

## Letters to the Church – Paul

We begin a chronological study of the letters of the Apostle Paul to various churches and persons. Unlike what we have studied in the Bible to date, the letters of Paul are occasional writings. That means that each letter was written for a specific occasion, usually to answer questions that were matters of concern for the churches addressed.

There are a couple of things that this would imply in our study. First, we don't have a systematic statement of Paul's theology. We can glean much of Paul's theology, but he doesn't have any books that bear his name which detail a Christian theology according to Paul.

The second thing these occasional letters imply – we are hearing one side of a conversation. It is as if we were listening to one side of a telephone conversation while trying to decipher what is being said on the other end.

As a refresher, and for those who weren't in the Acts study, let's take a few minutes to consider this man Paul.

Other than Jesus, I, personally, find Paul to be the most fascinating person in the New Testament. My concentration and my thesis in graduate school was the study of Paul.

He was a native of Tarsus, which was an important city in what we would now call Turkey. In its day it was a major commercial center, and the home of a major university. He was of pure Jewish descent, and he was proud of it.

The strange thing about this pure Jewish family is that they were Roman citizens. This meant that his family was of some importance, and most likely what we would call fairly well to do. So, Paul, in the context of his world, lived a fairly easy and privileged life. Think of that when we read of the hardships that he joyfully endured for the Lord.

As a Roman citizen in Tarsus, he would have been bi-lingual. Meaning, he spoke Greek and Aramaic (and possibly Hebrew). He was most likely schooled at the university in Tarsus, so Greek culture was not foreign to him in any way. Indeed, he refers to classical Greek poets and philosophers in his speeches in Acts, and in his letters to the churches.

He then studied in the rabbinical school in Jerusalem. His mentor was none other than Gamaliel, who had told the Jewish leaders in Acts 5 to use caution in their attitude towards the Christ followers.

While he may have been labeled a *Hellenistic* Jew, make no mistake about it, Paul was orthodox in every way, and in no way was he a liberal Jew.

If you're not familiar with the Book of Acts, Paul was a Jewish Pharisee who led a persecution against the Jesus followers. He believed that they were polluting the Jewish faith.

Acts is written in a way in which it appears that Paul, then known as Saul, organized the stoning of Stephen, a Christian.

**Acts 9:1** – Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest<sup>2</sup> and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

If you aren't familiar with his conversion story, please read Acts 9. As we learned in Acts, Paul did not become a believer and immediately start evangelizing. As we will see in his letters, it was some years before he did. Acts tells us that Barnabas encouraged Paul to evangelize to the Gentiles. Barnabas knew of Paul's background with the Gentile world, and so he sought him out.

Throughout our study of Paul's letters, we will refer back to the Book of Acts as sort of a refresher of Paul's contact with the city and/or person being written to. So let's turn to Acts 17.

Chapter 17 began with Paul and his companions in Thessalonica., Luke's account is very short. We know from Paul's letters that he spent a considerable amount of time in Thessalonica.

Remember, in Acts it was clear that Luke's emphasis was the break between Christians and Jews. We saw a similar pattern repeated over and over again – Paul shows up. Preaches to the Jews and God fearers – the Jews get jealous. They cause trouble and Paul leaves town.

What we aren't given in the considerable amount of time in these cities.

**Acts 17:1** – When Paul and his companions had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue.

Thessalonica was a free city, and as such it wasn't under Roman control. It was a large city for its time, and was a busy commercial city. So, there were people from all over that part of the world there. Many different ideas about. It made for a good place to evangelize.

**Acts 17:2** – As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, <sup>3</sup> explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. “This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah,” he said. <sup>4</sup> Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of *God-fearing Greeks* and quite a few prominent women.

Verse two has three Sabbath days. Some modern translations make the connection and have three weeks. The Greek is Sabbath days, however.

Let's not be too quick to say ‘well Paul stayed for three weeks.’ We will soon read and see in 1 & 2 Thessalonians that his stay was much longer.

When we read Philippians, we clearly see that his stay was for an extended length of time.

**Philippians 4:16** – Even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need.

**Acts 17:3** – explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. “This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah,” he said.

Paul had to explain how the Messiah had to suffer because the Jews never associated the suffering servant passages from Isaiah to the Messiah.

**Acts 17:5** – But other Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason’s house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd.

Luke writes of Jason as if his audience would have been familiar with him. Paul mentions a Jason in Romans 16. Is it the same man? We don’t know for sure. However, he’s a saint in the Roman Catholic church, and in the Greek Orthodox church.

Remember, if you were mentioned by name in the New Testament in a favorable light, you were made a saint!

**Acts 17:6** – But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other believers before the city officials, shouting: “These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here,<sup>7</sup> and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar’s decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus.”<sup>8</sup> When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil.<sup>9</sup> Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go.

So Luke basic theme – Paul preaches. Jews get jealous. Trouble follows.

So, that's all we have in Acts about Paul's time in Thessalonica. From Acts it would appear to be brief, but we know that he stayed there for a considerable amount of time.

As with any New Testament book, there are always debates about authenticity – who really wrote the letter, or in Paul's case, who was the letter from. I word it this way because Paul dictated his letters.

Now, some scholars look to a style of writing and they say – oh Paul couldn't have written this letter because the style is different from such and such letter. That's a difficult absolute to make, because when someone writes what another is saying, the style of the person putting pen to paper (ink to parchment) becomes evident.

So, let's consider the authenticity of the Thessalonian letters. It is generally assumed – but there are debates – that both 1 & 2 Thessalonians are authentic Pauline letters. It is probable that they were written while Paul was in Corinth, sometime around the year 50. This makes them the earliest New Testament documents that we have. Earlier than any of the Gospels.

The biggest debate over 1 & 2 Thessalonians is which came first. Originally they were not named 1 & 2 Thessalonians, they were simply letters from Paul to the church in Thessalonica.

How did they become 1 & 2 Thessalonians? By order of length. 1 Thessalonians is longer, it came first.

**1 Thessalonians 1:1** – Paul, Silas<sup>[a]</sup> and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Grace and peace to you.

This is the characteristic greeting used by Paul in nearly all of his letters. This letter is from Paul. Silas and Timothy were with him in Corinth at the time, and shared with Paul his concern for the Thessalonians.

I read Silas, your translation may read Silvanus, which is what the Greek has. Paul uses Silvanus when referring to him.

Luke, who wrote Acts, calls him Silas. Silas may have been the Greek nickname for Silvanus. Silvanus is Latin for Forest.

Paul is addressing the church – in the Greek this is (ek-klay-see'-ah). We get the word eclectic from this word. This word is used often by Paul to describe Christians. The term in ancient Greek mean an assembly. For Paul, it was an assembly that had been called out from the larger culture that surrounded them.

Do we view ourselves as called out from the culture which surrounds us?  
Do we appear to be different?

Remember I said that Paul didn't write a systematic theology. Therefore, we could possibly look at various verses out of context and make some statement about Paul's theology.

For example - To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

What is Paul's theology concerning the trinity?

Well, we have to read all of his letters to glean that information. Some speak more about the trinity than others.

What is significant about this greeting is *Grace and Peace*. The Jewish greeting was Peace. Paul, very much a Jew and very much a Christ follower now makes it Grace and Peace.

The Greek word here for peace is (i-ray'-nay). It refers to a peace of mind.

The Greek word for grace is (khar'-ece). The word literally meant grace or kindness, and Paul's usage it refers to a grace or kindness brought to us by Jesus.

So Grace and peace to you in the RTT becomes may you have the peace that the Grace of Jesus brings.

In most of Paul's letters, a thanksgiving follows his greeting. We have this here.

**1 Thessalonians 1:2** – We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers.<sup>3</sup> We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 3 is very important, and a study or sermon in itself. There is an age old debate about Paul & James, and how Paul emphasizes faith and James emphasizes works. They aren't at odds at all.

Here, Paul states that works are a product of faith. If we claim to have faith in Jesus, in his saving grace, what works is it producing? These works may not necessarily be active in various ministries (it might), but they certainly would be the way we conduct ourselves. The way we speak, the way we forgive.

So, faith produces works. Then labor – action – is produced by love. If the love of Christ is in us, we will involve ourselves in loving service to others.

Finally, hope produces endurance. For them, perhaps this meant endurance against any persecution for their faith. For the Jewish Christians in Thessalonica, it meant endurance in the face of persecution from non-believing Jews.

**V. 4** – For we know, brothers and sisters<sup>[b]</sup> loved by God, that he has chosen you,<sup>5</sup> because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake.

Modern translations always have brothers and sisters, while older translation have just brothers. The Greek word was (ad-el-fos') and was not gender specific. In New testament usage it referred to a fellow Christians.

There are several verses in Paul's letters in which people draw out a theology of predestination. Some are more difficult to reconcile than others. In verse four Paul states that God has chosen them.

The Greek word (ek-log-ay') implies being chosen out from something larger. This is biblical theology found even in the Old Testament. The Jews were chosen out of all the peoples of the world to bring the Messiah/Savior to the world.

Christians are called out of the world to show the way to God through Jesus.

When we look at the New Testament in total, it is God's desire that all people become chosen. That all people step out of the culture of the world and into the Way of Jesus Christ.

**2 Peter 3:9** – He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

Verse 5 – They were called out because – our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction.

The is power in the gospel. And when our words have conviction, and the power of the Holy Spirit, there will be power in them.

Verse 5 – You know how we lived among you for your sake.

Paul, Silas and Timothy were not there to make money off of them. In fact, they worked, and supported themselves.

We know from Acts that Paul was a tent maker – which were living quarters for many people. It was a sought after skill, and he would not have much trouble finding work in any city.

**1 Thessalonians 1:6** – You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. <sup>7</sup> And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.

The KJV says they became followers of them. Imitators is a better translation. It cost the Thessalonians something to follow Jesus. For many, they became ostracized from their former faith communities – whether Jewish or pagan.

And, remember in Acts 17, there were riots. The hostility most likely remained.

Macedonia and Achaia were the two Roman provinces surrounding Thessalonica.

**V. 8** – The Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere.

Paul, as we will see, often uses hyperbole, especially in his greetings and thanksgiving.

**V. 8b** – Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, <sup>9</sup> for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, <sup>10</sup> and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

Let’s understand what this is saying. In Paul’s travels after his time in Thessalonica, people were reporting to him about how the believers in Thessalonica were living distinctively different lives.

Unfortunately, when we speak of Christians living distinctively different lives it usually refers to the Amish, Mennonites, or such group. Mainstream Christians seem to be more mainstream than Christian.

V. 10 – Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.  
Jesus saves us from the judgment for our sins.

## **Chapter 2**

**V. 1** – You know, brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not without results. <sup>2</sup>We had previously suffered and been treated outrageously in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in the face of strong opposition.

The story of Paul in Philippi is in Acts 16. It was in Philippi that he met a wealthy woman who becomes a great help to Paul, Lydia. Paul stayed in Philippi for quite some time, and established a strong church there.

But what is this of the suffering he mentions?

**Acts 16:16** – Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. <sup>17</sup>She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.” <sup>18</sup>She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, “In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!” At that moment the spirit left her.

Interesting Greek word fact – the word we translate as spirit of divination is python. The reason – the mythical god Apollo who was a soothsayer would carry serpents around. So the word for snake and magic became synonymous in the ancient world.

Notice verse 17 – she followed Paul and the rest of us. Luke is now a sometimes travelling companion of Paul. The parts of Acts that Luke includes himself are called by an original name by scholars – the we passages.

**V. 19** – When her owners realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. <sup>20</sup>They brought them before the magistrates and said, “These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar <sup>21</sup>by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice.”

Exactly what customs they were advocating is unclear. It may have been a charge of proselytizing, which while not illegal, was frowned upon in the ancient world. You could set up a temple or place of worship, and make it attractive for people to stop by, but the active recruitment of people of other faiths into your own was discouraged.

What this tells us is that Christianity was looking very much unlike Judaism. Indeed, it was. The pagan converts were already allowed certain privileges that the Jews historically were not allowed. Circumcision, yes, but also food (remember Peter's vision).

**V. 22** – The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. <sup>23</sup> After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. <sup>24</sup> When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

<sup>25</sup> About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.

**V. 40** – After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them. Then they left.

Remember Lydia – she is the rich woman who dealt in purple cloth and had become a Christian.

Note what Paul and Silas did – they had been beaten and imprisoned – and they are encouraging the folks at Lydia's!

So it was after all of that that Paul traveled to Thessalonica.

**1 Thessalonians 2:3** – For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. <sup>4</sup> On the contrary, we speak as those approved by

God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts. <sup>5</sup> You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness.

Paul speaks of the gospel. Remember, this was written before any of the gospels that we have were written. The word gospel did not refer to a book about the life of Jesus. The Greek word is euangelion and means good news.

So verse four could, and maybe should read as “On the contrary, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the good news.”

It is good news that we no longer have to strive over and over, and make sacrifice after sacrifice, in an effort to be right with God.

It is good news that we have forgiveness for our sins, that we have grace.  
It’s not the scary news!

Verse 5 – You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness.

Perhaps some had made the charge that Paul and his companions were just after money or status. Maybe this had been said by the Jews who oppose Paul in Thessalonica. He continues this theme in the following verses.

**V. 6** – We were not looking for praise from people, not from you or anyone else, even though as apostles of Christ we could have asserted our authority. <sup>7</sup> Instead, we were like young children/gentle among you.

Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, <sup>8</sup> so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.

Gospel of God – the good news of God.

Each and every one of us should not only fully understand that good news of God, we should be able to articulate it, and share it with others.

Like Paul, Silas and Timothy, according to verse 8, we should be willing to share not only the good news of God but our very lives, as well.

**V. 9** – Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.

So, we are getting a fairly good picture of one of the occasions – or reasons – why Paul wrote this letter. He keeps bringing up this theme – we weren't a burden on you. We weren't after your money.

Paul wrote this letter while he was in Corinth, and he supported himself while there, as well.

So, did Paul receive no help from the churches? Yes, he did so often. He even received aid from the church in Philippi at least twice while in Thessalonica.

**Philippians 4:16** – Even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need.

After a while, in Corinth, this happened –  
**Acts 18:5** – When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah.

So, it appears that only after a church was established that Paul would receive support from a church, but he certainly was never a burden.

**1 Thessalonians 2:10** – You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. <sup>11</sup> For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, <sup>12</sup> encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

Herein lies the duties of pastor – encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God.

How did it ever come to be that pastors are expected to do so many other things?

In **1 Thess. 1:6**, Paul wrote – You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.

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

“And we also thank God,” – scholars believe that Paul is responding to a letter that he had received from the Christians in Thessalonica.

**V. 14** – For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of God’s churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own people the same things those churches suffered from the Jews <sup>15</sup> who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to everyone <sup>16</sup> in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit.

Like the Christians in Judea, more exactly Jerusalem, who suffered persecution from the Jews, the Thessalonians had suffered persecution from their own people. From Acts, we know that the Jews stirred up trouble while Paul was there. That most likely didn’t end completely when Paul left.

Many of the Christians in Thessalonica were pagan converts, and they, too, suffered some persecution from their pagan friends and family members.

This wouldn't have been anything like the widespread Roman persecution that would eventually take place, but persecution, nonetheless.

Interestingly, Paul was the chief instigator of the persecution in Judea.

**1 Thessalonians 2:16b** – The wrath of God has come upon them at last.

There's been a lot of scholarly debate about this verse. Is it referring to the fall of Rome? If so, that would take place some twenty years after this letter would have been written. Some scholars say – well then Paul didn't write this letter. Most scholars believe some scribe added this at a later date.

While some scholars believe that it simply means that now that they had rejected Jesus, God has handed them over to their own ways and the wrath to come, something similar he would say about those who reject God in Romans 1.

Remember, when we read these letters we are reading one side of a conversation. Perhaps, some were accusing Paul of not really caring about the spiritual welfare of the Thessalonians. Perhaps, as he writes the following.

**V. 17** – But, brothers and sisters, when we were orphaned by being separated from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. <sup>18</sup>For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, did, again and again—but Satan blocked our way.

It is no secret – and is evident when we read Paul's letters chronologically, that Paul expected the return of Jesus to happen soon, in his lifetime. While his later writings seem

to have softened this belief, it is clear in the following verses that he was still under this belief at the writing of this letter.

**V. 19** – For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? <sup>20</sup> Indeed, you are our glory and joy.

When Paul writes the coming of Jesus, the word he uses in Parousia, and it may be translated as second coming. It is what it referred to.

Parousia was a word that in a wider sense meant the arrival of a king, or a member of a royal family.

### **1 Thessalonians 3**

At the end of chapter 2, Paul was writing about how he had longed to see the Thessalonians again, but had been prevented from doing so.

Chapter 3 picks up there.

**V. 1** – So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens.

Acts 17 tells us that after the trouble in Thessalonica, Paul left for Berea. The Jews who had caused trouble in Thessalonica found out that Paul was there, so they went to Berea to cause trouble. From Berea, he traveled to Athens.

Acts 17:15 tells us that Silas and Timothy were going to meet Paul in Athens. Here in verse 2 it appears they did, and then they sent Timothy back to Thessalonica.

**V. 2** – We sent Timothy, who is our brother and co-worker in God's service in spreading the gospel/good news of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, <sup>3</sup>so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. For you know quite well that we are destined for them.

To strengthen and encourage their faith – the duty of a pastor.

Also note, Christians are destined for trials. The Greek word – (ki'-mahee) – that we translate as destined means to have something laid out before you. Did you ever think that as a Christian you will have troubles laid out before you?

Why is this?

Because evil will oppose the kingdom of God. When we live a kingdom life, there will be opposition.

That's not fair!?

We have been given the Spirit of God to defeat the evil before us.

**Romans 8:26** – the Spirit helps us in our weakness.

**Ephesians 6:10** – be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

**1 Corinthians 4:20** – the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.

**Philippians 4:13** – I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

**1 Thessalonians 3:4** – In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know. <sup>5</sup> For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter had tempted you and that our labors might have been in vain.

So Timothy had spent some time in Thessalonica, having returned as Paul prepares his letter to them.

**V. 6** – But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you. <sup>7</sup> Therefore, brothers and sisters, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith.

What brings you joy? Do we rejoice when other Christians live strong through faith? According to the next verse, their concern for them was so great, and the joy they received was so great, that they felt even more alive than ever!

**V. 8** – For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord. <sup>9</sup> How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? <sup>10</sup> Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.

What was lacking in their faith? We are not told, but we can gain some understanding of what it was in the next two chapters.

**V. 11** – Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you.

In the Greek, this verse gives us a glimpse into the theology of Paul. We have God the Father and Jesus. Then Paul asks that they clear the way – or direct. The verb tense in the Greek is singular when in the Greek it would have been plural had Paul been talking about two different people.

But he was not, he speaking of two of the three persons of the one triune God.

**V. 12** – May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. <sup>13</sup> May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones/saints.

Remember, Paul was anticipating the imminent return of Jesus. Exactly who these saints are we do not know. Some have said these are those who will be raised first, according to 1 Thessalonians 4:16.

Others say that this refers to angels. This is most likely, as this is what the prophet Zechariah said in **Zechariah 14:5** – Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him.

## Chapter 4

Now the letter changes tone. For the final two chapters we have a series of exhortations.

**V. 1** – As for other matters, brothers and sisters, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. <sup>2</sup> For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.

**V. 3** – It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality;

Sanctified – In the Greek we have a word that we translate as holy or saint, and that is (hag'-ee-os). Here we have a Greek word we translate as sanctified and it is (hag-ee-as-mos').

This word we translate as sanctified spoke about a continual process. Sanctified is not a place we get to in our spiritual walk and we've made it. Sanctified people can stop being sanctified. It's supposed to be a continual life long process.

This is what Paul is saying to the folks – It is God's will that you keep moving forward in your Christian walk. Sometimes we get part of life sanctified, but other areas need to join up.

Maybe a new Christian cleans up their language, that's sanctification, but maybe they still lie, or harbor un-forgiveness. They need to stay in the process of sanctification – (hag-ee-as-mos').

Avoid sexual immorality – the Greek word is porneia. How do we define this word in the New Testament? Usually just that – sexual immorality.

But we want further explanations – what is ok, what is not ok? Paul will address some specific behaviors in his letters, and here. But, to really understand Paul's understanding

of sexual immorality and sexual purity, we have to remember that he was a Jewish Pharisee. His writings about sexual behaviors reflect a Jewish mindset.

**Exodus 20:14, 17** – You shall not commit adultery. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male or female servant.

For Paul, sexual purity was found in a marriage between a man and a woman. If you are wondering about what Paul says about same sex relationships, you will have to wait.

I’m reading from the NIV. **Verse 4** reads this way: that each of you should learn to control your own body<sup>[a]</sup> in a way that is holy and honorable.

Almost all modern translation read something like this.

The RSV reads – that each one of you know how to take a wife for himself in holiness and honor.

I have no idea why or how the RSV translators came up with this. In the Greek, the word that is usually translated as body is the word for vessel. This is a biblical concept, that we are vessels. For some reason, the RSV translated it as wives.

**V. 5** – not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God;

Is desire wrong between a husband and wife?  
Keep in mind that most of the Christians in Thessalonica had been pagan. In their culture, sexual freedom and sexual promiscuity were expected. Coveting someone else’s wife, or another man or woman (10<sup>th</sup> commandment) is what Paul is referring to.

**V. 6** – and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister.<sup>[b]</sup> The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before.

Again, here he is referring to coveting a neighbors wife/husband.

**V. 7** – For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. <sup>8</sup> Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit.

To live a holy life – the same word we translate as sanctified. Holy means set apart, distinctive.

Our sexual purity should be different from the culture around us.

At this point Paul moves on from sexual purity to other matters. Whether he is responding to their questions sent in a letter, or sent through Timothy, we can't be sure. But the way he answers a series of issues, we can be fairly certain that he is responding to questions or issues brought to this attention.

**V. 9** – Now about your love for one another we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other.

I read love for one another, and older translations have brotherly love. The Greek word is philadelphia. Brotherly love was a very distinctive Christian virtue. In fact, the Greek word Philadelphia was almost never used before in any context other than the love for a family member. Here, it is used for the love shared with all the believers.

So, they had *been taught by God to love each other*. The word love is agape – to love without conditions. To love others doesn't come naturally in our fallen world. It must come from God.

**1 John 4:7** – Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup> Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

This kind of love was not in their lives before Jesus. This kind of love should be in us.

This love for others will lead to the next topic.

**V. 10** – And in fact, you do love all of God’s family throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more,<sup>11</sup> and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you,

Live quietly, mind your own business.

While loving one another should move us to speak out of concern to one another, especially when a brother or sister is heading down a wrong path, we shouldn’t be busy bodies – sticking our noses in everyone’s business.

Lead a quiet life most likely has to do with gossip. Gossip is a big sin according to the Bible, and one in which too many Christians welcome into their lives.

**Ephesians 4:29** – Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

**James 1:26** – Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless.

**Romans 1:29** – They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips,<sup>30</sup> slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful

**4:12** – so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.

Our lives should be noticed by others. Especially those without a relationship with Jesus.

Remember, Paul expected the immediate return of Jesus at any moment. So did the Thessalonian Christians. So when folks who had become Christian began to pass away,

they were concerned that those people would not receive the blessing of witnessing the coming of Jesus.

Obviously, this question made its way to Paul, either by letter or by Timothy.

**4:13** – Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope.

If your translation has – we do not want you to be ignorant – that is a better translation. The Greek word is ignorant. The word did not carry the connotation that it does today. Ignorance is not stupidity, it is lacking information.

“Do not grieve like the rest” – mankind or humanity is not there in the Greek. It simply says like the rest. Actually, it doesn't, the Greek word is (loy-poy') and it means – What's left, or one might say left behind.

“About those who sleep in death.” – The Greek is (koy-mah'-o) and the word was a euphemism for death. We might say pass away when we mean death.

**V. 14** – For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

To believe in the resurrection of Jesus is to believe in the resurrection of the dead.

This is going to be a question within the church in Corinth, as well. Paul wrote to them and said –

**1 Corinthians 15:20** – Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

**V. 15** – According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.

According to the Lord's word – from where? From Jesus himself? From something written? From Christian tradition up to that point? We can't say with certainty.

As confusing as this subject can be – this verse makes it clear. We who are alive right now will not go to heaven before those who have already died?

There are those who believe in soul sleep, and the next couple of verses taken out of context would point to that. But we who are alive will not go before those who have died.

**V. 16** – For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> After that, ...

After that – after some time. Paul is not necessarily writing as if these events will happen seconds after one another.

As Christians have reconciled these verses with verses in later letters, our traditional view has been that the trumpet calls for each of us when we die. If we are in Christ, we rise when we die.

Then, after that ...

**V. 17** – After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. <sup>18</sup> Therefore encourage one another with these words.

In the clouds – meant to convey heaven. So, Paul is saying that we will meet the Lord in heaven.

So, will the Lord actually be on earth? It says we will meet the Lord in the air/heaven. However, verse 16 spoke of the Lord coming down from heaven.

Unfortunately, no one that we know of actually sat down with Paul and asked for an explanation. So, let's find encouragement where we can.

We will not get to heaven before those who have died, and reconciled with other New Testament verses, we believe that we will be with the Lord when we die.

Will there come a time when it's all over and the Lord comes to get us?

Looks like it, but let's not simply sit back and wait for that to happen, and Paul doesn't suggest we should.

We continue to live a life as one called out from the society around us.

## Chapter 5

So, Paul, when is the Lord returning?

**V. 1** – Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, <sup>2</sup> for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. <sup>3</sup> While people are saying, “Peace and safety,” destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

Like a thief in the night – if they didn't have our gospels, how were they familiar with these words?

**Matthew 24:42** – “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. <sup>43</sup> But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. <sup>44</sup> So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”

Well, just because Matthew, Mark, Luke & John had not been written doesn't mean that people were unfamiliar with the teachings of Jesus. Keep in mind, this was still very much an oral culture. Many people didn't read, and they depended upon teachings to recite these sayings.

Also, we believe that there probably was a written document before our four gospels, which didn't survive the passage of time.

And also – like a thief in the night was a common sayings.

**V. 3** – While people are saying, “Peace and safety,” destruction will come on them suddenly –

It's good advice to stay spiritually awake because none of us knows not only when Jesus will return, but when our lives will end.

Remember, the message of Jesus is good news. We are not in the darkness any longer, and we need not fear the Day of the Lord.

**V. 4** – But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. <sup>5</sup> You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness.

Light & darkness, the light overtaking the darkness, is a common New Testament theme.

**John 1:4** – In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome<sup>[a]</sup> it.

**2 Corinthians 4:6** – For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,”<sup>[a]</sup> made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.

**V. 6** – So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober.

Here, the sleep is not physical death, but spiritual death. We are children of the light and children of the day – we are spiritually awake. We must remain so.

**V. 7** – For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. <sup>8</sup> But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.

Hey, isn't that Ephesians 6?  
Yes it is, and Paul wrote that letter as well. So, this was an analogy that he was familiar with.

Throughout his letters he often uses images of a battle, a race, a contest, a prize fight.

**V. 9** – For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>10</sup> He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.

Here asleep is death. Whether we are alive or dead, we may live together with him. This would lead us to believe that when we die we will be with the Lord.

**Romans 8:38, 39** – For I am convinced that neither death nor life will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**V. 11** – Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

Can't I be a Christian and not be part of a church?  
No, you can't be a biblical Christian. Part of the purpose of the church is to encourage others and to be encouraged.

Most of the Thessalonian Christians had been pagans before following Jesus. The pagans of that time had not much of a moral code. Their spiritual practices were between them and the gods they worshipped. There were not pagan spiritual guides, or at least very few. They weren't grouped in ecclesia's/assemblies.

So, they now had spiritual leaders. Back in chapter 2 Paul touched on what the responsibility of those leaders were.

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

Here in verse 12 he touches on that subject again.

**V. 12** – Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. <sup>13</sup> Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work.

The word we translate as admonish carries the idea of someone who warns others about their actions. Not administering punishment, but warnings.

**V. 13b** – Live in peace with each other.

Living at peace with one another within the church has been a challenge for Christians since the very beginning – indeed, we see it here in the earliest Christian writings that we have.

Perhaps the need for encouraging them to be at peace with one another has something to do with the people being idle, as it follows this verse and is mentioned in both Thessalonian letters.

What are the idlers? A couple of thoughts.

One, Jesus is coming back any minute, I'll just sit around and wait!

Second, perhaps idlers was connected to people who were Christian in name only. Such people would be disruptive to the ecclesia.

**V. 14** – And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. <sup>15</sup> Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.

Within the church/ecclesia, we are to warn others, encourage others, help others, and be patient with them.

Most of what we read in Paul's letters speaks of our behavior to other church members. Verse 15 makes it clear that we don't keep our Christian behavior just within the church.

We are also to strive to do good for each other (meaning in the church) and for everyone else (non-believers).

Paul now changes from ethical exhortations to religious.

**V. 16** – Rejoice always,

The word rejoice is found in Paul's letters more than two dozen times. He gives the Philippians the same admonition in Philippians 4:4. In 1 Peter 4, Peter also admonishing them to rejoice. So, rejoicing is a big deal for Christians!

**V. 17** – pray continually,

Does this mean every minute of the day, without end? How do we focus on other things? The Greek word could mean 'without remission.' Don't take a break from your discipline of prayer. If you don't have a discipline of prayer, develop one.

**V. 18** – give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Joy, prayer, thanksgiving. These three things together are found in Romans 12, Colossians 4, & Ephesians 6. They are essentials to the Christian life.

**V. 19** – Do not quench the Spirit. <sup>20</sup> Do not treat prophecies with contempt <sup>21</sup> but test them all; hold on to what is good, <sup>22</sup> reject every kind of evil.

These three things – not quenching the Spirit, not treating prophecies with contempt, testing them and rejecting the evil prophecies, build upon one another.

For the modern English reader, they make more sense when we change the order. Don't treat preaching with contempt, but test them and reject the unsound preaching. Don't reject the solid preaching or you will quench the spirit within you.

**V. 23** – May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul mentions Spirit, soul & body.  
What would be the difference between spirit and soul?

Spirit – pneuma – spirit. The pagans would have thought in terms of a divine spark. Something from God that gives life to us.

Soul – psuché – the essence of the individual. The person's mind.

Similar, but different.

**V. 24** – The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.

God is faithful, and with God's Spirit we can be kept blameless.

**V. 25** – Brothers and sisters, pray for us. <sup>26</sup> Greet all God's people with a holy kiss.

A holy kiss is mentioned in three of Paul's letters. It's found in 1 Peter. It's found twice in Luke's gospel. It was a common greeting among Christians and others. In some places in the world, it still is.

Parts of Mexico that we travel to, it is common.

**V. 27** – I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers and sisters.  
The ecclesia would gather together – in homes – and this letter would be read.

**V. 28** – The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.