words are of equal force for every one of them.

5:28

Paul closes his epistle with what would become his customary benediction: a prayer that the Saints receive a downpouring of grace from the Lord.

His description of this divine being as “our Lord Jesus Christ” (*τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, του κυρίου hēmon Iēsou Christou*) is significant, for it reveals much concerning the understanding of the primitive Church concerning the special authority of the Son of God because a Lord had power over life and death. It shows that they understood Him to be God’s Anointed One with authority to rule over all and with power to bestow obliging grace or reciprocal favors within a covenant. The Apostle’s prayer negates any idea that the early Church did not view Jesus as divine but only gradually came to see Him that way. Paul’s words clearly show that not to be the case and suggest that well before he wrote this, the earliest of his letters, the Church leadership was fully aware of the nature, mission, and work of their Lord and God.

Of note is that Christ’s grace dominates the Apostle’s prayer for these people as he bids them farewell.

One last note seems in order. The phrase at the end of the epistle in the King James Version text stating that it was written from Athens is but a later scribal gloss and is not found in the earliest manuscripts of this epistle.

Notes

- 1 For example, see Romans 3:26; Galatians 2:16; 5:6; Ephesians 4:21; Philippians 4:26.
- 2 Compare 1 Thessalonians 5:13; 1 Corinthians 3:11–15; 15:58; 16:10.
- 3 1 Thessalonians 2:9; 3:5; 2 Corinthians 11:27.
- 4 For more information on the concept of your election of God, please see Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, “Excursus on Election” in *Paul’s Epistles to the Thessalonians* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, forthcoming).

- 5 Charles A. Wannamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 80.
- 6 Romans 8:17; 1 John 3:2; compare Colossians 3:4; Alma 5:14.
- 7 1 Corinthians 8:1; 9:2; 11:9.
- 8 See 1 Thessalonians 2:8–9; compare Romans 1:1; 15:16; 2 Corinthians 11:7.
- 9 M. Eugene Boring, *I and II Thessalonians* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2015), 111.
- 10 1 Corinthians 7:5; compare 2 Corinthians 2:10–12; 11:13–15.
- 11 Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 105.
- 12 See 1 Corinthians 16:5; 2 Corinthians 2:13; Acts 19:21.
- 13 Wannamaker, *Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 145. For a more in-depth analysis of holiness, please see Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, “Excursus on Holiness,” in *Paul’s Epistles to the Thessalonians*.
- 14 James Moffatt, “The First and Second Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Thessalonians,” in *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll, vol. 4 (New York, NY: Hodder and Stoughton, 1897), 33.
- 15 See, for example, 2 Corinthians 4:7; Romans 9:23; 1 Peter 3:7.
- 16 Morris, *First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 123–124.
- 17 Boring, *I and II Thessalonians*, 148.
- 18 Wannamaker, *Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 162.
- 19 See 1 Corinthians 16:1, 19; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Galatians 1:2.
- 20 Morris, *First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 136.
- 21 For more information on the success of the early Christian church, please see Draper and Rhodes, “Excursus on the Reason for the Growth and Success of the Early Church,” in *Paul’s Epistles to the Thessalonians*.
- 22 Matthew 24:43; Luke 12:39; 2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 3:3; 16:15.
- 23 Matthew 24:36; Mark 13:32; Act 1:6–8.
- 24 See, for example, Isaiah 26:17–19; 45:10; 54:1–6; 66:7; Jeremiah 22:23.
- 25 Mark 13:7–8; Romans 8:22; Revelation 12:2.
- 26 Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Understanding Paul* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2007), 83.
- 27 Compare Psalm 37:9; 2 Thessalonians 1:9; Romans 6:23; Alma 12:16.
- 28 Ben Witherington III, *1 and 2 Thessalonians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 148.
- 29 Moffatt, “First and Second Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Thessalonians,” 40.
- 30 Moffatt, “First and Second Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Thessalonians,” 40.

31 See, for example, Romans 8:26; 14:17; 1 Corinthians 14:6.

32 see 1 Thessalonians 3:1–2; Romans 15:30–32; 2 Corinthians 1:11; Colossians 4:3–4.

Credits

Authors: Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes

New Testament Insights Series Editor: John W. Welch

General Editor: Taylor Halverson

Associate Editor: Morgan Tanner

Senior Editor: Sarah Whitney Johnson

Assistant Editors: Sam Lofgran, Verlanne Johnson

Content Manager: Jasmin Gimenez Rappleye

Source: *New Testament Insights: 1 Thessalonians*, by Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes