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CHAPTER 1

1:1 *Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to you and peace-* Paul and Silas were only "three Sabbath days" in Thessalonica (Acts 17:2). As many would have been working during the week, and Paul would not have been the only teacher in the synagogue, those baptized there would have had only a few hours instruction in the Gospel. It's not surprising that Paul had to now write to them about apparently basic things such as the Lord's coming and the resurrection. They were really "in God" and in Christ- Paul didn't want them to think that they had merely shown passing interest in some itinerant preacher. It was all for real.

1:2 *We give thanks to God always for you all-* The Old Testament as well as New is written in such a way as to encourage memorization, although this is often masked by the translation. There are several devices commonly used to assist in this. Not least is alliteration, i.e. similarly sounding syllables, and we have an example here: *Pantote Peri Panton* (1 Thess. 1:2); *Polymeros kai polytropos* (Heb. 1:1); *hautee protee entolee* (Mk. 12:30); *aphtharton amianton amaranton* (1 Pet. 1:3,4).

Making mention of you in our prayers- This means more than just 'mentioning'. To mention before God is a Hebraism referring to actually having real effect upon God's view of the person or situation, just as might make positive mention of someone to a superior. Whilst the Lord Jesus is our only mediator, it is also that because we in Him, we can have influence upon God in regard to others; He is so open to our prayers.

1:3 *Remembering without ceasing before our God and Father your work of faith, labour of love and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ-* "Remembering" is a similar word to "making mention" in :2 (see note there). Paul brought to God's attention, as it were, their faith, hope and love. And we must ask ourselves, as to how much of our prayer time is taken up with telling God the good things about others? Paul says he did this "without ceasing". Quite a challenge to our prayer life, which so easily tends towards selfishness. "Labour of love" is literally 'toil', and is elsewhere translated "trouble" or "weariness". Loving others results in just this- weariness and trouble. But that is what love is about in practice. "Hope" refers not to a hoping for the best, but a solid expectation- in this case, of salvation, because we are in Christ. That hope was 'patient' or enduring; our tendency is to be persuaded of our salvation for a moment and then drift into the mire of mediocrity in that we lose that intensity of vision and expectation. But patient or enduring hope means life lived in the constant belief that we shall be saved. Paul commends them for this- and yet has to explain to them later that those of them who had recently died were not lost, but would be resurrected at the Lord's return. The Thessalonians therefore had a basic faith, that there was hope in Christ, and they endured in that faith; but their understanding of what that hope was remained clearly very hazy. But all the same, Paul commended them in his prayers before God for believing and having the sure hope. So whilst faith must have content, we believe in something, it is also

true that basic faith in Jesus is acceptable even if we have details wrong as regards how it shall all work out in practice.

Note how many times Paul gives thanks for the spiritual progress he sees in others, even though we can be sure he saw clearly enough the spiritual immaturity which there still must have been in his converts. So many times he thanks God in his prayers for what he has seen in others (Rom. 1:8-10; 1 Cor. 1:4-9; 2 Cor. 1:3-7; 9:12-15; Eph. 1:3-23; Phil. 1:3-6; Col. 1:3-14; 1 Thess. 1:2,3; 2:13-16; 3:9; 2 Thess. 1:3-10; 2 Tim. 1:3-7; Philemon 4-7). Now it follows that if we are to *pray* like Paul, we must have the heart of love for people that was in him. So often we dwell upon the negative, the scandals, the failures of others. And we can't thank God for those things. Paul's pattern of prayer was of positive praise. And we can only share that if we have a mind that is positively perceptive of signs of response to grace in others.

Their "work of faith" recalls how James argues that there is no essential difference between faith and works. 'Faith' is not just credulity or a vague feeling of hope, but an active, driving force. There is "the work of faith" (1 Thess. 1:3; 2 Thess. 1:11); faith is something which ought to be 'done', the Lord taught (Mt. 23:23). Knowledge and faith are paralleled in John's thought (Jn. 8:32 cp. 14:1; and 6:69 cp. 11:27)- in stark contrast to this world's emphasis upon works rather than faith. Hence Isaiah's appeals to *know* and *believe* Yahweh (43:10); and the Lord's parallel of 'little faith' with little understanding (Mt. 16:7,8). *Pistis*, one of the NT words for 'faith', is translated in the LXX as both 'faith' (e.g. Dt. 32:20; Prov. 12:22) and 'truth' (Prov. 12:17; 14:22; Jer. 5:1). Indeed, another word used in the LXX is 119 times translated 'truth' and 26 times 'faith'. There *is* a connection between true knowledge of the Gospel and faith. And this faith is the basis for our works. We don't just learn the propositions of the one faith before baptism, and forget them. The triumphant spiritual life *lives them out*.

We note that their "hope" is praised here, but they were seriously deficient in understanding what that hope was in detail, apparently not understanding much about the resurrection. Yet Paul perceived their faith in Christ and firm expectation ["hope"] of salvation in Him, and praises them for it- even if they were astray or ignorant in their understanding of how it would work out in practice. See on 4:13. We can only conclude that not understanding the details of our future hope does not mean we do not have a valid faith in Christ, nor does it hinder the validity of a baptism. But like Paul, we are to seek to fill in the gaps which believers have in their knowledge of these things.

1:4 *Knowing, brothers beloved of God, your first calling*- Paul was sure they had been called because he had preached the Gospel to them (:5). The call is therefore in the Gospel. Those who hear the Gospel are called; those who have been invited to Christ cannot ever claim they were not invited or not called. Paul doesn't want them to be in any doubt about their calling- he wanted them to 'know' it. And yet Paul is so positive about these rather weak Thessalonians when talking to God about them; see on :3. The Lord's mediation for us is similar.

1:5- see on Gal. 1:6.

How that our preaching of the gospel came not to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit- As noted on :4, this preaching of the Gospel was the proof that they had

indeed been called to the Kingdom; and they should not stop 'knowing' that they were called. The word they had heard had been backed up by the power of the Holy Spirit. There is no record of any miracles being performed to back up Paul's preaching in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-10). The confirmation of belief was in the gift of the power of the Spirit in the hearts of all believers after baptism. It was and is not simply accepting a word preached; that word is confirmed by the action of the Spirit. The "power" given can refer to miracles, but there is no record of them in Acts 17; I suggest the reference is therefore to the power of the Spirit within us; the parable of the talents uses the same word, translated "ability", regarding the gifts given to each believer (Mt. 25:15). It is the gift of the power of the Spirit which enables us to abound in joy, hope and peace- all internal attributes (Rom. 15:13). This is the "power" (s.w.) with which we are strengthened by the gift of "the Spirit in the inner man" (Eph. 3:16). This is why Paul assures them that he can thank God for their faith, love and patience (:3); because they were given these things by the work of the Spirit.

And in much assurance- See on Jn. 15:26. As noted above, this could also refer to the gift of the Spirit in their hearts which was an assurance of their future salvation (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5). The riches of full assurance (Col. 2:2) are the same riches given by the gift of the Spirit in our hearts (Eph. 3:16-18). But we can be given the Spirit gift, and yet not be spiritual (1 Cor. 3:1). We must allow the work of the Spirit within us, and believe it.

There was a confidence exuding from the early preachers that they had arrived at Truth. They 'had the Truth' in that what they knew and had experienced was enough for salvation. Unlike the surrounding philosophies and religions, they knew whom they had believed; they weren't going somewhere in vague hope, they had arrived. They had something concrete to offer others. They preached from a basis of personal hope and conviction and experience, quite unlike the more 'political' methods other religions used to recruit members. The philosophers and teachers of the 1st century had little conviction about the value or truth of their position. But the Truth came "not only in word but also in power... and with full conviction (Gk. *plerophoria*)" (1 Thess. 1:5). This conviction was not mere dogmatism and self-belief; and likewise our witness must carry with it a "full conviction" that contrasts with the uncertainty about faith, hope etc. which many professing 'believers' of other faiths reveal when they are probed in any depth about their positions. Paul preached the seriousness of the issues which there are in the Gospel; and yet people flocked back to hear more (Acts 13:41). The preaching of truth involves the message of something being exclusive, and compellingly so. In the first century, "no pagan cult was exclusive of any other and the only restriction on initiation into many cults was the expense".

Even as you know what manner of men we have shown ourselves toward you, for your sake- Paul realized he was "a Christ appointed model" (RR); see on 1 Tim. 1:15. And so he framed his life in such a way as it could be usefully imitated, showing himself a pattern "for your sake". There is a fine line between this and posturing / hypocrisy. Paul was only with them for "three Sabbath days" (Acts 17:2), he had only a few contact hours with many of them. The greatest Christian instruction he could give them was himself. And they imitated him (:6). As many would have been illiterate, the word of the Gospel and of Jesus had to be made flesh, modelled, so that they could follow the pattern. This is not the same as the endless 'Let me tell you about myself' sermons which clutter Christianity today. To be a Christian is to be Christ centered, and Paul realized this; for he goes on to say that their imitation of him was therefore also of the Lord Jesus (:6). He wrote the same to the Corinthians: "Be followers of me even as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). He was to imitated only insofar as he was an image of the Lord.

1:6 *And you became imitators of us and of the Lord-* See on :5. The idea of consciously modelling, of having some characters as your heroes, your inspiration towards a closer following of God, was very much in Paul's thinking. Not only does he do it himself, but he encourages others to do it. He doesn't use the word 'modelling'; he uses the word 'mimicking', Greek *mimicos*, normally translated "follow" in the AV. This Greek word is used almost exclusively by Paul. "You became *followers* of us and of the Lord.... you know how you ought to *follow* us... an ensample unto you to *follow* us" (1 Thess. 1:6; 2 Thess. 3:7,9; the implication is that in the gap between 1 and 2 Thessalonians, they stopped following Paul as they initially did straight after his conversion of them).

We all have more influence on each other than we may think. Quite naturally, the Thessalonians imitated the ecclesias of Judaea and also Paul personally (1 Thess. 1:6; 2:14). And in turn, they became models to all the believers in Macedonia (1 Thess. 1:7). Leadership is essentially a process of influence, rather than a brother standing up and lecturing others. But the Lord used images such as salt, yeast and light to describe *all* who are in Him. They speak of indirect, constant, transforming influence rather than a frontal assault on the unspirituality of others.

Paul explains to the Thessalonians that he has consciously lived life before them in order to provide them with a template to copy; and their copying of that template in turn became a pattern to those within their circle of contact to emulate. In this we see the power of example, especially in the preaching of the Gospel: "You know what kind of men we were among you *for your sake* (i.e. Paul consciously lived as an example to them). And you became followers of us... so that *you* became examples to all in Macedonia... so that *we* do not need to say anything [because those who had copied Paul's example were effectively his voice to others]... for *they* [the converts of the Thessalonians, not Paul] themselves declare concerning *us* what manner of entry we had to *you* [i.e. the converts of the Thessalonians were a reflection of Paul's conversion of the Thessalonians]... you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judaea" (1 Thess. 1:6-9; 2:14). This last comment suggests that in imitating Paul, the Thessalonians were imitating the ecclesias in Judaea- perhaps indicating that it was those ecclesias who had initially influenced Paul and been his pattern, and now he was a pattern to the Thessalonians, and they in turn were a pattern to their converts in Macedonia.

Having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit- At the point of conversion and baptism, they received joy on account of the gift of the Holy Spirit. Rom. 5:5 speaks of love too being shed forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us. The outpouring of the Spirit is not only at baptism; we continue to be given it if we are open to it. Hence at Acts 13:52 "the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit", and Paul prays that the Roman believers would be "filled with joy... through the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 15:13). Life in Christ now is about "joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17). One of the fruits brought forth by the Spirit in us is joy (Gal. 5:22).

1:7 *In this way you became an example to all in Macedonia and in Achaia that believe-* See on :6. The example of the early Christians, especially their deportment under persecution and even death, was what converted others. The Thessalonians were convinced that what Paul taught them was not the word of men but the word of God, because of who Paul was: his life, his self-sacrifice, his caring, convinced them (1 Thess. 2:1-14). Paul speaks of how they had become examples to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia; and yet he also notes in the same context how the Gospel has been spread throughout those very same regions,

Macedonia and Achaia (1 Thess. 1:7,8). Their example was associated with the acceptance of the message. Their faith had “gone forth” and so thereby had the word of the Lord “sounded forth” (:8 RV).

1:8- see on Acts 2:46.

For from you has sounded out the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia but in every place your faith toward God has gone forth; so that we do not need to say anything about you- See on :7. Their following of Paul (:5,6) appears to specifically be a reference to their obedience to the great preaching commission: as if Paul is saying: 'Well done for realizing that the great commission which some of us received specifically, does in fact apply to you too!': "You became imitators of us... *for* not only has the word of the Lord *sounded forth* from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has *gone forth everywhere*". We see from this verse the network of communication which there was amongst the early churches. We read in Col. 4:8 of Tychicus being sent specifically from Rome to Colosse 'just' to share news of how Paul was faring in prison; and there were a whole group of "messengers of the churches" (2 Cor. 8:23). Communication was so important within a community which knew itself to be the body of Christ on earth, existent in order to build one another up. And yet with all our ease of communication, so little real communication goes on within the body of Christ relative to the ease of it. Communication then was a real sacrifice, and yet messengers scurried around the Mediterranean basin, in an age when most people never travelled more than 50 km. from their birthplace. And so the faith of those in Thessalonica, who had heard Paul preaching Christ for only three Sabbath days, spread far and wide.

1:9 *For others report about what kind of reception you gave us and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God-* See on :8. The record in Acts 17 says that Paul preached for three Sabbath days in the synagogue; and yet this verse envisages the Thessalonians as having been previously idol worshippers, and 2:14 states that the readership were Gentiles. Perhaps Paul preached to Gentiles too, although Acts 17 doesn't record it states that in addition to some Jews, a large group of "religious Gentiles" also responded. We would assume from Acts 17:4 that these were proselytes, or at best the religiously curious who also attended synagogue services. In this case we find great encouragement in our witness; for it can be discouraging to keep meeting people who are religious on a hobbyist level, but who seem unable to come to firm faith in the one true God. These were, it seems, the types Paul converted at Thessalonica, attending the synagogue as well as worshipping idols. Confronted with the truth of the Lord Jesus, they realized that the days of having religion as a hobby were over; this was the truth, and they believed it. They perceived that they were called to actually serve this living God; that He was not just an idea, a theology which they could approve, but a real, live Being who called them not only to intellectually assent to Him, but to actually serve Him. The Lord's parable spoke of all believers being given unique talents, and leaving, as it were, the baptismal waters to go out and use them for Him. This call to service, rather than mere academic assent, is lacking in much of our witness.

1:10- see on Mt. 3:7.

And to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come- On one hand we are serving God in practice (:9), on the other, we are waiting for the Lord's return. The usage of "Jesus" without any title, such as "Lord" or "Christ", is unusual. "Jesus" was a very common Jewish name at the time. Yet Paul baldly

uses it, in purposeful juxtaposition with the fact He is God's Son, raised from the dead, who shall return. Yet Paul along with that emphasizes His utter humanity, having a name as common as Dave or Steve in the Anglo Saxon world. "The wrath to come" may refer to the time of trouble of the last days which Paul clearly expected to come upon that generation; they should not fear it, because it was to be the sign the Lord's return was imminent. He may well be alluding to the prediction that God's true Israel would be delivered by "Michael" from the time of trouble of the last days (Dan. 12:1). Paul considered both Jewish and Gentile Christians to be part of that new people of God.

CHAPTER 2

2:1 *Brothers, you know our visit with you, that it has not been found vain-* "Our visit" is literally as AV "our entering in", and is the same word used by Paul for the 'entering in' by the Lord Jesus when He began His ministry (Acts 13:24). Paul clearly saw his ministry as a manifestation and replica of the Lord's. His audiences met Christ insofar as they met him. Therefore Paul's personal example could hardly be distinguished from the gospel he taught (1 Thess. 2:1-12)- he was his message, just as the Lord was His word made flesh. This is why 'authority' and respect are things which are earned naturally in a community by those who have converted the community. It is hard to impose these things from outside the conversion experience.

2:2 *As you know-* Paul was only with them for three Sabbath days, and yet in his teaching of them he told them what had happened to him in Philippi just days before. The marks of the beatings and the imprint of the chains would still have been on his body. He would have been a living, visible example of what it meant to suffer with Christ, and of the kind of commitment which following Him required. And Acts 17:4 says that a large number of people responded to his preaching.

Previously in Philippi we suffered and were spitefully treated- These are the very words used about the sufferings of the Lord (Mt. 16:21; 17:12 etc.); and of His shameful or spiteful treatment on the cross (Lk. 18:32). Hence Paul could speak of filling up the measure of Christ's sufferings through what he suffered whilst preaching Christ's Gospel (Col. 1:24). Paul was explaining and exhibiting what death and suffering with Him really meant; and people lined up to be baptized in response. They became followers of Paul and of the Lord (1:6). I suggested on 1:9 that the converts in Thessalonica were religiously curious Gentiles who attended the synagogue. But it was seeing the radical height of the call in Christ which made them snap out of the religiously curious mindset and be willing to sacrifice themselves for the Lord. The height of a demand motivates us to snap out of the mediocre secular mindset and give all for Him. Terrorist groups often find recruits among the uncommitted, religiously curious, secular types- who see in the rhetoric of total commitment something appealing. That rhetoric of total devotion unto death is found in the Lord Jesus, and Paul was a parade example of human response to it. The same word for "suffered" will be used in :14 and 2 Thess. 1:5 of how in turn, the Thessalonians "suffered"- with Christ, with Paul, and as an invitation to others to likewise sign up to the life of suffering and death with Him, that we might live with Him.

But even amid much opposition we were bold in our God to tell you about the gospel of God- Thessalonians tends to speak more about God rather than about the Lord Jesus. This was because they had been persuaded to quit their many gods and accept the one true God (1:9).

2:3- see on 2 Cor. 12:7.

For our appeal is not of error, nor of uncleanness, nor in deceit- Paul didn't state bald facts and leave it to his audience to make their minds up, which seems to be the tendency of preaching in our age. He *appealed* for their response. He has to remind the Thessalonians that he isn't preaching because he wants to take money and have relationships with women (1 Thess. 2:3-12). There were some wealthy women in Thessalonica who accepted the Gospel (Acts 17:4 Western Text), and no doubt gossip spread from this. See on 1 Tim. 5:19. It goes

with the territory that any preacher of the Gospel is going to suffer gossip and slander, no matter how wisely they deport themselves.

2:4 But even as we have been approved of God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak- We were "put in trust with the Gospel", literally 'en-faithed' with it, God gave it to us in faith that we would preach it (1 Thess. 2:4). The parable of the talents has an element of unreality to it, in that the rich owner gives all his wealth to his slaves and then goes away, leaving them to trade with it and increase his overall wealth. The storyline demands that we see him as having taken a big leap of faith in men and women who were not at all used to operating on their own initiative.

Not as pleasing men but God, who tests our hearts- If we know God's judgments- and this is an ongoing process- then our self-examination will become closer and closer to the real picture of us which God has. It is apparent that God *now* tests our hearts (Job 7:18; Ps. 11:4; 17:3; 26:2; 139:23), e.g. weighing up our motives in preaching (1 Thess. 2:4).

2:5 For neither at any time were we found using words of flattery, as you know, nor a cloak of covetousness, God is witness- Usually, itinerant preacher rocked up in a town, taught their ideas, and demanded payment or donation, using flattering words of gratitude. Paul was only two or three weeks in Thessalonica, but he was teaching what he knew to be desperately and urgently and ultimately true. His teaching was no cloak or covering over a covetous desire for money or adulation (:6). It is this desire for money and glory from men which has wrecked Christian leadership and the wider church.

2:6 Nor seeking glory of men, neither from you nor from others, when we might have claimed authority as apostles of Christ- Paul turned up in Thessalonica and preached. But he didn't claim any authority to do so, listing his qualifications, explaining that he was an apostle of Christ etc. He simply preached the message. It's rather like the teenage Mormon 'elder' who comes to your door telling you all his qualifications. All that stands for nothing. The message is all important. Paul knew his motives well enough to be able to say that he did not seek glory neither from his converts nor from his audiences generally.

2:7 But we were gentle in the midst of you, as when a nurse cherishes her own children- Paul taught from the podium of the synagogue for three Sabbath days in Thessalonica. But he was somehow "in the midst of you", treating them as his babies. This is a challenge for all platform speakers. He was amongst them as a nurse with her *own* children. This is a touching figure- a wet nurse giving that extra special attention to her *own* child (as 2:11 RV a father with his *own* children); and like children, they mimicked him (1 Thess. 1:6 Gk.). This was quite different to Paul's background culture, where "boldness and abusive scolding were considered essential by many of the wandering philosophers if their teaching was to have any impact". Many a Pentecostal pastor likewise scolds his flock for their lack of faith; but the leaders of our groups shouldn't be like this. There should be gentleness, an appeal for love's sake, rather than shouting and criticism. Paul dealt with his converts "as a father with his own children", encouraging, comforting, 'dealing with each one [individually]' and urging them to live a life worthy of God's grace (1 Thess. 2:11,12 RV). Note in this context how Paul says that he cares for them as for his own babies, as both the father and mother, and yet reminds them that "We were babes among you" (1 Thess. 2:7 RVmg.). His appeal to them was on the basis of the fact that although their parent, he was also essentially like them. Only as their

spiritual father could he ask the Corinthians whether they wanted him to come to them with a whip or with a loving appeal. He *could* exercise the discipline of a father, out of his affectionate concern for them; but he chose, wherever possible, a better way. He normally uses the father: child image to show his closeness to them, rather than to impose his authority upon them. And so it should be with the true spiritual father or mother in our groups today. He asks them to copy him; his method of shaping the community was to present himself as the pattern. This was especially necessary amongst largely illiterate converts- one could not direct them merely to independent study of the text of Scripture. Paul even likens himself to a woman breast feeding a child (1 Cor. 3:1-3; 1 Thess. 2:7). And yet such wet nursing was considered to be an occupation for the very lowest of women in the Roman world; it was common for even a respectable slave woman to pass her baby over to such a woman to breast feed. But no, Paul himself, as their leader and converter, as it were breast fed them himself. This very nicely shows the link between unashamed, self-abasing humility and true leadership. And again, the Spirit chose 'shepherd' as an image of ecclesial leadership, when the surrounding Rabbis despised shepherds as dishonest. It's just the same as the Lord Jesus describing Himself as the humble King- a very contradiction in the terms of the contemporary culture. There is an intended juxtaposition in Zech. 9:9: "thy King cometh... lowly, and riding upon an ass".

2:8 *So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us-* As explained on :7, this affection or 'yearning' (Gk.) was because he really considered them to be his own children, for whom he would die. It is one thing to impart the Gospel to someone. It is another to give your soul to them, because you truly love them. I suspect we have all been guilty of merely imparting the gospel, without the heart that bled within Paul. They are two quite different things. Imparting knowledge, inviting to meetings, distributing books... is not the same as giving your soul. The AV of this passage says that Paul was "*willing to have imparted unto you... our own souls*". There may be a connection back to Rom. 9:3 (see note there), where in the spirit of Moses, Paul says that he is theoretically willing to give his eternal place in the Kingdom for the sake of his hearers' conversion- even though he had learnt from Moses' example that God will not accept such a substitutionary offer. To give your life, to impart a Gospel... is one thing. But to so feel for others that you would let them go to the Kingdom rather than you... this is love. No wonder Paul was so compelling a converter. There was such an upwelling of thankful love and reflected grace behind his words of preaching. The Thessalonians became so "dear to us" over just two or three weeks, and we wonder exactly how many contact hours they had with Paul during that period, given the demands of family and secular life, and Paul's need to work night and day to support himself (:9). But he fell in love with them, and treats them as his beloved babies; despite their weaknesses of understanding and behaviour. For he had to warn them: "Abstain from fornication" (1 Thess. 4:3), and he had to teach them that when a believer dies, that is not the end, he will be resurrected at the last day (1 Thess. 4:13). 1 Thess. 5:14 clearly states that there were amongst them the "disorderly... fainthearted... the weak". But moral and doctrinal weakness need not get in the way of a yearning love for our brethren because they all the same are committed to the Lord Jesus. Paul's example with the Thessalonians is a great example of this.

2:9- see on Phil. 4:16.

For, brothers, you remember our labour and distress, working night and day, so that we would not burden any of you while we preached the gospel of God to you- Paul was only there with them for three Sabbath days. But he didn't have the cash in hand to support himself and his team for that time; he had to somehow work, presumably doing manual work on a casual basis. He would have had no time to set up a tentmaking business in three weeks; at best he could have only worked for a tentmaker on a casual basis. So he worked nights too, so desperate was he for cash. This makes his love for the Thessalonians the more remarkable, for he twice mentions that there were lazy people amongst them who didn't work (5:14; 2 Thess.3:11). And he had only recently been thrown into prison and badly beaten in Philippi, so his health and ability to do manual work was limited. His example is even the more commendable because he knew that he would have been quite justified in asking for basic support. He reminds them again of this in 2 Thess. 3:8,9: "Neither did we eat bread for nothing at anyone's hand; but we ate our bread as the result of our own labour and toil, working night and day, that we might not financially burden any of you. Not because we do not have the right to do so, but to make ourselves an example to you- that you should imitate us". All this also suggests that the number of contact hours he had with the Thessalonians was limited. He worked by night perhaps so he could teach folks by day; but they too had to work, and so they learned the Gospel in a very short time. The power of the most basic ideas of the Gospel, even if one has only a few hours to explain them, is enough to radically turn around the religiously curious into those on fire for Christ, willing to sacrifice all. And it was during the course of his daily work that he won many converts: "You remember, brothers, our work and toil. *It was while* we were labouring night and day... that we proclaimed to you the gospel of God" (1 Thess. 2:9 Gk.). People would have been stunned and deeply impressed by this man, as with lash marks on his back he carried water or shifted fruit or building material around the town to support himself... and it was whilst doing this that he preached and people believed. Celsus claimed that Christianity was attractive "only to the foolish, dishonourable and stupid, and only slaves, women and little children... [the Christian evangelists] were wool-workers, cobblers, laundry-workers, and the most illiterate and bucolic yokels [who enticed] ... children and stupid women [to come along to] ... the wooldresser's shop, or to the cobbler's or the washerwoman's shop, that they may learn perfection". This could almost be a quotation from 1 Cor. 1, where Paul describes the converts as just such people. And yet from out of their ordinary life situations, the witness went forth. Not from specially built halls, but from the workplace. And so it has ever been. This is why Pliny could observe that Christianity "penetrated not only the cities but even the villages and farms". It was individuals converting individuals.

2:10- see on Phil. 1:10.

You are witnesses and God also, how holily and righteously and unblameably we behaved ourselves toward you that believe- "Toward [AV "among"] you that believe" carries the sense that they now believed, because of Paul's example. It was Paul's behaviour during the two weeks he was with them which left such an impression. All itinerant preachers demanded money; but Paul was to be seen doing manual casual work around the town in order just to get food and lodging (:9), bearing in his body the signs of a recent traumatic lashing and beating. No wonder his own example led people to Jesus. Ideas alone are only meaningful and compelling, especially to the illiterate, when they are made flesh in practice. And this was just what Paul did. See on :9.

2:11- see on 1 Thess. 2:7.

As you know how we dealt with each one of you, as a father with his own children, exhorting you, encouraging you and testifying- Paul did not just preach to a group, baptize them as a group, and relate to them as a teacher to a class of pupils. He dealt with each of them individually. The language here is appropriate to practical exhortation and encouragement in a way of life, rather than theological instruction. Despite his few contact hours with each of them, he stressed the way of life more than theology (hence the need to teach them in chapter 4 that the dead in Christ are not lost but shall be resurrected at the last day). The Gospel of the Kingdom as taught by the Lord was likewise largely focused upon the way of life in Him rather than theological truths.

2:12 To the end you should walk worthily of God, who calls you into His own kingdom and glory- See on 2:2 for the emphasis on God rather than the Lord Jesus. Note the present tense of "calls you"; God is constantly calling us to the Kingdom through the word of the Gospel, and therefore that word dynamically works in us who believe. The basic Gospel of the Kingdom works in us throughout our lives, calling us daily, beckoning us onwards to the Kingdom. Walking / living appropriately given our calling to eternity, appropriate to the fact the Lord died for us, is a major theme with Paul (s.w. Rom. 16:2; Eph. 4:1; Phil. 1:27; Col. 1:10). This explains Paul's huge teaching emphasis upon practical issues in his short time amongst them (see on :11).

2:13 And for this cause we also thank God without ceasing, that when you received from us the word of the message of God, you accepted it not as the word of men but, as it is in truth, the word of God, which also works powerfully in you that believe- It is the Spirit which works powerfully within believers (1 Cor. 12:11; Eph. 3:16-20 s.w.). But it would be a mistaken equation to therefore state that the word of God as in the Bible equals the work of the Spirit, as if we can squeeze the Spirit out of the pages of the Bible by extensive study of it. Such study has been impossible for the majority of believers over time, seeing they were illiterate and didn't have Bibles. And the Spirit of God is repeatedly described as a gift, given into our hearts by grace. The "word of God" rarely refers to the whole Bible from Genesis to Revelation; and here we are reading of the *logos* of God rather than the *rhema*. It is the Lord Jesus who is "received" and "accepted", as the essential *logos* of God. The Lord Jesus is He who "works powerfully" in human hearts through His Spirit. But this working is not independent of the word of the Gospel; if we neglect that word, He will never force us. His work in us is related to our willingness for Him to work in us, and such willingness will be reflected in our continued memory and [in our generation] reading of His word. That basic Gospel message continued to work powerfully within them. Spiritual growth is not so much from discovering new things about the Bible (which can become a mere form of intellectual titillation), but from being persuaded over and over of the wonder and practical implication of the basic Gospel truths.

2:14- see on 1 Thess. 1:6-9.

For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus which are in Judea. For you also suffered the same things of your own countrymen, even as they did of the Jews- This is a fairly clear statement that most of the Thessalonians were Gentiles, although they had been converted whilst involved with synagogue attendance (see on 1:9). What did Gentiles in Thessalonica know about the Jewish churches in Judea? Only what Paul had taught them. And it was he who had persecuted those very churches (Acts 9:31). Yet Paul

was only three weeks at most with the Thessalonians. His teaching of them had involved personal testimony of his own shameful past, and how brave and committed those Judean Christians had been under his own persecution and torture of them. Paul would have been radically different from any other itinerant preacher; this man who worked day and night to support himself and his team (see on :9), with wheel marks on his back from a recent flogging and imprisonment in Philippi... who admitted to torturing and murdering Jewish Christians, but had changed because he had met the Lord Jesus, and was now urging Gentiles to convert to the Hope of Israel. His stories of those churches he had persecuted gripped the minds of his hearers, and they vowed to follow those brave believers. And somehow there was a credibility in Paul's accounts, a sense that really he was not making this up. They "suffered", using the same word as used for Paul's sufferings and those of the Lord (see on :2). Paul and the invisible Lord he imitated became their template.

2:15 Who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and do not please God, and oppose all mankind- Considering Paul had met the Thessalonian converts in the synagogue, his strong anti-Jewish rhetoric was purposeful. He saw the threat of Judaism and the Judaist campaign against his work as the biggest single problem facing the church. "The prophets" refers to the New Testament prophets, and therefore to martyrdoms which aren't recorded in Acts, which mainly focuses upon the work of Paul and Peter alone. As noted on :2, Paul continually draws a parallel between the Lord's sufferings and his own, and theirs. This principle is true for us; all our sufferings are a sharing in His final suffering, so that His life might be ours too, both now and at the last day (2 Cor. 4:11). They "drove us out" refers to how the Jews in Thessalonica had driven Paul out of town and persuaded the town authorities to ban Paul from ever returning (see :18). And contrary to the Judaist claim to be 'God pleasers', they were the very opposite. Judaism would have objected to the claim that they "oppose all mankind", but they did so in that they sought to stop Paul preaching to the Gentiles (:16). This is an example of how the implications of human behaviour are perceived and judged by God.

2:16- see on Mt. 19:14.

Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved- Paul had preached in the synagogue at Thessalonica, and from this he had met Gentiles who attended the synagogue who were impressed with his message. But the Jews had forbidden him to preach; and like Peter, he had refused to be obedient. We also see here the huge and eternal significance of preaching; by speaking to men we can lead them to salvation.

By doing so they fill up the full measure of their sins. But God's wrath comes upon them at last- The Jews forbade or hindered the apostles from preaching to the Gentiles "to fill up their sins... for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost" (1 Thess. 2:16). This is quoting from the LXX of Gen. 15:16 about the Amorites. See on Jn. 12:31. The religious Jews are being painted as nothing less than the worst of the Gentiles in God's eyes. This was an argument Stephen had used multiple times in his speech of Acts 7 which Paul would have heard and been convicted by. And he now repeats that same basic argument.

Not only did the Jews crucify God's Son, but the book of Acts makes it clear that it was Jewish opposition which was the main adversary to Paul's spreading of the Gospel and establishment of the early church (Acts 13:50,51; 14:2,5,6,19; 17:5-9,13,14; 18:6,12-17; 21:27-36; 23:12-25). Paul speaks of the Jewish opposition as having "killed both the Lord

Jesus and the [first century Christian] prophets, and drove us out; they displease God and oppose everyone by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. Thus they have constantly been filling up the measure of their sins" (1 Thess. 2:13–16). These are strong words, and must be given their full weight in our assessment of the degree to which the Jews were indeed a great 'Satan' to the cause of Christ in the first century. And Paul refers to them like this in :18.

2:17 *But we, brothers, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence but not in heart, endeavoured more eagerly to see your face with great desire-* Often he speaks of his urgent desire to see the face of his brethren (Rom. 1:11; 15:24; Phil. 1:27; 1 Thess. 2:17; 3:6,10; Heb. 13:23). It has been pointed out by F.F. Bruce that Paul's later letters reveal a marked *and progressive* fondness for Greek words compounded from *syn-*, i.e. together / with (e.g. *synergos*, co-worker; *synaichmalatos*, co-prisoner). Priscilla, Aquilla, Timothy, Titus, Marcus, Archippus, Luke, Aristarchus, Tychicus, Epaphras, Demas, Epaphroditus, Clement, Philemon, Euodias, Syntyche (the last two being weak in terms of spiritual behaviour) ...all of these are described by Paul with a *syn-* compound word. It seems that as he matured, Paul *needed his brethren*, he realized he wasn't so alone and strong-willed as he had once been, he saw the Christ in his brethren. Perhaps Paul's endeavours to see them again refer to how he sought to have his ban from entering Thessalonica reversed; see on :15 and :18.

2:18 *Because we wanted to come to you, I Paul time and again; but Satan hindered us-* As noted on :16, it was the Jewish satan / adversary / opposition which stopped Paul returning to Thessalonica. According to Acts 17, it was the Jews who got Paul driven out of town, which may mean they persuaded the local Roman administration to issue a ban forbidding Paul to ever return there (:15). All efforts to appeal against it had been rejected by Jewish pressure upon the Roman administration there.

2:19 *For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of glorying? Are not even you, before our Lord Jesus at his coming?* - Nearly all references to Paul's "joy" are in the context of his joy at the prospect of others' spiritual development and salvation (Acts 13:52; Rom. 5:11; 15:32; 2 Cor. 2:3; 7:4,6,13; Phil. 1:14,18; 2:2,17; 4:1; 1 Thess. 2:19,20; 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:4; Philemon 7,20). See on Eph. 1:4. Paul could say that his great joy at the judgment would be to see his dear brethren enter the Kingdom (1 Thess. 2:19,20; Phil. 4:1; 2 Cor. 1:14); not just joy for his own personal acceptance. In this moment, "he that soweth and he that reapeth [will] rejoice together" (Jn. 4:36)- the letter writers, speakers, writers, travellers... Hence Paul "held forth the word of life" to his converts at Philippi, "that I may rejoice in the day of Christ (through their acceptance) that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain". This explains the intensity of his efforts to strengthen his brethren: "As though God did beseech you by us: we *pray* you... be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). And later he could write from prison "Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 1:10). Thus even in this life John could write: "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth... I wish *above all things* that thou mayest (spiritually) prosper" (3 Jn. 2-4).

Paul's "crown", the nature of his eternal reward, was tied up in whether or not his converts made it there. He appeals to the Philippians to "stand fast" exactly because they were his "crown" (Phil. 4:1). His certainty at the end that he would receive the crown (2 Tim. 4:8) is perhaps a statement that he rejoiced that at least some of his converts would indeed be saved. Our focus likewise must be upon the moment when we shall stand before our Lord Jesus. The joy and crown will be tied up in the acceptance there of others for whom we have laboured.

This is not to teach salvation by works; but the quality and nature of our eternity is clearly predicated upon what we do for others. Sitting in splendid isolation, insisting upon our understanding of some curious theological point as an excuse for non engagement with the rest of the Lord's body... is not going to enable us to share too much joy for others in that day.

2:20 *For you are our glory and our joy*- Paul has stated that their acceptance in the last day before the Lord Jesus will be his glory and joy (:19). We noted on 1:3 how in prayer before the Lord, he recounted the good things about his Thessalonian brethren; he gloried in them right now in this life, before the throne of grace in prayer. And our attitude in prayer now before the Lord will be our attitude at the last day. In that day too, Paul will be glorying in his brethren, and eternally (:19). All this is a powerful template for us to live by.

CHAPTER 3

3:1 *Wherefore when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left behind at Athens alone-* The "wherefore" references Paul's explanation at the end of chapter 2 as to how his salvation is tied up in theirs; they would be part of his eternal crown. When Paul was imprisoned in Rome, it seems Epaphroditus was a great comfort to him; he didn't want to send him to Philippi, but he "supposed it necessary" (Phil. 2:25). Likewise, it was only when he "could no longer forbear" (1 Thess. 3:1,5) that he sent Timothy away from him when he was living at Athens, to strengthen the Thessalonians. Paul came to really need his brethren. We recall how Paul almost pathetically begs Timothy to come to him in Rome (2 Tim. 4); he so valued the company of others. So the sending of Timothy was a huge sacrifice for Paul, but he did so because he so loved the Philippians and was concerned at the state of their faith; for the nature of his eternity was tied up with their salvation.

Loneliness isn't at all a bad thing. Paul tells the Thessalonians how desperately he wanted to physically be with them, but God stopped him "time and again"; and so he concluded in the end that it was better for him to be left at Athens alone and send his close companion to them (1 Thess. 2:17-3:1). But looking back, we realize that that aloneness in Athens had actually been for his spiritual good, even though he so longed to be with his brethren. And here those who so bemoan [understandably] their spiritual isolation as they live out their Christian lives in ones or twos can take comfort. It was whilst left alone in Athens that Paul's conscience was stirred within him and he began an incredibly successful preaching campaign (Acts 17:16-22). The image of that wonderful man standing alone on Mars Hill taking Christ to the masses there for the very first time is inspirational; but he only stood up there and did it because he had been left in Athens alone by a loving Father. His loneliness led to his spirit / conscience being stirred within him by the need of the humanity around him. His loneliness made him see how unique was his relationship with God Almighty and His Son.

3:2 *And sent Timothy, our brother and God's minister in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and to comfort you concerning your faith-* See on :1. Paul was ever concerned with 'establishing' converts in their faith (s.w. Rom. 1:1; 16:25). he was far from just notching up baptisms. This was a particular concern at Thessalonica, for they had only had Paul with them two or three weeks to teach them the Gospel. Paul uses this same word for "establish" another three times, but always about the Father and Son establishing the Thessalonians (3:13; 2 Thess. 2:17; 3:3). Our efforts to establish others will have God working with them; we are Him to others. Especially in a situation like this, when it was impossible for Paul to personally visit and establish them (see on 2:15,18). God is the One who builds up even when we personally cannot. "Comfort" is the word used about what Paul did to them whilst with them (2:11), what he seeks to do through his letter (4:1,10; 5:14); and especially significant is the way that Paul uses the word in teaching them to comfort one another (4:18; 5:11). This is the sign of maturity of converts; when instead of relying upon visits and letters for upbuilding, they build themselves up.

3:3 *That no one be moved by these afflictions; for yourselves know that for this we are appointed-* "No one" reflects Paul's concern for every single member of the flock; see on 2:11 "each one of you". "Afflictions" is the same word used in the parable of the sower for the "tribulation" which inevitably comes to every believer, but which causes some to fall away (Mt. 13:21). It is however the same word used about the tribulations of the last days (Mt. 24:9,21) which Paul believed were coming upon them in the first century.

3:4 *For truly, when we were with you, we told you beforehand that we are to suffer affliction. Even as it came to pass and you know-* Paul made a point of telling his converts that tribulation / affliction was bound to come (s.w. Acts 14:22 "We must through much tribulation [s.w.] enter into the Kingdom"). I noted on 2:11 that Paul spent his few contact hours which he had teaching the Thessalonians in focusing more upon practical issues than theological ones- hence the apparent serious gap in their knowledge about the resurrection in chapter 4. The persecution of Paul and driving him out of Thessalonica didn't calm down after he left- his converts were clearly targeted.

3:5 *For this cause I also, when I could no longer endure it, sent Timothy-* "No longer endure it" is a repetition of :1. Paul was so anxious about their faith because the nature of his eternity was tied up with whether they would endure in faith (see on 2:19,20). To send Timothy was a major sacrifice- see on :1,2. Notice how there was no distinction between Paul's will ("*When I could endure it no longer, I also sent...*" 1 Thess. 3:5), and that of his fellow workers ("*When we could endure it no longer... we sent...*" 1 Thess. 3:1,2). He assigned to his brethren his own feelings and decisions.

That I might know your faith, lest by any means the tempter had tempted you and our labour should be in vain- Despite having had these questions about the state of their faith, he had always been positive about their faith and endurance, even telling God about it (1:2,3). This means that despite his doubts about them and valid concerns, he believed in their status in Christ and felt towards them accordingly. This is no simplistic positivism, but a studied outworking of faith in what it means for a person to be in Christ. The source of the opposition at Thessalonica was the Jews, as 2:14-16 and Acts 17 makes clear. They were the tempters, the satan of 2:18. He personifies the entire Judaist opposition and Jewish plot against his work as a singular adversary. We note he likens the Judaizers tempting the Corinthians to the tempting serpent in Eden (2 Cor. 11:3). To go off to Judaism would cost them their salvation; and Paul's labour would have been in vain. But he has stated in 2:1 that his work with them so far had not been in vain.

3:6- see on 1 Thess. 2:17.

But now Timothy has come to us from you and brought us the good news of your faith and love, and that you have good remembrance of us always, longing to see us, even as we also you- Paul seems to equate their good attitude towards him with having kept the faith. He was indeed so tied up personally with his own message that this was understandable. But he writes this in the context of concern about the Judaizers (:5). Their approach was clearly to defame Paul and shake faith in him personally. Paul must have endured defamation and slander more than most, and yet his positive, proactive approach continued. He didn't let it bring him down, as lesser men have often done.

3:7 *For this cause, brothers, in all our distress and affliction, we were comforted through hearing of your faith-* Paul wrote to the Thessalonians how their faith was a comfort to him in his "distress". And yet he goes straight on to say that he plans to visit them in order to "perfect that which is lacking in your faith" (:10). I find this so wonderful. Their faith was imperfect- and yet Paul all the same rejoices in what faith they do have, and can speak of "all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before God" (1 Thess. 3:9). Yet we are all too easily discouraged by the immaturities we notice in others' faith; instead, in a world where the majority don't truly believe, we need to focus on the positive in our brethren and rejoice in it, rather than holding them to some ideal standard which we claim to have in our own mind or

understanding or perception. For when compared against the spirituality of our Lord, we are ourselves so miserably imperfect.

3:8 *For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord-* Paul could say that he lived, if his brethren held fast; his life was bound up with theirs (1 Thess. 3:8; 2 Cor. 7:3), just as his eternity was (see on 2:19,20). He was willing to be offered as a drink offering upon the sacrifice of the Philippians (Phil. 2:17). Time and again he rejoices in the joy and hope of others (e.g. 2 Cor. 7:13; Col. 1:4); they were his joy and hope and future crown of reward in the Kingdom (Phil. 4:1; 1 Thess. 2:19,20). For them to be accepted at the day of judgment would be his crown, i.e. his reward and expectation which he looked forward to. It was for their salvation, not his own, that he would rejoice at the Lord's return (2 Cor. 1:14). His spiritual life was bound up in that of others; others who were many times his spiritual inferior. See on 2 Tim. 2:10.

3:9- see on Eph. 1:4; 1 Thess. 2:19,20.

For what thanksgiving can we render again to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sakes before our God- We noted on 2:19,20 that their acceptance in the Kingdom would be his eternal joy as they stood "before God" at the last day. But in prayer likewise "before God" he rejoiced in their faith (1:2,3). We are to live now the kind of life we shall eternally live; in this sense we "have eternal life". And so Paul rejoiced that if the Lord were to return, or they were to die, at that moment... they would be saved. He didn't allow the understandable worry about the possibility of living longer and falling away to cloud his present joy. He lived not as a naive short termist thinker, but as rejoicing in what Peter terms "the present truth" (2 Pet. 1:12), the reality which is gloriously true at this moment.

3:10- see on 2 Cor. 8:7; 1 Thess. 2:17.

Night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and may perfect whatever is lacking in your faith?- We note the need Paul felt to be personally present with them in order to give them spiritual strengthening; he writes likewise to the Romans (Rom. 1:11). The need of his physical presence may have been because the laying on of hands transmitted some spiritual gift. But I prefer to think that this was not really what he had in view; rather, as noted on 2:9,10 and elsewhere, Paul presented himself to illiterate people as the incarnation of the Lord Jesus, and asked them to follow him insofar as he followed the Lord. This is why in his brief contact with the Thessalonians, he had explained to them his own past and shown them by example what a life in Christ looks like. And this meant that his personal presence with them was significant, and would assist in maturing, developing and completing their faith. As noted on :6, Paul rejoiced in their faith, even though there were things lacking in it.

Paul's description of praying "night and day" (1 Thess. 3:9,10) alludes to the sacrifices, prepared and offered "night and day" (Ex. 30:7,8; Ps. 55:16,17). There was clearly an element of preparation before offering the prayer, as there was before offering a sacrifice. Note how Prov. 15:8 likewise parallels sacrifice with prayer. Prayer ought to be a humbling experience, perhaps alluded to by the incense, representing prayer, needing to be "beaten small". Preparation of prayer involves humility. David takes words of supplication to himself, which as King he must often have heard from desperate citizens, and uses it in his own prayers to God: "Save, Lord: let the king hear us when we call... A Psalm of David" (Ps. 20:9). In this one sees a conscious humility in how David formulated his prayers.

3:11 *Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you-* "God Himself" is involved in our lives, and can confirm us in our deepest desires. The same word is in 2 Thess. 3:5: "The Lord direct your hearts...". Clearly Paul believed that God can work on the human heart, directing hearts and in this case directing our path in life. There is no evidence, however, that Paul did re-visit Corinth.

3:12- see on 2 Cor. 12:15.

And the Lord make you increase and abound in love one toward another and toward all men- As noted on :11, Paul recognized that the Father and Son can work directly on the human heart. Increasing and abounding in love is an attitude of the heart or spirit, and here Paul prays that they will be "made" to have this; the work of the Father and Son on human spirits is surely by their Spirit working directly in the hearts of believers. Paul talks of an "account" of good works that is 'increased' by each good work- an account not kept by us, but by the Father (Phil. 4:17). And if we 'increase' in such acts of love, we increasingly have a heart unshaken by the prospect of judgment to come (1 Thess. 3:13).

Even as we also toward you- Paul envisaged the love between the Thessalonians and himself as being a love which was ever increasing, thanks to God making it like that. All human relationships seem to begin with an in-loveness which fades and even ends. The unique spiritual gift of ever abounding love is that the recipients of that gift go on increasing in love. And this will be our experience eternally; an ever increasing love between each other. This is why it is so serious if believers in this life will not love one another, placing barriers and stone walls between each other so that love has no chance to grow.

3:13- see on Mt. 24:28.

So that he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints- It is the experience of the gift of the Spirit making us ever growing in love (:12) which will mean we can appear before God, the Lord Jesus and the Angels, or before our own brethren, with hearts which have been 'established' or set fast. This is the same word used of the work of establishing we do to others (:2). There is thereby a wonderful connection established between how the Thessalonians will be at the day of judgment, and the efforts made for them now by Timothy. And this is true of our work for others. No longer, then, is church attendance and interaction with other believers to be treated as mere attendance at the same social club. We are working for the establishment of others now, in a way which will help them become now who they shall be before God at the last day.

The context has been of love toward others, and so I suggest the "saints" before whom we shall have an established heart at the day of judgment refer to our brethren. "Saints" usually refer to human believers rather than Angels. If we have not dealt in love toward them now, how can we have an established, stable heart before God as we appear before them in the day of judgment? There is ample reason to think that the "saints" in this context of judgment day refer to the believers. The Lord Jesus comes to judgment with His saints with Him (1 Thess. 3:13; Zech. 14:5; Jude 14). It is reasonable to guess that this assembly of faithful believers will visibly reflect God's glory, giving the impression of a 'shekinah' cloud. This may be due to the physical presence of the Angel with us during our time in this cloud. The cloud of witnesses (Heb. 12:1) will go with Jesus to judgment, which must be located on earth for the glimpses of the judgment seat which we are given to be realistically fulfilled. Such a picture

is presented in Dan. 7:9-14; the Lord Jesus comes with the faithful, symbolized as clouds, along with the Angels, to the judgment seat. It is at this stage that the responsible from all nations come to the judgment (Mt. 25:32) so that there can be a separation of sheep and goats. The 'coming down' of the righteous responsible to Jerusalem will be at the same time as the judgment of the wicked nations in that same place: "Thither cause thy mighty ones to *come down*" (Joel 3:11) occurs in the context of Armageddon. The bride as it were *comes down* out of Heaven as a prepared bride. "Saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau" (Obad. 21), i.e. Israel's Arab enemies. The apparent confusion between our gathering to judgment in Jerusalem and the judgment of the nations there at the same time is explicable if we accept that the meaning of time will be collapsed around the second coming.

CHAPTER 4

4:1 *Finally, brothers, we urge and exhort you in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God-* “The Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another... to the end He may establish your hearts” (1 Thess. 3:12,13) gives an insight into the upward spiral of development which the Lord wishes us to partake in. The theme continues here in chapter 4: “abound more and more... increase more and more” (4:1,10). “As you received from us” lends further weight to the argument that Paul's limited contact hours with them were spent teaching them practical things about how they “ought to walk”, rather than theological issues- hence the gap in their knowledge about the resurrection which Paul addresses later in this chapter.

4:2 *For you know what instruction we gave you through the Lord Jesus-* The abounding love which is the context here (3:12,13), leading to an established heart before both the Lord and our brethren at judgment day, means that we will not commit fornication (:3). Paul's brief time with the Corinthians had been an instruction of them as it were by the Lord Jesus, whom Paul manifested. “Instruction” translates a specific term generally used in the contemporary literature for military orders. Paul set them up as soldiers in spiritual warfare, and gave them specific commands about moral issues. All this was part of the teaching of the basic Gospel.

4:3 *For this is the will of God, that you live sanctified lives. Therefore abstain from fornication-* The Greek for “sanctification” here was a term used for consecration unto an idol. But that consecration often involved the use of the cult prostitutes as a sign of consecration to the cult. Consecration to the one true God and His Son was through living a moral life, and specifically denied such fornication / *porneia* / use of prostitutes. It was a radically new approach to religion. Despite Paul's praise of their faith and spirituality, the Thessalonians like the Corinthians appear to have been tempted to still visit the idol shrines and use the prostitutes there. Remember that most of the Thessalonian converts had been religiously curious Gentiles who attended the synagogue, which is where they encountered Paul (see on 1:9). It could well be that they continued this syncretism, by not abstaining from the *porneia* of the idol cults. Paul has praised them for turning away from the idols (1:9); but he is not unaware that some of them had not done so completely. Again we see his positivism regarding his converts, and his great valuing of their status in Christ.

The will of God is not always done on earth automatically; it's not determining of human behaviour in absolute terms; otherwise the will of God would exclude human freewill. “This is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication” (1 Thess. 4:3 AV); but the Thessalonians still had the freedom to commit fornication. The will of God here refers to the wish / desire of God. But the fulfilment of God's will is of course up to the freewill of the individual. Which is why we pray for God's will to be done in our lives; not in the sense of ‘OK well get on and do what You are going to do anyway’, but rather of seeking for strength to personally do God's wish in our lives. And as we mature, our will and the Father's become closer. We ask what *we* will and it is done; and therefore and thereby we ask for the Father's will to be done.

There was evidently a problem with immorality in the Thessalonica ecclesia (1 Thess. 4:3-6). And yet the ecclesia was so eager for the second coming that some were throwing in their jobs, so certain were they that it was imminent. Clearly the moral implications of the soon coming of the Lord had not been felt. And this is why in every chapter of those epistles, Paul pounds away about the Lord's return- a fact which they knew and enthused about, just as we

can, and yet would not face up to its real implications. If Christ is coming soon, we must quit the things which plagued Thessalonica- immorality, laziness, irresponsibility etc.

4:4 *Let each one of you take a wife for himself in sanctification and honour-* This command suggests that some of them, perhaps the younger ones, were using the temple prostitutes (see on :3). A wife / woman "for himself" suggests they needed to stop having relations with multiple women and have just one woman, their wife. And yet we recall the warm praise which Paul has heaped upon the Thessalonians, for their faith and spirituality, even saying this before God (1:2,3). Yet he did this being fully aware of their weakness. In 2 Thess. 1:3 he states that the love of each and every one of them was growing and he rejoiced in this; and yet in 2 Thess. 3 he clearly is aware that all was far from well with the spiritual state of some of them. The AV gives "possess his vessel" for "take a wife", and the reference in that case would be to knowing how to use our bodies. This would then make better sense of :5.

4:5 *Not in the passion of lust, even as the Gentiles who do not know God-* As noted on :4, Paul was aware that the church as a whole, and not just some of them, needed warning about not living "in the passion of list". We would probably have praised the faithful amongst them, and then singled out the weaker members and made it clear that we are addressing them, and not the faithful. But we see no such division in Paul's writing here. The Gentile Thessalonians had turned from idols to the one true God (1:9); but by 'knowing God' Paul refers to relationship with Him. If we "know God" we will not live "in the passion of lust". To know God is not therefore a question of academic knowledge of theology alone.

We noted on :4 that the context here could be regarding how a man takes a wife, or how he possesses his body. If the reference is to taking a wife, then marriage is not to be entered on the sole basis of wanting to legitimize sex, for that would be taking a wife "in the passion of lust". If the context is as AV of 'possessing his vessel' or body, then the idea would be that our body should be possessed by the outcome of knowing God, i.e. His Spirit, and not in the spirit of the passion of carnal lusts. It is walking by the Spirit which empowers us to not obey the lusts [s.w.] of the flesh (Gal. 5:16). The same word translated "lust" is used in Rom. 6:12: "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in the *lusts* thereof".

Col. 3:5 uses the same Greek word for "passion" and adds: "Which is idolatry". I suggested on :3 that the specific *porneia* in view was the usage of idol prostitutes.

4:6 *Let no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter. Because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as also we forewarned you and testified-* This appears to be a direct and sober warning against using another brother's wife. The context before and after is clearly in this context. I noted on :3 that the immediate reference may be to cult prostitution, and perhaps the particular scenario in view was in that context. Again we note that Paul is backing up what he has verbally taught them during his brief presence with them- he had warned them and testified about these things. And yet later in this chapter we find a gap in their knowledge about the death state and resurrection. Clearly his focus when with them had been on teaching the life in Christ rather than theology.

4:7 *For God called us not to uncleanness but to sanctification-* Perhaps the argument was that the usage of prostitutes was part of God's call; and Paul is saying that His call is to a holy life, quite the opposite. Religion and sex have always got mixed up, unashamedly so in pagan religions. This was the problem at Corinth and there probably was a tendency in all the

Gentile churches to import into Christianity the religious practices to which they had been accustomed. This call to holiness and not to uncleanness is described in :8 as a "teaching" Paul had given them during his brief time with the Thessalonians.

Paul had the same calling as we do (Rom. 9:24; 1 Thess. 4:7); in him above all there is set a pattern for all those who would hereafter believe. This may not entail itinerant missionary work as it did for Paul, but all the same, the same essential commitment to Gospel preaching must be at the core of the life of every convert.

4:8 Therefore he that rejects this teaching rejects not man but God, who gives His Holy Spirit to you- The "therefore" implies that to reject God's calling is to reject God. This is why most hard core atheists whom I know were actually exposed to God's calling and refused it. The Holy Spirit is given at baptism, the internal potential power to overcome the flesh and be transformed "in the inner man" (Eph. 3:16-20), but the Spirit is progressively poured out into the hearts of those open to it. "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us" (Rom. 5:5), and Paul several times prays that converts will receive the Spirit in this ongoing sense (Eph. 3 in particular). The result is that we are filled with the Spirit in order to sanctify us; to live in uncleanness rather than sanctification is therefore to grieve the Spirit, to go against God's sanctifying intention for us.

4:9 But concerning love of the brothers, you have no need that anyone write to you. For you yourselves are taught of God to love one another- "But concerning" suggests Paul is going through a list of issues, perhaps brought to his attention as a result of Timothy's visit to them and his report back to Paul. Perhaps the Thessalonians had asked Paul to write to them about brotherly love; his response is that no letter from anyone can teach that better than the teaching they have from God to love one another. God's ongoing involvement in our lives is therefore to be seen as His constant teaching of us "to love". Peter uses similar ideas as found in this section when he comments that we have been sanctified [:7] through the Spirit [:8] unto "love of the brothers" (1 Pet. 1:22 s.w.).

4:10 For indeed you do it toward all the brothers that are in all Macedonia. But, brothers, we encourage you to abound more and more- Paul's desire for their love to increase came true, for he says in 2 Thess. 1:3 that their love for each other is abounding. This is a feature of the love which is formed by the Spirit- it abounds, it increases, it is not stable nor does it decline or fragment into familiarity and mere sentimental fondness for a person or persons whom we have known a long time. True love keeps on growing, and we shall eternally experience this. Love is something 'done'; they 'did' love to the Macedonian brothers, perhaps in reaching out to their "great trial of affliction and deep poverty" (2 Cor. 8:2).

4:11- see on 1 Cor. 1:26-28.

May you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you- "That ye *study* (be ambitious) to be *quiet*" (AV) presents a powerful opposition of ideas; to have heroic ambition to be quiet; to be self-controlled, living a blameless spiritual life in everyday things (:12; this is what the idiom of "walk" refers to). In 2 Thess. 3:12,13, Paul returns to this idea: He tells them once again to live a *quiet* life, and says in that context: "Be not weary in (such) well doing". Yet he asks them in 1 Thess. 4:11 to be ambitious to be quiet. By encouraging them to keep on being "quiet" he is encouraging them not to be weary in living a life of such ambition. And this is not the only

reference to ambition in Thessalonians. Paul praises them for the brotherly love which they undoubtedly had. But he doesn't just say 'Keep it up!'. He exhorts them to increase in it, more and more (1 Thess. 4:10).

Paul's "command" to "work with your own hands" was backed up by his own example in the three weeks he was amongst them (see on 1:9). There was a congruence between his teaching and example; a word made flesh. "Mind your own business" may seem superfluous, but in illiterate urban society, with people living and working on top of each other, gossip and over involvement in the lives of others was a problem major enough to split a church. They were to aspire, or be ambitious, not to be like that. And we can take the exhortation too. For the world of social media today is little different in essence.

4:12 That you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing- Paul perceived very clear boundaries between those in Christ, and all others "who are outside". The commands of :11 were in order to make a witness to those "outside", just as Paul had lived amongst them as he did so conscious that he was setting an example: ""You know what kind of men we were among you *for your sake*". "Properly" can also mean "honestly" (AV), and this would connect with them 'having lack of nothing'. The temptation in that kind of society would be to do what everyone else did, and practice petty dishonesty so that they could make ends meet. But by being honest, they would under God's providence "lack nothing". But the Greek can equally mean "that you may need no man". In :11 he has urged them to work with their own hands, and in this case, his argument would be that they then would have no need of asking support from others. Paul returns to this issue in 2 Thess. 3, where he openly states that some of them were asking for help but refused to work. Paul's great love for this group is the more notable, seeing that he speaks so highly of them all as a group, and having worked night and day, despite having been beaten in Philippi just beforehand, in order to get enough to eat during the three weeks he was with them.

4:13 Brothers, we would not have you ignorant concerning those that fall asleep, lest you grieve like those who have no hope- The following section addresses the question of what happens to believers who die, and it concludes by urging them therefore to be of good comfort (:18). Several times in these letters, Paul reminds them of practical issues about the life in Christ which he says he had already taught them whilst with them (2:11,12; 3:4; 4:1,2,8,11; 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:5; 3:10). If he had taught them about these issues concerning resurrection, we would rather expect him to point that out to them, and perhaps rebuke them for having forgotten. But he doesn't, which implies his brief contact time with them during his three week stay with them had been taken up with teaching them practical things rather than theology about death and resurrection. Yet he praises them before God for their hope in Christ (1:3). But they were seriously deficient in understanding what that hope was in detail, apparently not understanding much about the resurrection. Yet Paul perceived their faith in Christ and firm expectation ["hope"] of salvation in Him, and praises them for it- even if they were astray or ignorant in their understanding of how it would work out in practice. We can only conclude that not understanding the details of our future hope does not mean we do not have a valid faith in Christ, nor does it hinder the validity of a baptism. But like Paul, we are to seek to fill in the gaps which believers have in their knowledge of these things.

4:14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again- As noted on :13 and elsewhere, Paul had only taught the Thessalonians very basic theology; most of his teaching during his three weeks with them had been about practical issues of the Christian life. He is now drawing out

an implication of the basic belief that "Jesus died and rose again". 1 Cor. 15:1-4 likewise defines the Gospel Paul preached as being this thing- the death and resurrection of the Lord.

Just as surely those that have fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring up with him- We can read this as meaning that those baptized into the Lord will share a resurrection like His. "Bring up with him" would therefore refer to the resurrection. The Lord's resurrection is the basis for ours. Despite the emotion and hardness of death itself, our belief in resurrection is rooted in our faith that our Lord died and rose. When comforting those who had lost loved ones in the Lord, Paul doesn't simply remind them of the doctrine of the resurrection at the Lord's coming. His focus instead is on the fact that "if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him" (1 Thess. 4:14). The reality of the resurrection must mean something to us in the times of death which we face in life. Jesus and the New Testament writers seem to me to have a startling disregard of death.

But "bring up with him" can also mean just as well "bring with him". It could be that the idea is that the Lord Jesus will "bring with Him" from Heaven "them also which sleep in Jesus" (1 Thess. 4:14) when the Heavenly Jerusalem (the believers) comes down from Heaven at Christ's return (Rev. 21:1). However, we know that the Lord Jesus will bring the Angels with Him. Being the guardians of those who have died, in this sense those people come with Christ from Heaven, although of course literally and personally they cannot see they "sleep in Jesus" in the dust of the earth. See on Dan. 5:23. Or perhaps there is in view the Lord's triumphant arrival in Jerusalem to save Israel with the resurrected believers with Him. 4:15- see on 1 Cor. 7:11.

For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we that are alive, that are still living at the coming of the Lord, shall in no way precede those that have fallen asleep- By or in the word of the Lord Jesus may mean that here Paul is repeating the teaching of the Lord in the Gospels. 1 Thess. 4 and 5 are shot through with allusions to the Olivet prophecy. A few of the more obvious are listed:

1 Thess.	Olivet Prophecy
4:15 "This we say unto you by the word of the Lord" Jesus	Jesus on Olivet
4:16	Mt. 24:30,31
5:1	Lk. 21:24
5:2	Mt. 24:43
5:3	Mt. 24:43,48,51
5:5 " Children of light"	Wise virgins with lamps (Mt. 25)
5:6	Mt. 24:13,25,42,49
5:9	Mt. 24:51

1 Thess. 4:15-18 begins with "For..." . This is explaining 1 Thess. 4:14, which states that "them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring (up) with him". This will thus be true both spiritually, in that they will share His victory over death, and, literally, in that they will come with their judge to judgment. John 14:3 may also become easier to handle with this understanding: "I will come again, and take you to be with me" (N.I.V.). Initially, this may

mean a literal ascent into the sky, followed by a return to earth to be with Christ eternally in the Kingdom. "That where I am, there ye may be also" may be the Spirit's basis for 1 Thess. 4:17, "And so shall we ever be with the Lord". The idea of literally travelling through the sky to the judgment seat was plainly taught by our Lord in His explanation of how "one shall be taken (literally disappear) and the other left" at His coming; "Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together" (Lk. 17:36,37). The point of this allusion is to show that as the eagle travels through the air with a natural homing instinct, without fear or worry as to correct direction, so there should be no apprehension in the mind of the believer concerning the mechanics of how he will be taken away to meet his Lord.

4:16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first- The Greek for "shout" really means a shout of command. The command in view is for the dead in Christ to rise; we recall the Lord's loud shout to bring forth Lazarus from the dead. "The archangel" is defined in Jude 9 as Michael. The connection is clearly to the prophecy of Dan. 12:1-3, which speaks of the revelation of "Michael" as being at the time the dead are resurrected. "The trumpet of God" is also associated with the Angels at the Lord's return in Mt. 24:31: "He shall send his Angels with a great sound of a trumpet"; see on :14. 1 Cor. 15:52 likewise: "The trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised". Perhaps there shall be a literal trumpet sound as the first concrete sign of the Lord's return; but the allusion is to the trumpet blasts which called the camp of God to move onwards in the wilderness, and which brought down the walls of Jericho so that God's people could possess the promised land.

4:17 Then we that are alive- Paul is speaking of the faithful believers in 1 Thess. 4 and 5 rather than all the responsible. He comforts them that the dead believers really will be rewarded with immortality, and that they can take comfort from the fact that they would live for ever (1 Thess. 4:13,14,18). Paul is therefore assuming their acceptability at judgment. "You are all the children of light" (1 Thess. 5:5) as opposed to the unworthy within the ecclesia, who were in darkness. This suggests that Paul wrote as though his readership were all faithful and assured of eternal life.

If we believe that we are counted righteous, we must likewise assume that all those properly baptized are equally righteous, and will be saved along with us. We cannot condemn each other; therefore we must assume each other will be saved. If we have a positive attitude to our own salvation, we will likewise perceive our whole community. And the reverse is true; if we cannot believe that God sees *us* positively, we will tend towards a negative outlook upon ourselves. My sense is that many of us fail in this area. Paul had many reasons to think negatively of his converts; and yet he writes to the Thessalonians as if 'we all', all his readership, would be saved (1 Thess. 4:17). And likewise to dodgy Corinth, he writes as if they would all be accepted at the Lord's return (1 Cor. 15:52); he saw them *all* as innocent Eve in danger of being beguiled (2 Cor. 11:3).

That are left, shall together with them be snatched away in the clouds in the air- Jesus will return to earth for judgement with His Angels, as we are told in His parables concerning the judgement. In the parable of the wheat and tares the point is made that the Angels do not just come to gather the harvest, but also to separate the wheat from the tares. Thus it would seem that the actual process of judgement will be largely associated with the Angels. We are told in 1 Thess. 4:17 that "we which are alive and remain shall be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air". The clouds must be the clouds of Angels with which Jesus returns, and may

even represent the figurative "air" in which we meet Him first of all, as if He is manifested through the Angels which He sends to gather us to judgement (although it is quite possible to take the 'air' literally too).

To meet the Lord, and so shall we ever be with the Lord- The connections between the parable of the virgins and 1 Thess. 4 are strengthened by the same Greek word being translated "meet" in Mt. 25:6 concerning the wise virgins going out to "meet" Christ and also in 1 Thess. 4:17: "We which are alive and remain shall be caught up... in the clouds to *meet* the Lord in the air". The picture is therefore presented of the righteous obeying the call of their own volition, and then being confirmed in this by being 'snatched away' to meet Christ in the (literal) air. We will then travel with Christ "in the clouds" (literally) to judgment in Jerusalem. In no way, of course, does this suggestion give countenance to the preposterous Pentecostal doctrine of being 'raptured' into heaven itself. Every alternative interpretation of 1 Thess. 4:17 seems to run into trouble with the phrase "meet the Lord *in the air*". 1 Thessalonians is not a letter given to figurative language, but rather to the literal facts of the second coming. Further, the 1 Thess. 4:16-18 passage is described by Paul as him speaking "by the word of the Lord" Jesus (1 Thess. 4:15). If 1 Cor. 7 is any guide to how Paul uses this phrase, he would appear to be saying that in this passage he is merely repeating what the Lord Himself said during His ministry. This deals a death blow to some Pentecostal fantasies about the passage.

Those wise virgins who go forth to meet Christ immediately are those who will be "caught up together" with the faithful believers who will have been resurrected. This will be when the Angels "gather together *his elect*" (Mt. 24:31). They then "meet the Lord in the air" literally, perhaps connecting with Rev. 11:12: "They (the faithful, persecuted saints of the last days) heard a great voice from heaven (cp. "the voice" of 1 Thess. 4:16) saying unto them, Come up (cp. " caught up...") hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud (cp. " caught up... in clouds"); and their enemies beheld them". It may well be that Rev. 11:12 is speaking of the faithful Jewish remnant of the last days, who will be snatched away along with us. This cloud of witnesses (Heb. 12:1) will then go with Jesus to judgment, which must be located on earth for the glimpses of the judgment seat which we are given to be realistically fulfilled. It is reasonable to guess that this assembly of faithful believers will visibly reflect God's glory, giving the impression of a 'shekinah' cloud. This may be due to the physical presence of the Angel with us during our time in this cloud. Such a picture is presented in Dan. 7:9-14; Jesus comes with the faithful, symbolized as clouds, along with the Angels, to the judgment seat. It is at this stage that the responsible from all nations come to the judgment (Mt. 25:32) so that there can be a separation of sheep and goats. The 'coming down' of the righteous responsible to Jerusalem will be at the same time as the judgment of the wicked nations in that same place: "Thither cause thy mighty ones to come down" (Joel 3:11) occurs in the context of Armageddon. "Saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau" (Obad. v 21), i.e. Israel's Arab enemies. The sequence of events here suggested chimes in with the thought so often expressed by generations of believers - that our initial reaction to the knowledge that our Lord is back will effectively be our judgment, although this will be formally confirmed at the judgment seat before which all the responsible must appear (2 Cor. 5:10).

The chronology we have suggested can now be summarized:-

- Persecution of believers.
- The Lord is revealed; the resurrection.
- An Angel invites each of the responsible to go and meet Christ.

- The unworthy delay, whilst the worthy go immediately.
- The worthy are snatched away into the air, forming a cloud of glory which is visible to all. They are physically with Jesus.
- Along with Him they come to Jerusalem.
- The unworthy are then gathered there.
- There is a tribunal-style judgment. The sheep and goats are together before the judgment seat. They are then finally separated by Christ's judgment, and receive their rewards.
- The wicked are destroyed along with the nations then surrounding Jerusalem.

The time scale for all this is unimportant- it could well be just a few seconds, if the meaning of time is to be collapsed, although there presumably must be a period of time for the cloud of witnesses to be beheld, and for the unworthy to desperately try to slap themselves into spiritual shape. The tremendous encouragement offered by the scenario here presented should not be missed: we will come with our judge, possibly already reflecting His glory, to the judgment. This in itself should give us a sense of humble certainty as we come before His tribunal. So much will depend on our reaction to the Angel's coming- our faith in acceptance, our degree of concern for the things of this life - all will be revealed in that instant.

4:18 *Therefore, comfort one another with these words-* The implication could be that they were indeed grieving as others who had no hope; see on :13 for the implications of this. The same word for "comfort" is used of how Paul comforted the Thessalonians whilst with them (2:11), how Timothy comforted them on his follow up visit (3:2), and how Paul comforted them in his letter (4:1,10). But the sign of true maturity amongst converts is when they can comfort each other (as also in 5:11), without needing letters and personal visits. This kind of spiritual autonomy amongst converts should be the aim of all missionary endeavour.

CHAPTER 5

5:1 But concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need that something be written to you- It would seem that after the mention of the return of Timothy from his follow up visit to Thessalonica in 3:6, Paul spends the rest of the letter answering various questions they had given to Timothy, or issues which he had brought to Paul's attention. The question 'When will Christ return?' is absolutely typical of the questions asked by new converts, and adds some verisimilitude to the inspired record. They had asked Paul to write to them about this, and Paul says there is no need for him to write anything, because the day of the Lord comes as a thief in the night, unexpectedly (:2), and whether we die before His coming or not is immaterial because the Lord died and rose again for us, that we might be resurrected like Him (:10); and our focus should be on building each other up rather than trying to guess the date of the Lord's return (:11). These perspectives need attention in our days, with so much interest in "the times and the seasons".

5:2 For yourselves know perfectly well- See on :1. This assumption of prior knowledge suggests that this too was one of the things Paul had taught them whilst with them, lending weight to the impression that he focused upon the practical issues of the basic Gospel rather than any deeper theology such as the issues about resurrection discussed in the previous section; see on 4:13.

That the day of the Lord comes as a thief in the night- The Lord comes as a thief to the unready (:4; Mt. 24:43; Lk. 12:39; Rev. 3:3). The argument is: You don't need to know the day nor the hour; just watch, be aware of the Lord and eager for His return at all times. This would explain why Paul writes as if the Lord's return was imminent when it wasn't in reality. We are to live, as part of the Christian faith, in expectation of His coming at any moment, regardless of any other indicators in prophetic fulfilment which might encourage us that His coming is near. We are to be watchful exactly because we do not and cannot know the exact date of the Lord's return: "Watch therefore; for you know not what hour your Lord does come" (Mt. 24:42).

The context is shot through with allusions to the parable of the virgins. The sleeping virgins represent the unworthy amongst the believers who will live just prior to the second coming. Paul's allusion to this fills out the details: the coming of Christ to this category of 'believers' will be like a thief in the sense that their privacy and spiritual house will be invaded by the reality of the second coming. This will be due to their attitude of 'peace and safety', which they will actively promulgate - 'Everything's great within the household, we're going from strength to strength spiritually, there's no need to fear failure in any form!'. That "they shall say, Peace and safety" (:3) suggests that this is an attitude which they publicly disseminate amongst the brotherhood. Bearing in mind the many prophecies and indications that there will be a massive spiritual collapse within the latter-day ecclesia, it is reasonable to assume that the faithful minority will speak out against this - to be met by a barrage of 'peace and safety' reasoning. Those who will stand ready for their Lord will be in the light, in the day, self-aware, spiritually sensitive and realistic, and therefore *not* saying "Peace and safety" (1 Thess. 5:3-8). Christ's coming as a thief to the unworthy is therefore in the sense of His coming being unexpected by them, rather than being as a thief to the world.

5:3 When people are saying: Peace and safety, then sudden destruction will come upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall in no way escape- See on :2, where I suggest that the cry of 'peace and safety' is amongst the unprepared within the brotherhood. It

could also refer to a brief respite in the troubles of the last days, perhaps offering a possible explanation of how the final invader comes down upon Israel that is living without bars and gates and at peace, "dwelling safely" (Ez. 38:11). Prophecy after prophecy describes a time of global cataclysm around the time of the second coming, even though this may be mixed with a fair degree of material prosperity. In no way will it be a time of "peace and safety" for the world; and their ever-increasing escapism shows that they don't exactly see it like that either. Biblically speaking, their hearts are failing them for fear, apprehensive concerning whatever is going to happen to their planet earth (Lk. 21:26, see modern versions). So I am inclined to see this as referring to a situation amongst the brotherhood.

Paul begins chapter 5 by saying that we do not need to know exact times and seasons (i.e. dates) of the second coming, because the most obvious sign is that it would come when some in the ecclesia were unaware- it would come upon them as a thief. Likewise Jesus said that a sign more important than famines etc. was the tribulation of the household. The unworthy saints of the last days who are not watching will find the second coming take them like a thief (Mt. 24:43). 1 Thess.5:3 says that those who think there is "peace and safety" within the ecclesia will also find the second coming to be thief-like. Thus a lack of spiritual watching is the equivalent of the "peace and safety" cry. The attitude that all within the house (the ecclesia) is well and there is no real danger of tribulation will result in a lack of watching. What sense can we make of Lk. 21:36 if we deny the possibility of a persecution period: "Watch ye therefore, and pray always that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass" ...? "Pray *always* that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that *shall* come to pass...". Whilst it is possible that we will be *saved out of* the tribulation, to dogmatically say that we will not experience it, coupled with an attitude which refuses to admit the doctrinal and behavioural problems within the ecclesia, will result in us being lulled into a sense of peace and safety. This "peace and safety" atmosphere within the ecclesia matches that in Israel just prior to the Babylonian invasion: "Them that are at ease (A.V.mg. "secure") in Zion" (Am.6:1, cp. Lk.6:24) trusted in their riches and regular observance of a few religious rituals. But surely we "are all the children of light", and therefore "are not in darkness that that day should overtake you as a thief" (:5,4). "By peace (prosperity) he shall destroy many" (Dan. 8:25) is the language of 1 Thess.5:1-3 regarding peace, safety and materialism destroying the saints of the last days. If this connection is valid, it shows that the little horn of Daniel will exert its influence within the ecclesia.

Ezekiel (8:8-15; 9:8; 11:3), Jeremiah, Micah and perhaps even the Lord Jesus (Is. 59:16; Lk. 13:8) over-estimated the spirituality of God's people in the run up to the 'day' of Divine judgment in their time. The "peace and safety" cry within the latter day ecclesia is part of an extended set of allusions back to the parables of Mt. 24 and 25, concerning the apostate, drunken servant who thinks everything is fine being suddenly destroyed by his Lord's coming. This kind of believer had been foreseen by Moses in Dt. 29:19; the type who hears the curses for disobedience, but blesses (forgives) himself in his heart, "saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst". As natural Israel will be awoken from their drunkenness by the final Arab invasion (Joel 1:1,2), so spiritual Israel will be awakened by the holocaust to come. The false prophets who lived on the eve of the Babylonian and Assyrian invasions told Israel that everything was "peace and safety" within the ecclesia of their time (Jer. 5:12; 6:14; 14:13; Ez. 13:10; Mic. 3:5). It seems that the latter day ecclesia will likewise have a faithful remnant who clearly perceive the apostasy, although they are surprised at it, seeing in it the clearest sign of their Lord's return; and an apostate majority, backed up by the elders of the ecclesia, who will claim with

some aggression that this is all utter nonsense, and there is peace and spiritual safety within the ecclesia.

The day of the Lord will result in the wicked being "in pain as of a woman that travails" (Is. 13:8; 1 Thess. 5:3). The Lord seems to have alluded to this when He spoke of how the faithful just before His coming would be like a woman in travail, with the subsequent joy on delivery matching the elation of acceptance at Christ's return (Jn. 16:21). So, it's travail- or travail, especially in the last days. If we choose the way of the flesh, it will be travail for nothing, bringing forth in vain (this is seen as a characteristic of all worldly life in Is. 65:23). We either cut off the flesh now (in spiritual circumcision), or God will cut us off. This point was made when the rite of circumcision was first given: "The uncircumcised [un-cut off] man... shall be cut off" (Gen. 17:14).

5:4 But you, brothers, are not in darkness, that this day should overtake you as a thief- it is therefore 'walking in the light' which means that we are not in darkness; we will not be caught off guard by the Lord's coming, as by a thief in the night, if our general walk is "in the light" (Eph. 5:8; 1 Jn. 1:7). If we live as if in the light of His presence, His actual presence will not surprise us as a thief.

5:5 For you are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night, nor of darkness- "Sons of light" was the language of Judaism for the hyper righteous within Israel. Remember that the Gentile Thessalonians had been synagogue attendees whom Paul had persuaded. He was saying that they, in Christ, were the true "sons of light". "The day" surely refers to the Kingdom; we recall Rom. 13:12,13 (see note there): "The night is far spent, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness and let us put on the armour of light. Let us behave decently, as in the day". We are to live the Kingdom life now; in this sense, we "have eternal life", and that we are to live now as we shall eternally live. We are "the sons of the day" in that we are "the children of the Kingdom", another phrase understood by Judaism to refer to the righteous Jews- whom the Lord said would be cast out into the darkness of condemnation (Mt. 8:12). "Darkness" is so often associated with the condemnation of the last day; we are not to live the life of the condemned, but of those who shall eternally live the Kingdom life.

5:6 So then let us not sleep, as do the rest, but let us watch and be sober- The allusion would be to the foolish girls who slept (Mt. 25:5 s.w.). This would explain the otherwise strange phrase "as do the rest / the others". Those "others" would be the foolish girls, and Paul is writing as to the wise girls. The allusion is also to the Lord's command to the weak believers in Gethsemane to not sleep, but watch- which they failed to do (see on Mt. 26:41). This conforms that "the rest" refers not to the world generally but to the failed believers.

5:7- see on Mt. 3:7.

For they that sleep, sleep in the night- There are many links between 1 Thess. 4,5 and Mat. 24,25; see on 4:14. The wise virgins slumbered and were sleeping at the time of the Lord's return. Paul matches this by saying that the *unworthy* will be slumbering and we ought to be awake and watching at the time of the Lord's return. And yet, the parable teaches that those slumbering wise girls will be accepted. This is a glaring paradox within the Lord's own teaching- for had He not taught that the faithful servants will be awake and watching when their Lord returns? Yet the paradox is there to flag a major message- that even though the last generation of believers may well not be ready and watching as they should be, their humble

recognition of the very likelihood of their oil running out would be their saving grace. And within 1 Thess. 5:6-10 this same paradox is brought out: "Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us *watch* and be sober. For they that *sleep sleep* in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation. For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for us, that, whether we *wake [s.w. watch]* or *sleep*, we should live together with him". The same Greek words are italicized. The contrast is between those who watch and those who sleep. And yet Christ died to save both those who watch / are awake, and those who sleep, as the 'wise' virgins slept when they ought not to have done. Both those who watch and those who sleep [after the humble pattern of the wise virgins] will be saved due to the fact that Christ died to save sinners, to save the sleepy as well as the more lively- if they are truly and humbly in Him. Likewise the Lord's parables generally include two types- the self-righteous rejected, and the accepted, who have something spiritually the matter with them. They either enter the Kingdom with splinters in their spiritual vision / perception, or are totally blinded by planks in their vision and will be rejected.

And they that are drunk, are drunk in the night- The allusion is to the parable of the believer who thinks the Lord delays His coming and starts drinking (Mt. 24:49; Lk. 12:45) rather than caring for his brethren. Lk. 21:34 uses the same word to say that believers must beware lest the Lord's coming is a shock for them (cp. "a thief in the night") due to their being drunk. This scenario could well arise if there is a brief respite in the traumas of the last days, all seems to be resolved politically, and there is an upsurge of global wealth.

5:8 But let us, since we are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet, the hope of salvation- "We are of the day" means that we are living the Kingdom life now- see on :5. This means that we shall be "sober", aware, perceptive and watching for the things of the Lord. Peter three times uses the word in appealing for us to be "sober" in the light of the Lord's imminent return (1 Pet. 1:13; 4:7; 5:8). The armour listed here is defensive- against the temptation to be unready for the Lord's return. The Thessalonian converts had once been synagogue attendees, and would have appreciated that it was only the High Priest who put on the breastplate. No ordinary Israelite would ever have had the ambition to dream of wearing it. But as often, Paul calls the believers to the heights of spiritual ambition. They were not mere spectators at a show, but participants, the priestly tribe, called to do even the work of the High Priest on earth. The helmet guards the head, the mind, the thinking, which Paul presents as the essence of Christianity. If really we are persuaded that we shall eternally live the spiritual life, we shall not give in to petty temptation now. But we must clothe ourselves with that as a helmet, just as we must of our own volition clothe ourselves with Christ in baptism. "Hope", *elpis*, doesn't mean 'hoping for the best', but rather a solid confidence that we shall be saved. This shall guard our thinking, and keep us ready and eager for the Lord's return.

5:9 For God has not destined us to suffer His wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ- As noted on :8, the certain hope of salvation will keep us eagerly watching for His return, far more so than any understanding of prophetic interpretation. Paul therefore underlines this point here in :9; we were in fact predestined to salvation, and not to condemnation. He wants us to be saved; hence we have the sure Hope, and believing that if the Lord were to return now, we shall surely be saved... will make us ever eagerly watchful for His coming.

5:10 *Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him-* As explained on :8 and :9, we will be eagerly watching for the Lord's return if we surely believe that it means salvation for us; and Paul yet further underlines this by saying that the Lord died so that we should be saved. As explained on :7, the "sleep" here can be interpreted in line with the rest of the chapter, where it refers to spiritual sleep rather than the sleep of death. The paradox of those who should not be asleep being saved is an allusion to the fact that even the wise girls of the parable also fell asleep, but were saved by grace. And yet the passage could just as well be saying that whether we are dead or alive at the Lord's return is no big issues; because we shall be resurrected and live with the Lord, and this was the whole purpose of His death for us. See on :1. In 4:14,17 the same language has been used for those who fall asleep in death before the Lord comes, and the issue of what shall happen to those who are alive at His coming is discussed there.

5:11- see on :1.

Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up, even as you already do- As explained on :8 and :9, we should encourage each other with the fact that if the Lord returns right now, we really shall be saved. And we must ask how often we specifically state this to each other. As noted on 4:18, this ability to build each other up was a sign of maturity, rather than relying upon visits and letters to encourage them. The words for 'encourage' and 'build up' are also found in the record of how these things are done to believers by the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:31). But that Spirit power is partly mediated to the members of the body of Christ through the other members (Eph. 4:16); our efforts to build each other up are a channel for the Spirit, and will be blessed.

5:12 *But brothers, we urge you to recognize those that labour among you, who are over you in the Lord and who encourage you-* Although the work of encouragement was to be done by each member (:11), there were spiritual leaders in the group, who should be recognized and respected on the basis that they were labouring for the upbuilding of the community. This is the basis of respect and recognition; not the mere possession of office. It would seem from "But brothers..." that there was a tendency for them not to respect their elders.

5:13 *Esteem these exceedingly high in love, for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves-* As noted on :12, they should be respected for the sake of their work of upbuilding others, and not just because they demand respect or hold an office. "Be at peace among yourselves" suggests (as on :12) that the tendency not to respect elders leads to frictions amongst the group. And that is why those communities who do not have an eldership system are noted for the endless arguments amongst themselves.

5:14 *And we exhort you, brothers, warn the disorderly, encourage the fainthearted, support the weak, be longsuffering toward all-* Despite knowing there were such within the church, Paul wrote so highly of them and spoke so positively of them before God (1:2,3). He saw them as "in Christ" and shared the Lord's view of imputed righteousness towards them. They were all exhorted to do the work of warning, encouraging and supporting; unless "brothers" refers specifically to the eldership. But the context is of Paul addressing the entire church membership, and he uses "brothers" specifically about them rather than about the eldership (:12,13). Being a member of the body of Christ means we are to take responsibility for others, and not resign it all to the eldership. The 'warning' of the disorderly was presumably with the consequence of temporary exclusion from the local congregation; for that is the consequence advised by Paul for "the disorderly" in 2 Thess. 3. The fainthearted were presumably those

who struggled to believe the great truths explained in :8 and :9, that we really can be sure that we shall be saved if the Lord returns right now. See on :11. The allusion is to Is. 35:3,4, where in the context of a vision of the Kingdom, the weak minded are urged to believe it as wonderfully true for them. Being "longsuffering" may allude to the parable of Mt. 18:26,29, where those indebted to us beg for "longsuffering", and we are to frankly forgive as the Lord has forgiven us. This idea is continued in :15.

5:15 *See that no one repays anyone evil with evil, but always follow after that which is good one toward another and toward all-* This follows on from the appeal at the end of :14 to be forgiving toward all. Forgiveness is "that which is good", and again they are told to practice this "toward all". To not forgive is therefore to repay evil with evil. The response to evil done is therefore to forgive, and there is no assumption here that we are to forgive only if repentance is shown. Paul uses the same words when commenting that Alexander had done him much evil, but the Lord would repay that evil (2 Tim. 4:14). The commands not to repay evil for evil are therefore because it is not for *us* to do this, but for the Lord (Rom. 12:17; 1 Pet. 3:9). Instead of repaying evil for evil, we are to bless or forgive (1 Pet. 3:9). But that is not to say that the person shall not have the evil repayed at the last day. But for us to do so in this life would be a form of playing God.

5:16 *Rejoice always-* A life of joy cannot be experienced if we are unforgiving and bent on repaying evil (:15). The insistent stress by Paul on the need to live lives worthy of our beliefs is really powerful. He knew that this was the main drawing power for the community. It has often been pointed out that sections of his letters seem to have strong links between them. Consider:

1 Thess. 5	Rom. 12
:12,13a	Respect elders
:3-8	Don't think too highly of yourselves
:13b	Peace among yourselves
:18	Peace with all men
:14	Care for weak and unruly (14:1); Receive the weak
:15	Not evil for evil, but good to all men
:17	Not evil for evil, but good to all men
:16	Rejoice always
:12	Rejoice in hope
:17	Pray unceasingly
:17	Continue in prayer
:19	Don't quench the Spirit
:11	Fervent in spirit
:20	Don't despise prophecy
:6	Prophecy

- :21 Test all things, hold fast to good
- :9 Cleave to good
- :22 Avoid evil
- :9 Hate evil

The conclusion from this could be that there was in fact a common document to which Paul is referring- a kind of practical guide to true Christian living that was expected of converts. If this is the case, then the early community would have been committed to being joyful, prayerful, tolerant, peaceful, loving, humble, Bible based, as a fundamental principle. These were what accepting Christ in baptism would have required.

5:17- see on Jude 20.

Pray without ceasing- The allusion is to the unceasing sacrifices of the tabernacle, which could be understood as speaking of our prayers. When Paul wrote of praying "night and day", it could be that he refers to his twice daily prayer times. For he was hardly praying 24/7. The idea is that we should live in an atmosphere of prayer, and not give up on an issue after a short time.

5:18 *In everything give thanks. For this is the will of God in Christ Jesus toward you-* God specifically wants us to be thankful, just as any parent seeks the virtue of gratitude in their children. Paul was again a word made flesh, for he has written earlier of his own constant thankfulness (1:2; 3:9,10). The Thessalonians were "appointed" to tribulation (3:3), but the will of God was just as much for their final salvation and for their gratitude, therefore, for all things in life; knowing that they are all somehow working towards that great salvation which is God's ultimate will.

5:19 *Do not quench the Spirit-* Verses 19-24 seem to mostly speak of the activity of the Spirit which was and is so central to the life of all believers and churches. All are given the gift of the Spirit on baptism, but this will not help us unless we allow it. Hence the Corinthians were given the gift but were "not spiritual" (1 Cor. 3:1). We can in this sense "quench the Spirit". I noted earlier that chapters 4 and 5 are full of connections back to Matthew 24 and 25, especially the parable of the foolish virgins. We may have another link here, in that "quench" is the same word used in "our lamps are gone out", 'quenched' (Mt. 25:8). They had no oil- the Spirit. They were "not spiritual". Eph. 4:30 [see note there] puts it another way in appealing for us not to grieve the Spirit, not to frustrate God's intention to transform us mentally now and physically at the Lord's return.

5:20 *Do not despise prophecies-* The gift of the Spirit is as real today as it was then, but in the first century there was the miraculous manifestation of the Spirit which was required for those times. The gift of prophecy was required in order to communicate God's word to the new community; for the New Testament was not then written or at least not in circulation in its current form. The Thessalonians had warmly accepted Paul's preaching, impressed by his personal example and the congruence of his life with his message; but when their elders gave them prophetic words from the Spirit, there was a tendency to despise them. We noted on :12

and :13 that they were not as respectful to their elders as they might have been, and this was particularly serious when those elders were speaking to them by direct Spirit inspiration.

5:21- see on Job 34:4,5.

Test all things. Hold fast to what is good- As noted on :20, there were gifts of prophecy available in order to teach the new, illiterate communities what was the Lord's word for them. But there were false prophets around, and so the various prophetic words had to be tested. There was apparently a Spirit gift specifically for this (1 Jn. 4:1; 1 Cor. 14:29 and see on Rom. 9:1). When a prophetic word was authenticated as legitimate, they were to "hold fast" to it and to generally "what is good". And by doing so, they would "abstain from evil" (:22).

5:22 *Abstain from evil wherever it appears-* See on :21. This abstaining from evil may specifically refer to rejecting false prophecies. But we can also read this on a more general level; we should abstain from every appearing of sin; wherever it comes up, we should abstain (this verse *doesn't* mean 'don't do things which look as if they're sinful'). Whenever we hear of sin we should seek to cover it, not to show it forth more widely, and especially seek for it to be forgiven. By doing so we will reflect our own experience of how God has dealt with His knowledge of our sins. "A talebearer reveals secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit conceals (Heb. 'covers') the matter" (Prov. 11:13). And it is the Spirit which is the context here in :19-24.

5:23- see on Phil. 1:10.

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ- The context in :19-24 is of the work of the Spirit; and it is the Spirit which sanctifies or makes us holy (1 Cor. 6:11). The Holy Spirit is literally 'the spirit of holiness / sanctification'; "sanctify" here is a form of the word for "holy". It is by the Spirit that we are made holy or sanctified. That work of sanctification affects every part of our lives and being- it operates upon us "completely". However the Greek translated "completely" is a unique word in the New Testament, and literally means 'complete to the end'. The Spirit works in our minds now to progressively transform us, and it is that same Spirit which shall transform our bodies physically at the last day into immortality (Rom. 8:11). Paul has spoken earlier of the possibility of being alive at the Lord's return, and this was his great wish as it is ours. And it seems he has that in view here, in wishing that their whole spirit, person ["soul"] and even their body would be "preserved blameless" at the Lord's coming. We are of course sinful, but we are counted as "blameless"; as explained in Romans 8, the work of the Spirit is to make us in reality how we are counted by the grace of imputed righteousness. That grace has its outflow in the grace or gift of the Spirit in transforming us into that which we are counted as by status.

Paul at times quotes from or alludes to popular Jewish ideas with which he may not have necessarily agreed. The lack of quotation marks in New Testament Greek means that it's hard for us at this distance to discern when he does this – but it seems to me that it's going on a lot in his writings. Thus he uses the phrase “your whole spirit, soul and body”, a popular Jewish expression for ‘the whole person’ – but it's clear from the rest of Paul's writings that he didn't see the body and soul as so separate.

5:24 *Faithful is He that calls you, who will also do it*- We are called to salvation. To get us there, as it were, the Spirit is being used to transform us and then to finally change us at the Lord's return from mortal to immortal; see on :23. Paul here simply states that we have been called to this, and He really will do it. This repeats the argument in Romans 8- that we were called to be saved, and so the Spirit will work to transform the called into a position whereby they will actually be saved.

5:25 *Brothers, pray for us*- Paul's authority was strengthened by his openness and exposure of his vulnerability. He needed their prayers.

5:26 *Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss*- "A holy kiss" seems to have been the way of concluding a first century Christian meeting, in the same way as Paul ends some of his letters with this (1 Thess. 5:26; Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Pet. 5:14). It's hard to translate into our terms the huge meaning of this in the first century world. It would've been unthinkable for a slave to take such initiative to kiss their master, or indeed any free person. This practice of all kissing everyone else in the congregation would've been arresting and startling. Sociologically, it stood no chance of ever being done. And yet these social and inter-personal miracles were what made Christianity stand out so noticeably- and in essence, our overcoming of social and inter-personal barriers ought to do the same for our community in the present world. But does it? Are we *so* markedly different from others... ? Is our love and unity of such an evidently deep and different quality? The implication is that all these various slaves from different households did meet each other for fellowship. We can imagine the issues they faced with shifts, getting free time off, permission to leave the household etc. And the same effort is required by us to achieve face to face fellowship in Christ.

5:27 *I solemnly implore you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the brothers*- Revelation, Thessalonians and Colossians contain specific statements that the material was to be read out loud to the [illiterate] church members (Rev. 1:3; 1 Thess. 5:27; Col. 4:16); but the contents of those books require quite detailed analysis, which we tend to wrongly assume can only be given by reading the text. The processes of occasional listening to a text [employed by most first century believers] and reading a text [employed by many twenty first century believers] are quite different. We can go back to a text, re-read it, re-access it at will. Someone who occasionally hears a passage read, and who maybe only heard parts of the New and Old Testaments read once or twice in their lives, simply relates to the text differently. Further, the nature of the reading of the text, the delivery of the speaker, would've played an important part in the interpretation of it by the illiterate hearer- hence the greater responsibility of teachers in the first century than today. For the illiterate audience, the message was tied up with the messenger to a huge degree. Hence Timothy is told to pay attention to his [public?] reading, preaching and teaching (1 Tim. 4:13).

5:28 *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you*- "Grace" often refers to the gift of the Spirit, the power of new life within the heart of the believer which is given by the Lord Jesus. "Be with you" can as well be translated "be within you", for this is where the Spirit most essentially operates. And such spiritual mindedness was Paul's greatest wish for all believers.