**1 Thessalonians Commentary**

**1 Thessalonians Chapter 1**

1Th 1:1

**“Paul, and Silvanus, and Timothy.”** Paul, and Silas first evangelized Thessalonica (Acts 17:1) and Timothy was with them.

**“Silvanus.”** Or “Silas” (Acts 15:22). “Silvanus” is Silas’ Roman name and “Silas” is his Hebrew name. As Lenski writes, “From Acts 16:37 we know that Silas was a Roman. The added Roman name of a native Jew was often chosen because of a similarity in sound.” (cf. 2 Thess. 1:1).

**“in God.”** The Greek word *en* (#1722 ἐν) has a wide semantic range. The phrase is ambiguous on purpose and means many things, all of which are true, because the Christian is “in” God or “in” Christ in many ways. We are “in connection with” God,[[1]](#footnote-15560) and the connection is due both to our position as children of God by birth and our being connected to God by our life and love. “In” as “in connection with,” or “in relation with,” is one of the foundational meanings of “in.”[[2]](#footnote-23483) “Christians are not simply people who have heard about God and trust Him. They live “in” Him day by day. All their deeds are done in Him.”[[3]](#footnote-28842) Some authors prefer “in union with” and that also is a meaning.[[4]](#footnote-29415) The spiritual union we have with Christ is intimate indeed, because we are part of his very body (Col. 1:18). In this instance, the phrase “in God” can also be a locative usage, and thus mean “grounded in” God.”[[5]](#footnote-15783) Since the locative and dative cases are exactly the same in Greek, only the context can be used to tell the difference, and in situations like this when both meanings are true and apply, the ambiguity is purposeful and can be the figure of speech amphibologia.[[6]](#footnote-11532)

[See figure of speech “amphibologia.”]

The phrase “in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” is necessary as a modifier of the word “congregation” because, as a study of *ekklēsia* (congregation; church; assembly) shows, there would have been many “congregations” in Thessalonica (see commentary on Matt. 16:18, “congregation”). There would have been some congregations that gathered to worship the Emperor, some to worship the Roman gods or various mystery religions (such as the cult of Isis), and other congregations as well. This epistle from Paul was to none of those “congregations,” but was to the congregation that was grounded in, in relation to, and in union with, God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son.

1Th 1:2

**“always for all of you.”** This is the figure of speech, homoeopropheron (Alliteration). The Greek is “*pantote peri panton*,” quite an attention grabber.

**“constantly remembering *you* in our prayers.”** This is similar to Romans 1:9, although the “constantly” could also go in 1 Thessalonians 1:3 before “remembering” in that verse. The scholars and versions are divided as to where it should go. However, adverbs are usually after the verb (here, participle) that it modifies. The word “constantly” must not be overemphasized. Paul is not saying that at every minute of the day he is praying for the Thessalonians, he is saying that he prays for them regularly.

1Th 1:3

**“work motivated by trust, and labor prompted by love, and endurance based on hope.”** The Greek reads, “work of faith, labor of love, and endurance of hope.” We take these phrases to be three genitives of production. The reason for translating the genitives rather than leaving them, “work of faith,” etc., was that their meaning is not easily understood in English. As S. J. Kistemaker points out in his commentary, “What is patience of hope, anyway?”[[7]](#footnote-22846) When one reads “labor of love,” it would be easy to miss that love is the spring out from which our labor flows. Ecclesiastes states that apart from God, no one can find any enjoyment in their work or labor (Eccl. 2:17). Thus, Scripture teaches it is one’s trust in God that is the source for our energy to work and labor.

**“on hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”** This is a good example of an objective genitive.

1Th 1:4

**“brothers and sisters who are loved by God.”** The prepositional phrase “by God” goes with the verb “loved,” and not with the “chosen” (“election” in some versions). This is the natural reading of the Greek, and is grammatically more proper.[[8]](#footnote-27927)

[For more on “brothers and sisters,” see Word Study: “Adelphos.”]

1Th 1:5

**“and in holy spirit.”** This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God.

[For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

1Th 1:6

**“joy from *the* holy spirit.”** This refers to the holy spirit which is the gift of God. “Joy” is a fruit of the spirit, so the active presence of holy spirit produces joy.

[For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

**“much.”** The Greek word *polus* (#4183 πολύς). *Polus* here indicates the *degree* of affliction experienced by the Thessalonians.[[9]](#footnote-22941) The extent of their suffering was high, much, great.

1Th 1:8

**“Macedonia and Achaia.”** Macedonia is northern Greece, and Achaia is southern Greece. Towns such as Thessalonica and Philippi were in Macedonia, while Corinth and Athens were in Achaia.

**“into every place.”** This is hyperbolic, but it makes the point that the word about the Thessalonians had gone forth far and wide.

1Th 1:9

**“how we *conducted ourselves when we* came to you.”** The scholars and versions are divided about whether this verse refers to the manner in which Paul and those with him entered in among the people of Thessalonica (BBE, KJV, NJB, Rotherham, YLT), or whether it refers to the welcome that the people of Thessalonica gave to Paul and Silas, listening to them and converting to Christianity (CJB, CSB, ESV, NASB, NIV).

R. C. H. Lenski believes the text is speaking about the way Paul and his companions entered Thessalonica and the synagogue there, and writes that their entrance was “one that was so different from that of the charlatans and religious quacks who try to steal people’s confidence to their own advantage.”[[10]](#footnote-23531)

Gene Green writes that the people from outside Thessalonica, from Macedonia and Achaia, “report to Paul about what kind of ‘entrance’ the apostolic team had at Thessalonica (v.9a; cf. v. 5). And, secondly, how the Thessalonians had converted to God from idolatry (v. 9b; cf. v.6). The NIV understands the first part of the verse is an explanation of how the Thessalonians had received the apparent apostolic team. But the term translated reception (*eisodon*) can just as well mean an act of entering a place or even the place through which one enters, the entrance. The same word is found in 2:1, where it clearly speaks of the messengers’ entrance into the city and we should understand it the same way here. The first part of verse 9 is a reference to the news about the nature of the heralds’ entrance into Thessalonica. …The ‘entrance’ of the heralds is the principal theme of 2:1-12, which can best be interpreted as a contrast to the way that ancient philosophers would enter a city, at times with great pomp and questionable motives. The ‘entrance’ of an orator to a city could be a grand event…. Paul and his associates’ entrance to Thessalonica was not accompanied by all this ceremony, and, as we will see in 2:1-12, Paul was careful to distinguish between their entrance and those of the common stock philosophers.”[[11]](#footnote-14660)

Jeffrey Weima writes, “The word εἴσοδον (*eisodon*, visit) occurs only twice in Paul’s letters, both of them in 1 Thessalonians (here and in 2:1). A number of leading translations wrongly render this word as ‘reception’ or ‘welcome’…and so mislead the contemporary reader into believing that the emphasis here is on the Thessalonians believers in their warm reception of the missionaries and the gospel. The word however means ‘entrance’ or ‘visit’… And clearly refers to the activities of Paul along with his fellow missionaries and not that of the Christians in Thessalonica. …The point the apostle makes is clear; there is a widespread report of the genuine character of his original visit to Thessalonica. In an age where traveling philosophers and orators frequently enter the city with extravagant pomp and self-serving motives of securing the praise and purse of its citizens (see Winter 1993), people throughout Macedonia, Achaia, and even beyond recognized that Paul’s mission-founding visit to Thessalonica exhibited none of these vain and dishonest practices. In this way, Paul not only further defends himself but also strengthens his relationship with his original readers by reminding them of the crucial role that he played in their conversion.”[[12]](#footnote-23906)

**“to serve.”** The verb is *douleuō* (#1398 δουλεύω), to serve as a bond-servant, not *latreuō* (#3000 λατρεύω), which is to perform religious duties and services. When the Thessalonian believers turned from paganism, they did not just change religious behaviors and functions, they literally changed masters and the whole orientation of their lives.

1Th 1:10

**“the one who rescues us.”** This is a quite literal rendering of the Greek text. There are scholars who believe that the participle (“rescues”) can be a title. For example, F. F. Bruce comments: “The present tense of *ruomenon* carries no implication of realized eschatology with it…the participle plays the part of a *nomenagentis* [name of an agent] “our deliverer” (cf. Romans 11:26, in a quotation from Isa. 59:20 LXX, where *ho ruomenos*, “the Deliverer” is practically a divine title).”[[13]](#footnote-25418)

**“the wrath to come.”** The Greek word translated “wrath” is *orgē* (#3709 ὀργή, pronounced or-'gay). The Greeks used the word *orgē* for natural human anger (Mark 3:5), and for violent emotions in general, such as anger, wrath, or indignation—the context determined the exact meaning. Also, *orgē* was used for the anger that was exhibited in punishment and then by extension for the punishment itself. Thus, *orgē* was used for the punishment meted out by magistrates which also then included the punishment meted out by God; His punishment of the earth is referred to as His “wrath,” as it is here in 1 Thessalonians 1:10. That Christians will not go through the wrath is stated three times in the Church Epistles: Romans 5:9; 1 Thessalonians 1:10, and 1 Thessalonians 5:9, and all three verses use *orgē* for “wrath.”

The wrath of God that will come upon the world is referred to here as “the” wrath because it was well-known to believers because it was the subject of many prophecies in the Old Testament. Jesus Christ spoke about it too (Luke 21:20-24, esp. 21:23; Matt. 24:4-22, esp. 21-22). Then, many years after Paul wrote Thessalonians, the apostle John described the wrath in great detail in the book of Revelation, which sets forth four sets of wrath-judgments: the seal judgments (Rev. 6:1-17; 8:1-5), the trumpet judgments (Rev. 8:6-9:19; 11:15), the thunder judgments (Rev. 10:3-4), and the bowl judgments (Rev. 16:1-21). All those judgments occur in the seven-year Tribulation period, which culminates with Jesus coming down from heaven and fighting the Battle of Armageddon. For our study of “wrath,” it is important to note that even the early judgments in the book of Revelation, the 7 seals, are part of the wrath of God (Rev. 6:16-17). Thus, the “wrath” is the whole Tribulation period, not just part of it.

It is sometimes taught that God’s “wrath” that Christians are delivered from is destruction in the Lake of Fire. While destruction in fire is certainly wrath, it is not the wrath being spoken of here in Thessalonians. For one thing, the book of Revelation gives good evidence that the Tribulation is the “wrath.” The book of Revelation uses the word “wrath” six times (Rev. 6:16, 17; 11:18; 14:10; 16:19; 19:15) and five of them clearly refer to the judgments occurring in the Tribulation itself and do not refer to the Lake of Fire. In Revelation 14:10, the word “wrath” could be referring to the Lake of Fire, or it could be referring to the Tribulation before the Lake of Fire, or it could be using “wrath” for both the Tribulation and Lake of Fire. However, given the fact that the Old Testament referred to the Tribulation as a period of God’s wrath, that Jesus called the Tribulation “wrath,” and that Revelation called it “wrath” at least five of six times, the evidence is that the “wrath” in Revelation 14:10 at least includes the Tribulation period.

The most solid evidence that the “wrath” is not the Lake of Fire is that the message of the Old Testament, Gospels, and Revelation is totally different from the message to the Christian Church. If God’s wrath was destruction in the Lake of Fire, then God’s message about it should be the same throughout the Scripture. The consistent message of Scripture is “get saved and you won’t go through the ‘wrath,’ that is, the Lake of Fire.” That should be the message of the Old Testament, Gospels, Church Epistles, and book of Revelation because it is the universal message about salvation. But instead, the Old Testament, Gospels, and book of Revelation all speak of the “wrath” coming upon the world and everyone in the world going through it no matter what they believed, while the Church Epistles say the Church will be delivered from the wrath. So something about the Christian Church is different from believers living at other times in history.

The Old Testament has dozens of verses about Israel going through the wrath and the believers being given over to the Antichrist (Dan. 7:21, 25; cf. commentary on Dan. 12:1). In the Gospels, Jesus taught that his followers would go through the Tribulation and be arrested, tortured, and killed (Luke 19:41-43; 21:20-24; Matt. 24:9-13). The book of Revelation has the same message—the believers will be handed over to the power of the Antichrist and killed (Rev. 2:10; 13:7-10; 14:12-13). But—and this is a huge “but”—the message to the Christian Church is different. Three times in the Church Epistles the Church is told they will be delivered from the wrath. So what is the “wrath” that the Old Testament says believers will go through, that Jesus said his followers would go through, and that the book of Revelation says the believers will go through but which the Church Epistles say that Christians will not go through? It cannot be the Lake of Fire because believers of every age will not go through the Lake of Fire, they will be with Jesus and have everlasting life. The “wrath” that believers on earth will go through but Christians will be delivered from is the Tribulation period described in Revelation. Before the Tribulation starts, the Christians will be Raptured into heaven (1 Thess. 4:13-18) and be seated there with Jesus (Eph. 2:6), so Christians will be delivered “from” the wrath.

Until the Administration of Grace and the Rapture of the Church was revealed to the apostle Paul (Eph. 3:2-9; 1 Thess. 4:15-18), everyone thought that God’s wrath would come upon the earth as foretold, and if you were part of the generation that experienced it, well, too bad for you. Jesus certainly expected the Great Tribulation to come upon his disciples (Matt. 24:3-25). But the Church Epistles show us that Christians will not experience the Great Tribulation because they would be delivered from it by being taken into heaven. Thus, Jesus Christ is rightly said to deliver Christians from the wrath to come. The fact that believers will be taken off the earth before the wrath of God is poured out was a great comfort to believers, and we are to comfort one another by reminding each other of it (see commentary on 1Thess. 4:18).

It is sometimes taught that the way Jesus “delivers” us from the wrath to come is by somehow protecting us from it. But that is not accurate. The Old Testament, Jesus Christ, and the book of Revelation all say that believers will suffer hardships and even death in the Great Tribulation (Dan. 7:21, 25; Matt. 24:9; Luke 21:16; Rev. 2:10; 14:13). The book of Revelation indicates that some believers will be protected during the Tribulation, but certainly not the majority of them, and that is in stark contrast with verses such as Romans 5:9 and 1 Thessalonians 1:10 and 5:9 which say that Christians will be delivered “from” the coming wrath. The preposition in the Greek translated “from” is important, because the Christian is not delivered while “in” the wrath, or “during” the wrath, but “from” it entirely—Christians will not experience the period of God’s wrath known as the Tribulation because they will have been Raptured off the earth and will be seated in heaven with the Lord Jesus (Eph. 2:6). The way Jesus delivers Christians, and why it is a comfort, is he removes us from the earth by the Rapture before the Great Tribulation starts.

During the Tribulation, believers will be “seated in the heavenlies” with Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:6). This fact supports a pre-Tribulation Rapture because being “seated” implies being there in heaven for a period of time. The “post-Tribulation premillennial Rapture” belief is the belief that there is a Rapture but it is after the Tribulation and Christians are Raptured up into the air where they meet Jesus as he is coming down to fight the Battle of Armageddon, but that cannot be correct according to Ephesians 2:6. Believers go all the way to heaven and are seated there with Jesus.

[For more on how horrendous the Tribulation will be, see commentary on Dan. 12:1. For more on the Rapture being a comfort, see commentary on 1 Thess. 4:18. For more information on why the letters to the seven assemblies in Rev. 2 and 3 are to Jewish assemblies after the Rapture and not to Christian Churches, see commentary on Rev. 2:1.]

**1 Thessalonians Chapter 2**

1Th 2:1

**“brothers and sisters.”** See Word Study: “Adelphos.”

**“coming to you.”** This is the same Greek word as is used for “*conducted* ” in 1 Thessalonians 1:9.

1Th 2:2

**“because of our *trust in* God.”** The phrase in the Greek is literally “in our God” (ἐν τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν, *en tō theō ēmōn*). So, the phrase translated literally would be, “we were bold in our God to speak to you.” In the Greek, there are multiple possible meanings. It could be a dative of means, of association, or a causal use of “*ev*.”

If association is intended, Paul means to say we emboldened ourselves “in our blessed connection with him.”[[14]](#footnote-19015) In other words, something about his (Paul’s) association with God, made him bold.

A dative of means, on the other hand, would indicate they emboldened themselves by means of God. The problem is that this does not make too much sense with a middle voice verb. What does it mean to embolden yourself “by God?” That is why some translations make the verb have a more passive understanding i.e. “we were emboldened by our God” (CSB), in order to capture the dative of means. However, changing the middle form to a passive is unwarranted.

The last option, that it is a dative of cause, fits nicely. This would mean that God causes them to be bold. Well, in what way does God cause them to be bold? Is He actively forcing them to speak the good news? Likely not. So we must ask, what about God causes them to be bold? It is their trust in God, and in His promises, that He rewards those who seek Him (Heb. 11:6), these are what motivate Paul and his companions to speak the good news in spite of opposition. It is the character and nature of God, and their trust in Him that causes Paul and his companions to be bold.

**“after having suffered and having been shamefully mistreated in Philippi.”** This refers to the record in Acts 16:12-40. In Philippi, Paul and Silas suffered, being seized and dragged before the rulers, having their clothes torn off, beaten with rods, thrown in prison, and feet placed in stocks. They were shamefully mistreated in that this treatment was undeserved—especially since they were Roman citizens—and adding insult to injury, the rulers attempted to quietly cover it up, without giving personal apologies; as Paul said, “They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out” (Acts 16:37, ESV).

1Th 2:3

**“appeal.”***Paraklēsis* (#3874 παράκλησις) can be translated in a large number of ways. Two common ways it has been translated in this verse are “appeal” or “exhortation.” “Appeal” was the more accurate translation in this case. The sense is more of an appeal here because when Paul first came to the Thessalonians they were not yet Christians. You *exhort* someone who is already walking in the way, but make *appeals* to someone who is not on the path yet.

**“nor.”** The repetition of “neither” and “nor” or “either” and “or” is the figure of speech paradiastole.[[15]](#footnote-12910)

**“impure motives.”** Cf. NIV, NRSV, NAB. The Greek is simply *akatharsia* (#167 ἀκαθαρσία), the word for “impurity” or “uncleanness.” In this context, however, to say their appeal did not come “out of uncleanness” means it did not come from internal impurities of motives or desires.

[For more on *akatharsia*, see commentary on Gal. 5:19, “impurity.”]

1Th 2:5

**“flattering speech.”** In the Greek, “words of flattery.” This is an objective genitive, where “flattery” becomes the object of the words spoken.

**“greed as a motive.”** Cf. HCSB: “greedy motives.” The Greek literally reads “a hidden motive/pretext of greed.” The word *prophasis* (#4392 πρόφασις) can mean both a motive or a pretext. The idea is that Paul did not come putting up a front, with a disguise or pretext to cover up his true greedy motives. The NIV has, “nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed.”

1Th 2:6

**“from people.”** Genitive of origin. The Greek reads “of men.”

**“made demands.”** The literal Greek phrase is “being able in to be with *baros*” (#922 βάρος). *Baros* is a noun meaning “weight, burden,” “weight” being more strictly literal, “burden” being the result of the weight. It also has the sense of a claim to influence, importance, or authority.[[16]](#footnote-18527) The NASB translation captures the sense of authority well, but misses the notion of burden: “As apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority.” Paul and Silas could have asserted their “weight” and authority as “apostles of Christ” (it seems that Silas and Timothy are being called apostles here, but it may just refer to them having apostolic authority in this context). Note that here in 1 Thessalonians 2:6, Paul uses the word *baros*, weight, for his apostolic authority, but he did not want to be a burden (a verb related to *baros*) to anyone in verse 9.

1Th 2:8

**“souls.”** The Greek word often translated “soul” is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή, pronounced psoo-'kay), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it is used more broadly of the individual himself with an emphasis on his thoughts and emotions. Thus, while the verse could read something such as, “share with you…our own lives” (HCSB; cf. ESV, NASB, NET, NIV), the inclusion of the word “soul” points us to the fact that the thoughts, feelings, and emotions are specifically being emphasized.

[For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

In this verse, Paul shows us what it is to be a true minister of the Good News. We do not just take people a message about Christ, we take that message as part of Christ living in us, and share with people our mental and emotional life as well.

1Th 2:9

**“brothers and sisters.”** See Word Study: “Adelphos.”

**“working.”** Paul worked to make his own money so he would not burden the church he was starting in Thessalonica with paying his expenses (cf. Acts 18:2-3; 1 Cor. 4:12).

**“night and day.”** This is according to the custom of starting the day with the sunset, so the first part of a day available to work is the night.

1Th 2:10

**“purely.”** Cf. NRSV and Williams’ New Testament. This is from the adverb *hosiōs* (#3743 ὁσίως), which Bullinger defines as “being pure from all crime, and religiously observant of every duty.”[[17]](#footnote-23068) According to BDAG it refers to being devout or pious in the sense of being careful to follow religious regulations in order to please God.[[18]](#footnote-21132) It refers to superior moral qualities; living uprightly.[[19]](#footnote-28196) The noun form occurs in Acts 2:27; 13:34, 35; 1 Timothy 2:8; Titus 1:8; Hebrews 7:26; and Revelation 15:4; 16:5.

1Th 2:12

**“encouraging you, and comforting you, and urging you.”** The repetition of “and” is the figure of speech polysyndeton. The “and” emphasizes each part.

[See figure of speech “syndeton.”]

**“encouraging.”** We followed the Nestle-Aland verse divisions, dividing 1 Thess. 2:11 and 2:12 at “encouraging,” as all other modern translations do.

**“comforting.”** The Greek is *paramutheomai* (#3888 παραμυθέομαι). As comfort, its base meaning is to soothe and console, but its semantic range can extend to speaking “persuasively and tenderly.”[[20]](#footnote-24767) Yet not as persuasive as *parakaleō* (#3870 παρακαλέω), translated here as “encouraging.”

**“urging.”** This word for “urging” is the normal Greek term for “bear witness” or “testify,” *marturomai* (#3140 μαρτυρέω). BDAG lists the second definition of *marturomai* as “implore” or “insist.” The full meaning of the term, therefore, gives the sense of urging from personal testimony. The apostles were personally attesting to the necessity of living a life worthy of God, bearing witness to the rewards of such a life and the severity of the consequences for failing to do so. See commentary on Ephesians 4:17, “say this and insist.”

1Th 2:13

**“the word you heard from us.”** Literally, “the word of hearing from us.”[[21]](#footnote-15151) A genitive of relation. The “of God” is a second genitive, a genitive of origin.

There is an additional *kai* (“and” or “also”) at the end of this verse, which the REV has not brought into the translation. It serves as an intensifier in the Greek, having no lexical purpose that changes the meaning. To leave it in would give the wrong impression in English: “Which *also* is at work in you who believe.” To be “also” at work implies that the word of God is at work elsewhere, which may be true but is not the point of the verse.

1Th 2:14

**“brothers and sisters.”** See Word Study: “Adelphos.”

**“countrymen.”** The Greek word, *sumphuletes*, “own countrymen” tells us that Gentiles persecuted the church at Thessalonica (instigated by Jews), even as Jews persecuted the Church in Judea. The Jews had a “reason” for persecuting Jewish Christians, because they were spreading (what the Jews believed were) false doctrines about a false Messiah. But why would the Gentiles, who had thousands of gods, and dozens of philosophies, persecute Christians? The battle is spiritual and the Adversary is behind it.

**“Jews.”** This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ.

[For more information, see commentary on John 1:19.]

1Th 2:15

**“and drove us out.”** This likely refers to Paul and his companions being driven out of Thessalonica (Acts 17:5-10).

1Th 2:16

**“hindering”** is better than “forbidding.” The Greek word can mean either. The Jews really were not in a position to “forbid” Paul and his companions from speaking to the Gentiles, but they sure did hinder the work.

**“the wrath *of God* has come upon them until the end.”** The phrase “until the end” comes from *eis telos* (#1519 εἰς and #5056 τέλος), literally, “unto the end.” The Jews were experiencing wrath at their present time, and will continue to experience it “until the end.” The temporal expression is better than the statement of completeness because in this life God’s wrath never falls *completely* on anyone, he has deferred judgment until the next age. Speaking of the judgment as now is the idiom called the prophetic perfect (see commentary on Eph. 2:6, “raised…seated”). Christ is risen, the Judgment is coming, evil will be avenged. These things are certain.[[22]](#footnote-24045)

1Th 2:17

**“brothers and sisters.”** See Word Study: “Adelphos.”

**“orphaned.”** This is the literal meaning of the Greek word. This whole section is full of family terms, displaying the close relationship between Paul and the Thessalonians. The nursing mother, the father, the orphaned child. Also, in the biblical culture, the disciples of a Rabbi were called his “sons,” and the Rabbi was called their “father,” so in the Jewish culture of biblical times if a Rabbi died or left the area, his disciples were then referred to as “orphans,” and this terminology shows up a couple times in the New Testament (John 14:18; 1 Thess. 2:17). Since Paul, who was a Rabbi and teacher, had left Thessalonica, his disciples there could properly be referred to as “orphans,” but in this verse Paul turns the proper arrangement upside down and speaks of himself being the orphan, as if the people in Thessalonica had been teaching him. It is a wonderful stroke of humility and love.

[For more information on the uses of “father” in the Bible, see commentary on Gen. 4:20. For information on the disciples of a Rabbi being called his “sons,” see commentary on Matt. 12:27. For information on the disciples of a Rabbi being called “orphans” if the Rabbi died or left the area, see commentary on John 14:18, “orphans.”]

**“period of time.”** The Greek literally reads, “We were torn from you for a time, an hour,” using *kairos* (#2540 καιρός) and *hōra* (#5610 ὥρα). The meaning is that they have been separated for a *period of time*.

**“in person.”** The Greek is literally, “in face, “ which is an idiom and a very Hebraic concept. The idea is “in person.”

1Th 2:18

**“again and again.”** An old Greek idiom meaning more than once.

**“the Adversary.”** The Greek word for Adversary is *Satanas* (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated as “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see commentary on Mark 1:13. For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil”.

**“prevented us.”** Paul says Satan “prevented” his entourage from visiting the Thessalonians. The Greek word translated “prevented” is *egkoptō* (#1465 ἐγκόπτω), and its meanings include to “hinder” or “thwart.”[[23]](#footnote-22756) The translations are divided as to whether the meaning here is “prevented” or simply “hinder.” The word occurs five times (Acts 24:4; Rom. 15:22; Gal. 5:7; 1 Thess. 2:18; and 1 Pet. 3:7), sometimes meaning *hinder* and sometimes meaning a hindrance to the point of actual *prevention*. Here, it is prevention, for Paul, desiring to come to them, was actually inhibited from coming.

Scripture does not tell us how Satan prevented Paul from getting back to Thessalonica, but the fact that Paul never mentions any reasons leads us to believe that they were largely known and understood. One likely candidate was Claudius expelling the Jews from Rome. The Jews of Thessalonica tried to bring Paul and his companions before the Roman magistrates, but could not find them, but the charge they leveled at Paul and the others was that they “act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus (Acts 17:7). These were very serious charges. Roman Emperors were constantly threatened by rebellion and revolution, and stamped it out quickly and decisively whenever there was a hint of it. If Paul was in Corinth (or he even could have been in Thessalonica) when Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome, news of that would have gotten to Thessalonica very quickly along the Egnatian Way. That news would have made the Roman magistrates even more on the alert against any suspected Jewish sedition, and the Jews in Thessalonica were not above lying and twisting the facts, as we have seen. In any case, that is a possible reason Paul could not get back to Thessalonica. When he visited there again, Claudius was dead and Nero was the new Emperor.

1Th 2:19

**“For who is our hope.”** “Who” not “what” (as the KJV), because the people are the joy and crown.

**“crown of boasting.”** The “crowns” are special rewards that will be given out in the future Messianic Kingdom, and the New Testament mentions five crowns that God will give to those people who deserve them. The crown of boasting is for those who win others to Christ. In this context, the “crown of boasting” seems to be the people who will be in the Messianic Kingdom because of Paul’s evangelistic work, and they will certainly be something to boast about. However, given the scope of Scripture on the subject of crowns being given as rewards, it also seems that the “crown” here is a crown given as a reward. As such, the “crown of boasting” is an amphibologia (double entendre), and both meanings are true.

[See figure of speech “amphibologia.”]

The word “boasting” is the Greek word *kauchēsis* (#2746 καύχησις), and it means “boasting,” or the object of pride or boasting. Some versions use the word “glory,” that we “glory” in something, that is, refer to it with pride. The word *boast* can have two connotations—just like English usage—one can boast in a negative way and in a positive way. Scripture uses both instances (e.g., James 4:16 and Rom. 15:17).

The NIV calls it “the crown in which we will glory.” Reaching others with the Word and bringing them to the point of salvation is something that every Christian should want to do. It is an act of compassion because death in the Lake of Fire is the fate of those who reject God and His Son. If people are going to believe and receive salvation, someone needs to speak. “Setting a good example” is not usually good enough, because lots of people do good things, and have many different reasons for doing so. Furthermore, Jesus came to save sinners. No one gets everlasting life by being “good enough,” we get everlasting life by making Jesus Christ our Lord. If we want others to take Christ as Lord, we must tell them about him (cf. Rom. 10:13-14).

Men and women who, without hesitation, would risk their own lives by running into a burning house to save someone are often so intimidated by the fear of rejection, or the uncomfortable feeling of not knowing exactly what to say, that they will not talk to people about Jesus. Yet the end of someone who is not saved is exactly the same as a person trapped in a burning house—death by fire. Although not everyone is called to be an evangelist, everyone is called to “tell the Good News.” Witnessing to others can be challenging, intimidating, and occasionally risky because the hearer is not always appreciative. God knows this and rewards those who make the effort to win others to Christ by giving them the crown of boasting.

[For a summary of all the crowns and more information on the incorruptible crown see commentary on 1 Cor. 9:25. For information on the crown of righteousness see commentary on 2 Tim. 4:8. For information on the crown of life see commentary on James 1:12. For information on the crown of glory see commentary on 1 Pet. 5:4. For more information on rewards and punishments in the future kingdom, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10.]

**“in the presence of our Lord Jesus at his coming.”** This is the natural reading of the Greek text and there is no reason to change it, as the NIV does. The question is what goes with the prepositional phrase, “in his presence.” Do we boast in his presence (NIV), or are the people “in his presence” at the Parousia? The versions are divided. There is no reason not to leave the Greek word order intact, for the verse makes perfect sense that way. Paul’s boasting is the people, who will be before the Lord Jesus Christ at his *parousia*, his coming and personal presence.

**“is it not you.”** The Greek *kai* has overtones of “also you,” meaning that the Thessalonians were “also,” along with Paul’s other converts, his joy, but the fact that the next verse says “you are our glory” indicates that the primary meaning is “even.” In saying that, Paul is not trying to exclude his other converts, but is simply emphasizing the joy the Thessalonians will be to him at the Parousia.

**1 Thessalonians Chapter 3**

1Th 3:1

**“by ourselves.”** The Greek is more literally “alone,” but they had each other so “alone” is confusing in English.

1Th 3:2

**“concerning your trust.”** The Greek *huper* can occasionally have the force of *peri* (“about, concerning”).[[24]](#footnote-19167)

1Th 3:3

**“shaken.”** The Greek word is *sainō* (#4525 σαίνω), and it only occurs here in the Greek New Testament. It originally meant “to wag,” like a dog wags his tail, which led to the meaning to “flatter” or “fawn upon,” like a dog would come wagging its tail and ingratiate itself. However, there is a secondary meaning in which the wagging action is used to describe something that is unstable and wavering, and hence the word came to also mean “to waver, be shaken, be unsettled.”[[25]](#footnote-13208)

**“we are destined for this.”** Literally, “unto this we were set/placed.” Here in 1 Thessalonians 3:3, the word for “destined” is from *keimai* (#2749 κεῖμαι), which has the base meaning of being placed somewhere. When you are placed somewhere with an expected outcome that is sure to come to pass, you are said to be “destined,” and so Paul is saying that those who trust in Jesus should expect to experience afflictions. It is not as though specific sufferings are “destined” or “appointed” for us in a fatalistic sense. Rather it is as Lenski writes, “God placed us in a position where we are bound to encounter affliction.”[[26]](#footnote-11793) When we become Christians, we are drawn into God’s battle plans; we become one of God’s valuable pieces battling on the chessboard of life. And in this spiritual battle, it is inevitable that afflictions will arise.

1Th 3:4

**“we were going to suffer affliction.”** The “we” is both the Thessalonians and Paul and his companions. Everyone who lives godly in Christ will suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:12).

1Th 3:5

**“For this reason.”** The Greek is *dia touto*, usually translated “for this reason” or “because of this.” In this context, the expression refers to what preceded and not what follows.

**“I sent.”** The Greek can be an emphatic “I,” or “I also,” and that has engendered much discussion among scholars. If Paul is just saying “I,” he is emphasizing his role in sending Timothy. If he is saying “I also sent,” then he could be pointing out his role in league with the others, or, having earlier said that he sent Timothy to encourage the Thessalonians, he could now be saying that he had another personal reason as well, which was to learn about how they were doing.

**“for I was afraid that.”** There is no specific word for “fear” in the Greek. It comes from the expression *me pōs*, a “marker of a negative perspective expressing misgiving, frequently rendered lest” (BDAG). The “misgiving” being expressed is Paul’s concern that the Thessalonians’ faith had faltered. It is a common pattern in Paul’s writings that he uses “fear” in the text when he uses *me pōs* and from the immediate context it is implied here (cf. 2 Cor. 11:3, 12:20; Gal. 4:11).

**“the Tempter.”** The Tempter is the Adversary of 1 Thessalonians 2:18. The Adversary is actively and aggressively tempting people to destroy them. Christians need to open their eyes to the spiritual battle that rages invisibly around them. Most Christians act as if temptations “just happen” and they are an accidental and spontaneous part of life. While some temptations are simply due to life and a person’s sin nature and individual personality and character, Satan is always working behind the scene to figure out ways to make people stumble in their walk with Christ. That is one reason we must “pray without ceasing.”

**“had tempted you.”** Although the translation fits the context, the verb in Greek is a participle in the present tense and active voice, indicating that the Tempter keeps on tempting us. He wages a relentless assault.

1Th 3:6

**“always remember us.”** The Greek reads, “that you have good memories of us always.”

**“remember us with affection.”** The word translated “affection” is *agathos* (#18 ἀγαθός), usually translated “good.” In this context, however, “good” does not mean “good” or “well” in the sense of a good job versus a bad job, but rather “good” in the sense of affectionate, kind. The point Paul is making is how the Thessalonians are currently thinking of him and the apostles, remembering them, not that they have some good memories (past) of them. Paul is pleased that they “think kindly”[[27]](#footnote-32730) of them, making pleasant remembrance when they are brought to mind.

1Th 3:7

**“brothers and sisters.”** See Word Study: “Adelphos.”

**“in all our distress and affliction.”** The Thessalonians were afflicted, but so were Paul and his companions. Affliction is unavoidable for godly Christians.

1Th 3:8

**“For now we *really* live.”** The Greek text says, “now we live,” and it refers to getting new energy in life. The good news Timothy brought about how well the Thessalonians were doing energized Paul and his companions.

1Th 3:9

**“how can we give thanks to God.”** Paul was writing about the thanks to God concerning the Thessalonians, for all the joy he had.

1Th 3:10

**“night and day.”** An accurate rendition of the thinking of the time, because the Jewish day starts with sunset.

**“supply what is lacking in your trust.”** The verb *katartizō* (#2675 καταρτίζω) could either mean “supply,” “complete” or “restore.” Here it should be translated supply, for as recorded in the book of Acts, Paul’s time in Thessalonica was cut short when a mob attempted to seize him, and so the new believers sent him away secretly (Acts 17:1-11). Thus he did not wish to “restore” the Thessalonians to the trust they once had, but to supply what was lacking in their trust in the first place.

1Th 3:11

**“our God and Father…and our Lord Jesus.”** This verse is good evidence that Jesus is not God. God is the Father, and the Lord Jesus is separate. If Jesus were God, this verse would have read something like, “Now may our God, the Father and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you.” Simple verses like this one, which occur throughout the NT, are strong evidence Jesus is not God.

1Th 3:12

**“one another and for all people​.”** The “one another” refers to believers; those in the Christian community (see commentary on Gal. 5:13). The phrase, “and for all people” refers to everyone who is not saved. This phrase also occurs in 1 Thessalonians 5:15.

1Th 3:13

**“at the coming of.”** The Greek is *en ho parousia*, “at the presence” (or “coming”). The word *parousia* has two definitions: “presence” and “coming,” and it is used both ways in the New Testament. It is used as “presence” in verses such as 2 Corinthians 10:10 and Philippians 2:12. It is used as “coming” in verses such as 2 Corinthians 7:6 and 2 Peter 3:4. The most likely meaning of *parousia* here is “presence,” the presence we will have when Jesus comes for his Church at the Rapture. At the Rapture of the Church, Christians will be in the presence of the Lord, and they will be there with all the “holy ones,” both Christians and angels.

John Walvoord writes, “What does the word *parousia* mean here in Thessalonians? When someone is coming, we also speak of his presence. For instance, a visiting preacher might be welcomed with the words, ‘We are happy for the coming of pastor John Doe.’ What would be meant by that? How he came would not be important; the point is that he is here, and we are glad for his presence. Even in English we use the term *coming* in the sense of *presence*. That is precisely the thought here. But when are we going to be in the presence of the Father? According to Scripture, Christians will meet Christ in the air at the rapture. We will be present with him at that moment. After we meet him in the air, he will take us home to glory to be in the presence of the Father and the holy angels. After that. we will return back to earth with Christ.”[[28]](#footnote-17903)

If *parousia* was to be understood here as “coming” and not “presence,” it would be his coming at the Rapture, and the “holy ones” would be the angels that accompany Christ. The Old Testament (and thus Septuagint) refer to angels as *hoi hagioi* (“the holy,” plural; see Meyer).

The point that Paul is making in this section of Scripture becomes clear when we read 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13 as one sentence, which it is in both Greek and English. The sentence is a prayer with multiple requests. The first request is that Paul prays that God and the Lord Jesus will bring Paul back to Thessalonica so he can see the believers again (1 Thess. 3:11). The second request is that the Lord would cause the Thessalonians to grow in love with the result that when the Lord comes he would find them to be established and blameless in holiness before God. The Lord will come for the Church and be present with them at the Rapture, which Paul writes about in the next chapter, 1 Thessalonians 4, and at that time all the Christians will be together in the presence of the Lord Jesus. Paul wants to do all he can to make sure that the believers in Thessalonica (and everywhere else) will be established as blameless in holiness before God at the coming of the Lord. Paul is very aware that when the Lord returns believers will be judged for what they have done and how they have lived (cf. 1 Cor. 3:10-17; 2 Cor. 5:10; Col. 3:23-25; 1 John 2:28; 2 John 1:8). Wise Christians realize that how they live now affects the rewards or lack of rewards that they will have in the future Kingdom of Christ on earth, and they make an effort to live holy and blameless lives.

**1 Thessalonians Chapter 4**

1Th 4:1

**“brothers and sisters.”** See Word Study: “Adelphos.”

**“learned.”** The Greek is more literally, “received,” but here it is used idiomatically for “learned.” Some other English versions use “received” but added something such as “instruction” for clarity.

**“from us.”** The Greek text reads “of us,” and here it is a genitive of origin.

**“that you would do so even more.”** Cf. NASB, HCSB, NJB. The verb is *perisseuō* (#4052 περισσεύω), meaning “to cause something to exist in abundance,”[[29]](#footnote-29968) and thus by extension, it can mean “to do more of what you are doing”. Paul is urging the believers to live in a godly manner even more and more than they already have, even though their behavior was already exemplary.

1Th 4:3

**“For this is the will of God—for you to be holy.”** The Greek is more literally translated as “For this is the will of God, your holiness,” but that sentence structure is not completely clear in English. In the sentence, “your holiness” is being described as the will of God; God wills that each Christian be holy. The emphasis in the text here is not being holy due to the presence of the gift of holy spirit born in the believer, but rather this verse is speaking of being holy by virtue of what one thinks and does. The verse is speaking of holy living. Furthermore, this sentence is followed by three sentences with infinitive verbs that describe some of what it means to be holy. Thus, God tells us to be holy (live a holy life) and then tells us some of how to do that.

1Th 4:4

**“how to control his own vessel.”** This section has been hotly debated. There are two primary interpretations: the section is speaking of “controlling” one’s own body, or the section is speaking of one’s relation to his wife. Although “vessel” can refer to the human body (Acts 9:15; 2 Cor. 4:7; etc.), the wife is referred to as a “vessel” in 1 Peter 3:7. Besides “vessels,” women were referred to as a “fountain,” “garden,” “spring,” (Song 4:12), “cistern,” “well” (Prov. 5:15).

**“control.”** The Greek is *ktaomai* (#2932 κτάομαι). This is a major key to this section. Robertson notes: “Present middle infinitive of *ktaomai*, to acquire, not *kektêsthai*, to possess.”[[30]](#footnote-12284) Lenski, Vincent, and others point out that the natural meaning of *ktaomai* is “take,” not “possess” or “control,” in which case another word, perhaps *kektesthai* would be used. However, other people point out that when it refers to one’s own body, the word can mean “control.”

If this section of Scripture is speaking of taking a wife, then the word “take,” which also means “acquire,” has a double meaning in this section. Every Christian man is to take, or acquire, his own wife to avoid sexual immorality (1 Cor. 7:1-2), however, beyond that, the man should “take” (i.e., take sexually) his wife with the same sanctification and honor. Thus there is a sense in which the phrase could be translated that each should know how to treat his wife in sanctification and honor. Vincent has: “that every one of you know how to treat his own wife honorably” (Also cf. Williams, *New Testament.*) In a culture where women were regularly brutalized by their husbands, the Word of God states that women were to be “taken” by their husbands in sanctification and honor, not like the Gentiles did, who acted out of the passion of lust, the men forcing their will upon the women simply because they were stronger.

**“vessel.”** The Bible uses “vessel” as a metaphor for the human body.

1Th 4:5

**“lustful passion.”** The Greek is literally “in passion of lust.” It is a genitive of character, meaning “in passion characterized by lust.”

1Th 4:6

**“brother or sister.”** The Greek word *adelphos* (typically translated “brother”) is often not gender exclusive, in other words, it often refers to both genders.

[See Word Study: “Adelphos.”]

**“an avenger.”** The Greek is the adjective *ekdikos* (#1558 ἔκδικος), and it relates to punishment. In this verse it is used as a substantive, meaning, the one who avenges, or perhaps more clearly, the one who punishes. The NIV reads: “The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you.” The New English Bible reads, “as we told you before with all emphasis, the Lord punishes all such offences.”

The Lord will punish people for their unforgiven sin, even if those people are Christians. A Christian’s salvation is assured and secure (see commentary on 1 Pet. 1:23). However, salvation and rewards are different. Salvation is receiving everlasting life. Our rewards are what we will have in the Kingdom of Christ. God is an avenger of sin, He punishes people for unforgiven sin. That punishment may take different forms. People can lose rewards, or lose their inheritance entirely (see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil;” also commentary on 1 Cor. 3:13).

It is worth noting that the way the Greek text is worded, “an avenger is the Lord concerning all these things,” leaves the door open for other things to be “avengers” (punishers) as well as just the Lord. Someone who ignores God’s sexual standards is likely to run into trouble from many directions: angry people, disease, and finally, at the Judgment, the Lord.

**“of all these *offenses*.”** The Greek is more literally, “concerning (*peri*) all these,” but that is not as clear as “of all these *offenses*.”

1Th 4:7

**“to be impure.”** The preposition is *epi*, and the use of *epi* with a noun in the dative case to express purpose, as we see here, is in both classical literature and the Bible (cf. Eph. 2:10; you were called “to do good works,” that is, with the purpose of doing good works).[[31]](#footnote-19065) The Greek word translated “be impure” is literally “impurity” *akatharsia* (#167 ἀκαθαρσία), but the English reads more clearly to say God did not call us “to be impure,” and it refers to being “unclean” before God. The dominant use of *akatharsia* in the New Testament includes sexual sin, as it does here.

[For more information on *akatharsia*, see commentary on Gal. 5:19.]

**“*to live* in holiness.”** God called believers with the goal that they would be holy.[[32]](#footnote-23233)

1Th 4:8

**“rejects *these commands*.”** This picks up the idea of commands from 1 Thessalonians 4:2.

**“his holy spirit.”** This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God.

[For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”. For more information on the holy spirit being the gift of God and not a member of the Trinity, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

**“you.”** The “you” is plural, it is speaking to “all of you,” i.e. the Church.

1Th 4:9

**“affection for *God’s* family​.”** The Greek is *philadelphia* (#5360 φιλαδελφία), a compound Greek word made up of *philos* (a strong liking, a friendship; see commentary on John 21:15) and *adelphos* (#80 ἀδελφός), which means “brother.” It is the strong bond of friendship that exists between brothers.

**“by God.”** The Greek is a genitive of origin: “taught of God.”

**“love one another.”** The command to “love one another” was the new commandment that Jesus gave his disciples in John 13:34, and it is so central to Christian life that it occurs 13 times in the New Testament—and besides those, there are also similar commands to love our fellow believers (cf. 1 John 2:10; 3:10, 14; 4:20-21). It is vital to understand the impact of this command, that it is not a general call to love everyone, although we are supposed to love everyone. It is a specific command to especially love fellow Christians, and thus is similar to Galatians 6:10, be especially good to the household of faith; that is, fellow Christians.

[For more on “love one another,” see commentary on John 13:34. For more on other ways we are to love one another, see commentary on Gal. 5:13, “one another.”]

1Th 4:10

**“brothers and sisters.”** See Word Study: “Adelphos.”

**“encourage you, brothers *and sisters*, to do so even more.”** This wording is very similar to 1 Thessalonians 4:1. This encouragement is followed by four infinitive phrases: “to do so even more;” “to endeavor to lead a quiet life;” “to mind their own affairs;” and to work with their own hands.”

1Th 4:11

**“to lead a peaceable life.”** Cf. NAB. The verb for quiet, *hēsuchazō* (#2270 ἡσυχάζω), can sometimes refer to being “silent,” as in Luke 14:4, and sometimes to “refrain from disturbing activity, be peaceable/orderly.”[[33]](#footnote-12539) This is the sense here. The negative might be, “that you do not live a disruptive life.” Also, there were people in the church who were not being “quiet,” but were running around being busybodies and talking about things that they should not have talked about. Gordon Fee writes: “But Paul’s present concern is with their relationship to others, in the sense of not intruding on their lives but becoming something of a burden to them. Thus, ‘quiet’ in this case has to do with some of them not being disruptive regarding the lives of others, which is made clear by the two elaborations that follow.”[[34]](#footnote-29419)

1Th 4:12

**“so that you walk properly.”** Here, “walk” refers to living life, in this case, the way a person behaves toward others.

**“do not need anything.”** The Greek more literally reads, “have need of nothing.” The English versions are split on the translation of this phrase. Some read, “be dependent on no one” (ESV, NIV, NRSV, HCSB, NAB), while others go with the translation “have no need of anything” (NASB, NET, KJV, ASV). The difference in translation comes from the word *mēdeis* (#3367 μηδείς), which could be either neuter (“nothing”) or masculine (“no one”). Are we to work with our hands so that we have no need of anyone (i.e. not be dependent on anyone), or not have need of anything? We feel the latter translation is more accurate. Working to have no needs logically includes not being dependent on others. However, being dependent on others and working were not mutually exclusive during this time—the culture of the Roman world was based on a patron-client system in which nearly everyone was dependent on others in some form. Given this, “do not need anything” was the better translation.

1Th 4:13

**“brothers and sisters.”** See Word Study: “Adelphos.”

**“are asleep.”** The Greek verb is *koimaō* (#2837 κοιμάω), to fall asleep, to be asleep, and in this verse it is in the passive voice, indicating that death happened to the believers, it was not something they initiated. Sleep is used as a euphemism and metaphor for death. See commentary on Acts 7:60.

**“grieve like the rest *of humankind*.”** Death is an enemy, and it hurts very deeply. The natural and proper response to death is grief. Even animals grieve, even if it is for a short time. The orthodox belief that the dead go immediately to heaven to be with Jesus has sometimes caused Christians to try to not grieve, but to rejoice. This is confusing at best, and can be especially harmful to children who hurt terribly over the death of a loved one, but are told that they should be happy for them instead of being sad, as if being sad was selfish. If it is proper doctrine to rejoice at the death of a Christian, then this would be the place to say it. But no, Paul writes that we should grieve, but not in the same way as the rest of mankind, who believe that death ends any meaningful life. This points also to the Greco-Roman culture of the time. Although there was among some people a concept of an afterlife, even then it was uncertain and not a wonderful place. The majority of the people, however, were uncertain as to whether there even was an afterlife, so death was very bitter indeed.

1Th 4:14

**“since we believe.”** This is the use of *ei* (#1487 εἰ) that is not conditional and is best translated “since,” or something similar rather than “if.”

**“was raised.”** This is a better translation than “rose again.” See commentary on 2 Corinthians 5:15.

**“so also.”** The Greek is *houtos kai*, meaning, just as Christ died and came back to life, “in the same manner also” Christians are not lost forever, but will be raised.

**“through Jesus.”** This is the preposition *dia* with Jesus in the genitive case, showing agency or means. God is going to raise the dead by means of Christ, who will give the command for the dead to be raised (John 5:25-29; 6:39, 40, 44, 54).

**“bring .”** Jesus Christ will bring people up from the grave to be with him in heaven. The word for “bring” could be translated “bring, lead, lead away, or take.” It is from the Greek verb *agō* (#71 ἄγω), “to bring, to lead, lead away.”[[35]](#footnote-12371) The question arises, “lead (or bring) from where?” Paul does not specifically state that here, and the scholars are divided as to whether it means bring up from the grave into heaven[[36]](#footnote-17907) or bring back from heaven at the Parousia.[[37]](#footnote-20443)

Although scholars such as Morris argue that the context is the return of Christ at the Parousia, that does not seem to be a strong argument; there is much more in the context about the Rapture into heaven. 1 Thessalonians 4:14 starts with the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus: “we believe that Jesus died and was raised.” It then says, “in the same way…God will bring.” So the verse is speaking of what happened to Jesus happening “the same way” to Christians, which is that if they die they will later be brought into heaven just as Jesus was.

The context goes on to say that the dead Christians will rise from the grave (1 Thess. 4:16), then together with the living believers will be taken to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:17).

That Jesus will bring people up from the grave is stated in a number of places (cf. John 5:25, 28-29). 1 Corinthians 15:22-23 is especially clear in saying that the dead will be made alive “at his coming.” “For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then those who are Christ’s, at his coming.” Notice that dead people are dead until Christ comes, and they are made alive when he comes. This is very different than most Christians are taught. Orthodox Christian doctrine is that when a person dies he does not totally die, his soul (or spirit) goes to heaven and is alive there. But the Bible is clear that when a person dies, they are totally dead in every respect and stay that way until Christ makes them alive. Then Christ shouts from heaven and thus leads them up out of the grave to be with him.

[For more on the dead being dead in every respect, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.”]

**“have fallen asleep.”** See commentary on 1 Thessalonians 4:13.

**“with him.”** The Greek word translated “with” is *sun* (#4862 σύν) and it very likely has a double meaning in the verse. In one sense, it applies to being with Christ (i.e., in his presence) where those who are “asleep” God will bring to life to be “with him,” referring to Jesus. In another sense, *sun* can mean “along with” or “in addition to.” Thus, the verse could be saying that God will bring to life, along with Jesus, those who are asleep.

Scripture consistently includes us as participants in Christ’s death and resurrection. It says we were “crucified with him” (Gal. 2:20), “died with him” (Rom. 6:8; Col. 2:20; 2 Tim. 2:11), “buried with him” (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12), and “raised” and “made alive with him” (Rom. 6:8; 2 Cor. 4:14; Col. 2:12, 13; 2 Tim. 2:11). (See also 1 Cor. 15:20-23). When referring to Christians being raised from the dead, often the word *sun* is employed, either directly (2 Cor. 4:14) or as a prefix to a verb (Rom. 6:8; Col. 2:12; 2 Tim. 2:11). All these sayings are not to be taken as literal physical happenings, rather they point to an association in (*sun*) Christ’s death and resurrection. Such is also the case here in 1 Thessalonians 4:14. Christ does not bring the dead physically with him since they are in the grave, which is why he is going to raise them. To “bring with him” from the grave is the equivalent of being made alive and raised with him, whereas to have “fallen asleep in him” is to have died in association with Christ’s death.

This verse has been used to teach that when Jesus comes from heaven he brings with him the souls (or spirits) of those who have already died, and then unites them to their dead bodies, which have just been raised. This is not the correct understanding of this verse. First, the verse says nothing of disembodied souls being brought with Jesus. That is an interpretation based on the theology that when a person dies his soul or spirit goes to heaven.

The text says that Jesus will “bring with him **those** who have fallen asleep.” “Those” is those people who have died, not those disembodied souls. It is the people who fall asleep, not the “souls.” If it were the “souls,” then the verse would be saying that Jesus brought with him “those **souls** which had fallen asleep.” That would make no sense, and furthermore, the people who believe that the soul exists in heaven after the body dies claim that Jesus brings the souls back to earth precisely because they did not “fall asleep” (die).

If God, through Jesus, is going to bring people “with” him, in the context, where did Jesus go? The early part of the verse says, “For if we believe that Jesus died **and was raised**….” Jesus was raised from the dead by God, and the believers who died will also be raised “with” Jesus, not in time but in effect. What happened to Jesus will happen to us. This exact point is made in 2 Corinthians 4:14: “knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.” The Greek, “with Jesus” (*sun Iesou*) is the same in both Thessalonians and Corinthians.

God did not want the Thessalonians to be ignorant about those believers who had died, “or to grieve like the rest of men” (1 Thess. 4:13). If the dead were with Jesus in heaven, then the way to keep the Thessalonians (and the rest of us) from grieving would be to plainly say that the dead were with Jesus. Instead, the comfort that this verse is giving is to say that Jesus died (just like the Thessalonians who had died), and Jesus rose (and we will too). F. F. Bruce comments on the word “with:” “Although later in time, the resurrection of the people of Christ is their participation in his resurrection; they are to be raised from the dead ‘with him’….”[[38]](#footnote-27394)

Meyer comments on why the text would read “bring with Jesus” instead of “raise with Jesus.” “For the words instruct us not concerning Jesus, but concerning the *koim*ē*thentes* [those fallen asleep]; it is not expressed in what manner the return of Christ will take place, but what will be the final fate of those who have fallen asleep. The apostle selects this pregnant form of expression instead of the simple *egerei* [to awaken; to raise up], because the thought of a separation of deceased Christians from Christ was that which so greatly troubled the Thessalonians, and therefore it was his endeavor to remove this anxiety, this doubting uncertainty, as soon as possible.”

Adam Clarke notes: “*will God bring with him*—he will raise them up as Jesus was raised from the dead, in the same manner,…”[[39]](#footnote-28123)

Even Christian commentators who believe and teach that the spirits of dead Christians will come back with Jesus do not believe that this verse is teaching that doctrine. The noted commentator, Albert Barnes writes, “*Will God bring with him*. This does not mean that God will bring them with him *from heaven* when the Saviour comes—though it will be true that their spirits will descend with the Saviour; but it means that he will bring them from their graves, and will conduct them to glory….”[[40]](#footnote-13491)

1Th 4:15

**“the word of the Lord.”** This is referring to revelation from God. To declare by a word from the Lord is to speak by direct revelation from God (e.g., Gen. 15:1, 4; 1 Sam. 3:1; 3:7; 15:10-11; 1 Kings 6:11-12; Isa. 38:4-5; Jer. 1:4-5).

**“will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.”** Paul’s teaching in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 is one of the very good pieces of supporting evidence that when a person dies they are dead in every way and not alive in any form. People who have died stay dead until they are raised from the dead, which is why the resurrection from the dead is such an important topic in the Bible.

For background, we must first understand why the people of Thessalonica would be so concerned and confused about the state of the dead. Although there are always differing opinions about death in any large population, in general, the Greeks and many Greek-speaking Jews believed that when a person died, their human body decayed but their “soul” went to the land of shades, or Hadēs, a dreary and gloomy place where people lived out eternity. They believed that because they believed in an “immortal soul,” which was part of their mythology; but there is no “immortal soul” in the Bible. That is tradition but not truth; Jesus said the soul would be destroyed in Gehenna, the Lake of Fire (Matt. 10:28). In Greek mythology there was no resurrection of the body and no participation in the wonderful future life that the Bible promises for believers. That the Greeks and Greek-speaking Jews were confused about the resurrection shows up in a few places in Scripture, such as Acts 17 when Paul was in Athens (Acts 17:22-34) and in 1 Corinthians 15:12-22. The confusion among the Greeks and among the Jews who read the Septuagint was why Paul had to write about the dead being raised to life by God through His Son, Jesus Christ (1 Thess. 4:14).

A second thing that Bible students should understand is that the Bible never says that a person’s “soul” goes to heaven. When speaking of death and resurrection, the Bible generally speaks of people holistically, in terms of the whole person. For example, The Bible always says that God raised “Jesus” from the dead, it never says God raised Jesus’ body from the dead (cf. Mark 16:16; John 2:22; 21:14; Acts 2:32; 4:10; 5:30; Rom. 4:24; 8:11; 8:34; 10:9; 2 Cor. 4:14; 1 Thess. 1:10). At the resurrection, “the dead” will be raised; no verse says that only people’s bodies will be raised because the “soul” never died. That is why Jesus taught that “the queen of the south [the Queen of Sheba] will rise up in the Judgment with this generation, and will condemn it” (Luke 11:31). The Queen of Sheba was not already in heaven or Hell, she was dead. But at the resurrection, she, and “this generation,” and the “men of Nineveh” who Jonah preached to (Luke 11:32), will all “rise up” from the dead and be judged.

Once we understand that dead people are dead in every way, we can understand what Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. He spoke of “those who are asleep.” He did not say, those people whose bodies are dead, he spoke of “those,” that is, those people, who were asleep, i.e., dead. Then Paul sets forth his argument that “we believe that Jesus died [not Jesus’ body; Jesus himself died] and was raised,” so God will raise “those” [those people, not “those bodies”] who have “fallen asleep” (died).

Paul is arguing that people are dead and God will raise them from the dead. There is no mention here of the people’s souls being alive and only their body being dead. That is a tradition but it is not what the Bible teaches. Paul continues his argument in 1 Thessalonians 4:15 by saying “we” who are alive, and contrasting it with “those who have fallen asleep.” The “we” who are alive are the people like Paul who are alive, meaning they have a body that is animated by soul and infused with spirit, while “those who have fallen asleep” are the people who are dead. Those dead people are not really “asleep” if they are in heaven with Jesus, enjoying his company. Furthermore, there is not a word about their “body” being asleep; “they” are asleep and they will get up when they are raised from the dead.

1 Thessalonians 4:15 also has some wording that we must pay careful attention to. It says that “we who are alive…will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.” Why would Paul say that? If when a believer dies they are in heaven with the Lord as Christian tradition says, then dead Christians have already preceded living Christians to heaven! If what orthodox Christianity teaches about the dead being alive with Christ is correct, then Paul should have written something such as, “those who are dead have preceded us and are now in the presence of the Lord.” Instead, he consoles the Thessalonians by saying that living Christians will not go into the presence of Christ before dead Christians. But he does not say that because dead Christians go to heaven when they die; he says it because dead Christians will be raised up to be with Christ before living Christians are changed and go up to be with Christ (1 Thess. 4:16 and 4:17).

Paul’s discourse in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 was designed to educate and comfort the believers of Thessalonica. Some of their people had died, and some members of the church were worried that those dead believers would miss out on the Parousia and being with Christ. Paul comforted them by saying that God had raised Jesus and he would raise dead believers; in fact, dead believers would be raised before living believers would be changed and given immortal bodies. Christians can rest in the knowledge that no matter whether they die before Christ comes or are still alive when he comes, they will be with Christ forever.

[For more on dead people being dead in every way, and for ‘sleep’ being used as a euphemism for death, see Appendix 3: “The Dead Are Dead.” For more on the different resurrections, see commentary on Acts 24:15. For more on “soul” and that soul and spirit can cease to exist, see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

1Th 4:16

**“loud command.”** Comes from the word *keleusma* (#2752 κέλευσμα), which the KJV translates as “shout.” However, it is more than a simple shout. This was a common word in ancient Greek—although it is only used once in the NT—and it always refers to an order or command of some kind.[[41]](#footnote-10627) Lenski writes, “The Lord shall descend ἐν κελεύσματι, ‘in connection with an order’…this word is common to designate a loud military command, the shout of a charioteer to his horses, of a hunter to his hounds, of a shipmaster to the rowers… ‘Shout’ in our versions is inexact; the word means a shouted order or command.”[[42]](#footnote-10317)

**“ruling angel.”** See commentary on Jude 1:9.

**“with *the sound of* the trumpet of God.”** The Greek uses the figure metonymy. The literal, “with the trumpet of God” does not mean that Christ is carrying a trumpet when he comes, but comes with the sound that the trumpet makes.

[See figure of speech “metonymy.”]

**“dead in Christ.”** The phrase “in Christ” is very important, because it is only used in the Epistles written to the Christian Church (Romans-Jude; cf. Rom. 8:1-2; 12:5; 16:3; 1 Cor. 1:30; 15:18-19, 22; Gal. 1:22; 2:17; Eph. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:28), and it refers to Christians because they are part of the Body of Christ and therefore are “in Christ.” On the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), God, for the first time in history started “the Body of Christ,” with each Christian being a member of the Body and Christ himself being the head of the Body (see commentary on Eph. 1:23). Since a Christian is part of the Body of Christ, he or she is “in Christ” in a brand new way that was not available until God started the Christian Church. That explains why “in Christ” is never used in the Old Testament or Four Gospels but only in the New Testament Epistles. So, when Thessalonians says the dead “in Christ” will rise, that means that Christians, the ones who are “in Christ,” will rise. Believers who died before the day of Pentecost were never part of the Body of Christ and are not “in Christ.” They will be in the first resurrection (Rev. 20:4-5), not the Rapture.

1Th 4:17

**“suddenly caught up.”** The Greek word translated “*suddenly* caught up” is *harpazō* (#726 ἁρπάζω) and it means to seize, snatch, carry off by force, to eagerly seize and claim for one’s self. It is implied in the meaning of the word *harpazō* that the thing taken is taken suddenly or quickly. A definition in BDAG is, “to grab or seize suddenly...snatch/take away.” Thus, the REV has the word “suddenly” to pick up that emphasis.

The Church being suddenly taken to heaven to be with the Lord is referred to theologically as “the Rapture.” The word “Rapture” comes from the Latin Bible. In 1 Thessalonians 4:17, the Latin Vulgate has *rapiemur* (from the root *rapio*, “caught up,” from which the English word “rapture” comes). Christian theology involves the use of many descriptive words that are not in the English Bible and come from Greek and Latin. For example, the words “theology” (the study of God), “eschatology” (the study of the End Times), and “pneumatology” (the study of the spirit), come from the Greek, while “Trinity,” “sacrament,” “orthodox,” “Millennium,” “ex nihilo,” and “antediluvian” come from Latin.

It is common to hear people say, “The word ‘Rapture’ is not in the Bible,” but that is not true. It is in the Bible: it is in Latin versions such as the Vulgate. The word “Jesus” is only in the English Bible because “Jesus” is an English word; “Jesus” is not in the Greek or Hebrew Bible. But it would be silly to say “Jesus” is not in the Bible just because it is not in the Greek or Hebrew Bible. Any legitimate translation by necessity uses words in its own language, and “rapture” comes from Latin and is in the Vulgate. So a more accurate statement would be: “The word ‘rapture’ is not in the English Bible.”

To assert that because the word “Rapture” is not in the English Bible there is no Rapture of the Church would be like saying that there was no civilization before Noah’s Flood because the word “antediluvian” (from the Latin) is not in the Bible, or that God could not have created the universe from nothing because the words “ex nihilo” are not in the Bible. The word “Rapture” is a convenient term that theologians agree on to describe what 1 Thessalonians 4:17 refers to as being quickly caught up into the clouds to be with Jesus, just like “millennium” is a convenient Latin term to describe the 1,000-year reign of Jesus Christ on the earth. There will be an instantaneous event in which Christians are caught into the air to be with Jesus. We call it the Rapture. There will be a time when the saved will live on earth for 1,000 years. We call it the millennium. Neither term is in the English Bible but both events will happen.

Some ministries have resisted using the word “Rapture” and refer to the Rapture of the Church by other terms, such as “the gathering together,” which is used of the Rapture in 2 Thessalonians 2:1, but that terminology can be confusing because during the End Times there will be several events when groups are gathered together. For example, Matthew 25:32 says when Christ comes he will gather the nations, but that gathering together refers to Jesus’ gathering of the survivors after the Battle of Armageddon; it does not refer to the Rapture. The helpful thing about the word “Rapture” is that the theologians who use it all know exactly what it refers to without any ambiguity.

Some critics of the Rapture have deleteriously called it, “the secret Rapture” because Jesus did not mention it in his teaching on the End Times in Matthew 24 (cf. Mark 13 and Luke 21). However, that criticism misses the point. Jesus did not teach about the Rapture because he did not yet know about it, or, if he did, he knew his disciples did not and thus did not mention it. There are many things revealed in the Church Epistles that Jesus did not speak about, but we accept those things as truth. Jesus never said anything about speaking in tongues, or explained that men and women would be equals in Christ, or mentioned that Jews and Gentiles would become “one new man” in Christ, but those things are true nevertheless. It would be wrong to deny the reality of things Jesus never spoke about if those things are clearly in the Epistles written after Jesus’ ascension into heaven. At the Last Supper, Jesus said he had many things to tell the apostles that they were not yet ready to hear (John 16:12), and Jesus revealed many of those things to Peter, Paul, John, and others in the New Testament books from Acts to Revelation.

What the Bible calls “the Administration of the Grace of God” and also “the Administration of the Sacred Secret,” started on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 and ends with the Rapture. Furthermore, the Administration of the Sacred “Secret” is called that specifically because it actually was a “secret.” The Administration of the Sacred Secret was not foretold in the Old Testament or Gospels, so Jesus did not teach about it. Paul writes about the Rapture, and we should believe what he wrote.

[For more on Administrations, see commentary on Eph. 3:2.]

God started the Christian Church on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, and it was a totally new program than what had gone before. For example, in the Christian Church, Jews and Gentiles became one in Christ. Also, Christians were guaranteed salvation, something God had never done before. This new program of God’s, “the Christian Church,” had a distinct beginning on the Day of Pentecost, and it has a distinct ending, which is the Rapture, when all Christians, dead and alive, will be taken to heaven. In contrast to the Rapture and the promise to be taken to heaven, Israel had a different promise, which was that their graves would open and they would be taken back to the land of Israel (Ezek. 37:12-14). This promise to Israel will be fulfilled after Jesus Christ fights the Battle of Armageddon and conquers the earth.

[See Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.”]

One thing that the Rapture does well is allow for God to be completely fair to mankind and demonstrate His wonderful justice. After the Rapture, the Great Tribulation will occur. The Great Tribulation was spoken of many times in the Old Testament and Gospels. Daniel 12:1 calls it a time of distress, and says, “There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then.” Isaiah indicates that so many people will be killed that people will be “scarcer than pure gold, more rare than the gold of Ophir” (Isa. 13:12). Jesus spoke of the Great Tribulation in Matthew 24 (cf. Mark 13 and Luke 21), and said there would be earthquakes, famines, wars, pestilence, and that “If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive” (Matt. 24:22 NIV).

The reason the Great Tribulation will be so terrible is that God will pour out His wrath upon mankind for the sins of all people. In fact, Jesus made it clear that one generation would experience God’s wrath for people’s sins from as far back as the first murder, the death of Abel (Gen. 4:8), all the way forward through history to the murder of a man named Zechariah (Luke 11:50-51; Matt. 23:34-35; and see commentary on Luke 11:50 and Matt. 23:35).

It is a fair question to ask how one generation can deserve the wrath of God for the sins of all mankind. This has always been a very troubling aspect of the Great Tribulation. After all, will the generation that experiences the Great Tribulation be any more sinful than other generations have been? We, like Abraham in Genesis 18:25 must ask, “Will not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?” How can God be righteous and punish one generation for the sins of all mankind for all time?

The Bible makes it clear that with a few exceptions, God has been withholding His wrath and not punishing mankind for their evil deeds. That is part of the lesson of the Parable of the Good and Bad Seed (Matt. 13:24-30; often called, The Parable of the Tares of the Field). The bad seed is allowed to grow until the end of the world, at which time it is plucked up and cast into the fire. Thankfully, God planned a way to be completely fair to the generation who will go through the Tribulation.

As we have seen, the Administration of the Sacred Secret comes to an end with the Rapture, when every Christian is taken off the earth and into heaven. Since salvation is by faith in Christ, when the Rapture occurs every single person who has faith in Christ, as well as their children who are not yet old enough to have faith on their own, will be taken from the earth to be with Christ (1 Corinthians 7:14 makes it clear that the children of Christians who are too young to have faith on their own are considered “holy” to God). That means that immediately after the Rapture, for the very first time in all of history since early Genesis, the only people on earth will be those who are unrighteous in the sight of God.

At every other time in history since Adam and Eve, at least some of the people on earth were righteous before God, but that is not the case immediately after the Rapture. Every Christian will be Raptured into heaven and at that split second there will not be one single righteous person left on earth. Thus the Rapture clears the way for God to pour out His judgment upon the world in a totally righteous way. God offered salvation and escape from wrath to anyone who had faith in Him and His Messiah, and thus only those who rejected God’s salvation experience the wrath of God.

In His love and mercy, God begins to try to win people right after the Rapture. While the Bible lets us know that the vast majority of people will continue to reject God during the Tribulation, some people will believe. Eventually, there will be 144,000 Jews who believe (Rev. 7:4) and a great multitude of people from all the other nations (Rev. 7:9).

[For more on the verses in the Old and New Testaments that speak of the resurrections, see commentary on Ezek. 37:12. For more on the Rapture and the last generation, see commentary on Luke 11:50.]

**“together with them.”** “Together” comes from *sun* (#4862 σύν). The word “with” is from *hama* (#260 ἅμα), meaning, “at the same time,” “simultaneously” with them. Thus, since we go up at the same time we will not “precede them” (1 Thess. 4:15).

**“in the clouds...in the air.”** At the Rapture, Christians will be taken off the earth and into the clouds, into the air, to meet Jesus. We will be in heaven with him during the time of the Great Tribulation. Occasionally people who deny the Rapture say that “in the air” just means that people are raised from the dead and so become “in the air” instead of being dead “in the ground.” But that explanation is incorrect. For one thing, this verse is speaking of those Christians who are still alive at the Rapture, and therefore are already standing on the earth. So being taken to a meeting “in the air” has to be different than simply being alive on earth. Furthermore, Christians are taken up “in the clouds,” and generally in the Bible and specifically in this context, clouds are above the earth, which is why this verse says that Christians have to be taken “up” into the clouds. Sometimes clouds are pictured as being in heaven itself, as when Jesus is sitting on a cloud (Rev. 14:14-16), but in any case, believers are taken into heaven where Jesus is, and are “seated” there (Eph. 2:6).

The “post-tribulation premillennial Rapture” doctrine is that Christians go through the entire Tribulation and then, just as Jesus and his army are coming down from heaven to fight the Battle of Armageddon, Christians are Raptured up into the air where we meet Jesus and come back down to earth with him. However, that doctrine cannot be correct for a number of reasons. One reason is that Christians would then go through the wrath, whereas the Bible says Christians do not go through the wrath (Rom. 5:9; 1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9; see commentary on 1 Thess. 1:10). Also, there would be no “comfort” in knowing we were going through the Tribulation (see commentary on 1 Thess. 4:18). Also, Ephesians 2:6 says the Christian will be “seated” in the heavenlies with Jesus Christ, and that would not be the case if we meet him as he is coming down from heaven.

**“meeting.”** The word “meet” is *apantēsis* (#529 ἀπάντησις, pronounced ä-'pän-tay-sis), which is an event that included going out from a city to meet a visiting dignitary, spending some time exchanging niceties, and escorting him back to the city.

Christians will be raptured into heaven before the Tribulation, and they will be with Christ in heaven until he comes back down to earth and sets up his kingdom. When Christ does come down from heaven to the earth, Christians will come down with him. He will not leave them up in heaven. The Bible says that Christians will be with the Lord Jesus Christ forever, and we will be—we will be on earth with him.

The fact that Christians are going to come back to the earth with Jesus is contained in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, but unfortunately, that truth is usually lost because the English is not as clear as the Greek text. Almost all English versions say we will “meet” the Lord in the air, but there is a lot to that, since “meet” is the Greek word *apantēsis*. An *apantēsis* was a meeting, but an *apantēsis* also included additional activities. In the ancient world, there were no reliable city maps, street names, or house numbers. If a friend who had never been to your town was coming to visit you, the way to be sure that he arrived safely at your house was an *apantēsis.* You would leave your house and go out to a well-known place, meet him, and travel back with him. If a dignitary or important person were coming to town, even if he knew the correct directions, then the *apantēsis* was a way of honoring him, and it included speeches and other niceties and was often very ritualized. The people of the town would show their love and respect by traveling out and meeting the person, then escorting him back.

When an important dignitary paid an official visit to a city in Hellenistic times, and “came” to the city in person (a *parousia*), the action of the leading citizens in going out of the city to meet him and then escorting him back was called an *apantēsis.* It was quite a formal and ritualized event. Sabine MacCormack writes: “The subjects would leave their city to welcome the ruler at some distance beyond the walls and would solemnly conduct him into the city; upon arrival there, the *prosphonetikos* [a formal speech lauding the dignitary] was to be delivered.” In fact, if the dignitary was important enough, such as the emperor himself, MacCormack writes, “it was unwise to absent oneself” from at least being in the audience when he arrived at the city.[[43]](#footnote-13339) No wonder that Cicero, describing Julius Caesar’s progress through Italy in 49 BC, says, “Just imagine what *apantēsis* he is receiving from the towns, what honors are being paid to him!”[[44]](#footnote-20008)

We Christians will have the honor of having an *apantēsis* with the Lord Jesus Christ. We will go up to him in the air, spend a little time with him in heaven (we will be there through the time of the Tribulation), and then accompany him back to earth. Of course, it is always appropriate for the approaching dignitary to spend some time celebrating and exchanging niceties with those who have come to meet him before continuing the journey. The Greek poet Menander said that upon first meeting the dignitary, before returning to the city, someone would recite an *epibaterios*, an oration of praise for the occasion.[[45]](#footnote-12958)

When we understand the meaning of *apantēsis* and place it in the social context of the New Testament, and also fit it with the prophecies that the Church will end up on the earth, we can see why Thessalonians says that Christians will have an *apantēsis* with Jesus. Such a solemn event honoring the Lord Jesus would be expected in any Greek city such as Thessalonica. We Christians will go out of our cities to meet him (actually, “up” to meet him), spend some time with him, and escort him back. That kind of event was common for visiting dignitaries, and so an *apantēsis* for Jesus Christ, the King of kings, would only be natural.

The meaning of *apantēsis* as going out to meet someone and then escorting him back to the city is corroborated by its other three uses in the Greek New Testament. The “Parable of the Ten Virgins” in Matthew has the first and second use of *apantēsis*. As the parable unfolds, the ten virgins were to go out to “meet” the bridegroom and then travel back with him to the waiting bride (Matt. 25:1,6). That event was an *apantēsis*.

The third use of *apantēsis* is in Acts 28:15. The apostle Paul was being taken prisoner to the city of Rome. The believers in Rome heard about Paul’s coming and set out for an *apantēsis* with him. They left Rome and came to the Forum of Appius (43 miles, or 69 km., from Rome) and the Three Taverns (33 miles, or 53 km., from Rome), waited until Paul arrived, and then traveled back with him to Rome. These biblical uses clearly show the full meaning of *apantēsis.* These believers so respected the apostle Paul that they went out more than a day’s journey from Rome, met him, and then traveled back with him to Rome.

The fourth and last use of *apantēsis* is in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, and it portrays the same thing: we Christians will leave our home, this earth, go into the air to “meet” the Lord, and then travel back with him to the earth. Thus, the honor that first-century people knew would be given to any visiting king will also be given to the King of kings.

[For more information on Christ’s kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

**“and so we will always be with the Lord.”** The phrase “and so” focuses on the result of being raised: we will be with the Lord forever. It is not saying we will be with the Lord in the air forever. It is saying that we will always be with the Lord, wherever he is. First, we will be with him when we meet him in the air, then we will be with him when he returns to reign on the earth (Rev. 5:9-10; 21:1-22:5). The phrase “and so” comes from *kai* (and) *houtōs* (#3779 οὕτως), which refers to the whole rapture process that precedes it, “in the way described.”[[46]](#footnote-18562)

1Th 4:18

**“comfort.”** The word “comfort” is in the imperative mood in Greek, and is a command. Comforting one another by speaking of the Rapture of the Church is more than a good idea, it is something that we are supposed to do.

The fact that Christians are to comfort one another with “these words” (1 Thess. 4:14-17), is a huge key to understanding when the Rapture will occur. Theological controversies concerning the Rapture abound. There are pre-tribulation theories, early tribulation theories, mid-tribulation theories, pre-wrath tribulation theories, and post-tribulation Rapture theories, and some denominations say there is no Rapture at all. There will be a Rapture. It is described in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, and supported by Scriptures such as 1 Corinthians 15:51-53; Ephesians 2:6; Philippians 3:20-21; and 2 Thess. 2:1-7.

But when is the Rapture going to occur? The evidence supports a Rapture before the Great Tribulation, a pre-tribulation Rapture. Although there are a number of reasons to believe in a pre-tribulation Rapture, one of the reasons to believe in it is the comfort mentioned here in 1 Thessalonians 4:18. The Bible is very clear that a time of great tribulation will come upon the earth. The prophets spoke of it at great length (see commentary on Dan. 12:1), and Jesus Christ taught about it (Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21).

The Great Tribulation will certainly not be a comfortable time. Amos said, “Woe to you who desire the Day of Yahweh! Why do you long for the Day of Yahweh? It is darkness and not light, as if a man fled from a lion and a bear met him” (Amos 5:18-19). It will be a cruel time (Isa. 13:9-13). Jesus did not mention anything at all about “comfort.” Quite the opposite! He said, “Then they will hand you over to be tortured, and will *even* kill you, and you will be hated by all the nations because of my name” (Matt. 24:9; cf. Mark 13:9-13; Luke 21:12-17). The Tribulation is foretold in Daniel 7:21, and it says the Antichrist (the “little horn” in that context) will “prevail” over the believers, and Daniel 7:25 says he will “wear down” the believers and they will be given into his hand. Revelation 13:7 confirms this and says that it was given to the Antichrist (called the “beast”) to make war on the believers and overcome them, and Revelation 14:13 says “blessed are the dead who die in the Lord,” because things will be so difficult for believers. At no place in the Old Testament, the teachings of Jesus, or in the book of Revelation is there any reason given to take “comfort” in the tribulation that was going to come—people who were going to be in the Great Tribulation would face indescribable hardships.

But in contrast to what the prophets and Jesus taught, Paul taught something that people could take comfort in—that both the living and dead Christians would be taken into heaven. Obviously, if there was no Rapture, as some denominations teach, then there would be no reason for comfort in Paul’s words. But similarly, if the Rapture occurs during or after the Great Tribulation then Christians are going to have to endure torture and death, and there is no comfort in that either. In fact, even the earliest plagues in the Great Tribulation—the seven seals of Revelation 6 at which time there is war, famine, plagues, and death by wild animals—are so horrific that no one would say, “comfort one another because you are only going to go through the early part of the Tribulation” (see commentary on Rev. 6:8). The reason Christians can take comfort in what Paul wrote about the Rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 is that Paul had already written that Christ was going to deliver believers from the wrath to come (1 Thess. 1:10), and that “wrath” is the Great Tribulation.

The word “comfort” is translated from the Greek verb *parakaleō* (#3870 παρακαλέω). It is difficult to decide whether to translate *parakaleō* here as “comfort” or “encourage.” Comfort is a part of the semantic range of *parakaleō*, even though *parakaleō* more often means “encourage.” However, in the context of beloved ones dying, it seems that “comfort” is the aspect of *parakaleō* that is most applicable here, which is why many versions translate it as “comfort” (cf. BBE, GW, KJV, NASB, RSV). Death is difficult in many ways, and often to help people deal with the death of a loved one there must be both comfort and encouragement. It is comfort that is most important at first, then in time if the bereaved cannot seem to get over the loss in an appropriate manner (for in one sense the pain often never goes away), then the emphasis of the love and care usually shifts from comfort to encouragement.

If the whole emphasis in this verse was comfort without any encouragement, it seems that the word *paramutheomai* (#3888 παραμυθέομαι) (e.g., John 11:19) would be more appropriate than *parakaleō*, so it is important to see both comfort and encouragement in this verse. Thus, this verse gives us good guidance about helping someone through the process of grieving over the dead: both comfort and encouragement can be appropriate. As for the Great Tribulation to come, believers need both comfort that we will not go through the wrath to come and encouragement that we can in fact deal with life’s woes that include the death of loved ones.

[For more on how horrendous the Tribulation will be, see commentary on Dan. 12:1. For more on Christians being delivered from the wrath, see commentary on 1 Thess. 1:10. For more information on why the letters to the seven assemblies in Revelation 2 and 3 are to Jewish assemblies after the Rapture and not to Christian Churches, see commentary on Rev. 2:1.]

**“one another.”** The phrase “one another” occurs in the context of the Christian community, and while we are to be good to everyone, in the context of the New Testament Epistles, the commands toward “one another” are specifically to other Christians. Christians are to be “especially good to the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10). It is very important for the richness of our lives together here on earth, for our personal growth here on earth, and for rewards in the next life, that each Christian needs to be “other-focused,” focused on others and how we can help them. The phrase “one another” occurs many times in the New Testament, stating and reinforcing that truth.

[For more on the “one another” commands, see commentary on Gal. 5:13, “one another.” For more on “love one another,” see commentary on John 13:34.]

**1 Thessalonians Chapter 5**

1Th 5:1

**“dates.”** The Greek word is *kairos* (#2540 καιρός), and it has a semantic range, including “a measure of time,” “a large or small portion of time,” “a fixed and/or definite time,” “an opportune time (thus, “the right time”), and an anticipated time. Given that range of meanings and the natural curiosity of humans about exactly when the Day of the Lord will come, the translation “date” or “dates” is appropriate and used in a number of English translations (cf. CEB, CJB, NIV, NJB, and the New Testaments translated by N.T. Wright, by R. F. Weymouth, by Charles Williams, and by F. Laubach). Lots of people seem to be overly interested in exactly when the Rapture will occur or the fullness of the Day of the Lord will begin on earth. Paul’s answer is about as good as we can do: the Day of the Lord will come like a thief. We may think that we know, or “sort of know,” and although what we think may turn out to be correct, people have been “pretty sure” the Lord was coming soon for centuries, and they have been wrong. In the end, God will send the Lord in His own time, and the job of the believer is to be always ready.

In contrast to *kairos*, “dates,” the word “times” is *chronos* (#5550 χρόνος), from which we get the word “chronology,” and *chronos* refers to an indefinite period of time, and although it can in certain contexts refer to a point in time, it most often refers to a period of time or the flow of time. The phrase using both *chronos* and *kairos* occurs here and in Acts 1:7. The point in both Acts and here in Thessalonians is that God is not going to reveal to us when the period of time, or the exact time, of the Day of the Lord will be.

**“brothers and sisters.”** See Word Study: “Adelphos.”

**“anything to be written to you.”** Perhaps more literally, “you have no need to be written to.” But the infinitive “to be written to” requires an object that is supplied: “anything.”

1Th 5:2

**“will come.”** In the Greek the verb for “come,” *erchomai* (#2064 ἔρχομαι), is the present tense; it is the “prophetic or futuristic present tense.”[[47]](#footnote-17341) Thus, rather than “the Lord comes,” we have translated the phrase “the Lord will come.”

1Th 5:3

**“disaster.”** See commentary on 1 Corinthians 5:5, “destruction.”

**“will come.”** This is the futuristic present, see commentary on 1 Thessalonians 5:2.

**“will certainly not escape.”** This is the futuristic subjunctive.[[48]](#footnote-18247)

1Th 5:4

**“brothers and sisters.”** See Word Study: “Adelphos.”

**“the Day.”** The “Day” refers specifically to the Day of the Lord spoken about in 1 Thess. 5:2, and therefore we capitalized “Day.”

1Th 5:5

**“children of light ... day.”** The words “light,” “day,” “night,” and “darkness” in this verse are used in an idiomatic way common in the biblical culture, and are still sometimes used in a similar way today. “Light” and “day” are used here in an idiomatic way of referring to truth, enlightenment, and what is right and godly. This is in contrast to “night” and “darkness,” which are used of evil, moral depravity, ignorance, and ungodliness. This idiomatic use of these words occurs quite often in the Bible. For example, Ephesians 5:8.

1Th 5:6

**“let us not be.”** The Greek imperative verb can be “let us not” or it can be “we must not.” The word “must” seems too much here, and “let us” seems to catch the sense best.

**“asleep...awake.”** Here in 1 Thessalonians 5:6, “asleep” and “awake” refer to being spiritually asleep to God and truth, whereas in 1 Thessalonians 5:10, “awake” refers to being alive, and “asleep” refers to being dead, just as he uses it in 1 Thessalonians 4. Interesting that Paul would use the same words with such different meanings in such a small context.

**“clearheaded.”** This is from the verb *nephō* (#3525 νήφω), which is rendered in most versions as “sober.” Although *nephō* can have the meaning of staying sober, as in not being drunk, this meaning is most likely not found in Scripture.[[49]](#footnote-19619) The word speaks of more than avoidance of inebriation, it points to having a clear mind and being self-controlled.[[50]](#footnote-26083) Louw-Nida writes: “It is possible that in 1 Thess. 5:8 *nephō* means lack of drunkenness, but most scholars interpret the use of *nephō* in the NT as applying to a broader range of soberness or sobriety, namely, restraint and moderation which avoids excess in passion, rashness, or confusion.”[[51]](#footnote-31290) Hence, we have translated the verb as “clearheaded” rather than “sober,” feeling that the rendering “sober” would cause the reader to only think of drunkenness and miss the deeper meaning of the word. There are many things that keep a person from being clear-headed; including alcohol and drugs, but also things like uncontrolled rage or other emotions. The Christian is to strive to overcome all the various things in life that keep him from thinking clearly and acting in a godly manner. Things like alcohol or drug addiction, or uncontrolled anger, can be hard to overcome, but they can be overcome with diligent effort. God and the Lord Jesus deserve our absolute best effort to be mentally prepared and able to serve them. That the Christian is clearheaded is important to God, so He mentions it a number of times (cf. 1 Tim. 3:2, 11; 1 Pet. 1:13; 4:7).

1Th 5:7

**“who sleep, sleep… get drunk, get drunk.”** The repetition of different forms of the same word is the figure of speech polyptoton.[[52]](#footnote-21417)

[See figure of speech “polyptoton.”]

1Th 5:8

**“clearheaded.”** See commentary on 1 Thessalonians 5:6.

**“putting on.”** This verb is in the middle voice. The middle voice means the subject of the action acts upon him or herself—the action of the verb is reflexive, it comes upon the subject. E.g., “he washes himself.” Hence, the action of “putting on” the breastplate of faith and love is something you yourself must do. It is not something that happens to you (which would be the passive voice), but something you put on for yourself. An alternate translation would be “clothing ourselves with the breastplate…” I. Howard Marshall writes: “The verb ‘put on’ is an aorist participle and is generally taken to refer to an act coincident with the adoption of a sober attitude.”[[53]](#footnote-19201) In other words, the clearheaded person puts on the armor; the mindset of clearheadedness involves putting on the armor.

**“a breastplate of trust and love.”** There is no definite article with breastplate. So the emphasis here is different than in Ephesians 6:14, which speaks of the breastplate of righteousness. The purpose of the breastplate was to protect the heart, and in a Christian’s life and walk there are many different things that protect the heart, including righteousness, trust, and love. The qualities of righteousness, trust, and love help form a protective barrier around one’s heart, thus helping to guard it against unnecessary pain.

**“hope of salvation.”** The Scripture speaks of our salvation as a future occurrence that is yet to be hoped for—the “hope of salvation.” This is the literal truth regarding our salvation, that it is still future. No one has yet “been saved,” which will happen when we are delivered from physical death and the future judgment coming upon the world. 1 Thessalonians 5:9 reflects on our future salvation by saying we were not appointed (intended) for wrath in this judgment. Because we are ensured to be delivered from these things the Bible often speaks of our salvation as a present and past reality—this is the prophetic present and prophetic perfect idioms (see also commentary on Eph. 2:6; “prophetic perfect” and cf. Eph. 2:8).

1Th 5:9

**“appoint.”** From *tithēmi* (#5087 τίθημι). We have rendered *tithēmi* as “appoint” as did the NIV, HCSB, KJV, and ASV. Other versions read “destined” (ESV, NASB, NRSV, NET, NAB). But *destined* gives the wrong impression to the modern reader. It sounds as if the verse means God did not fatalistically destine us to experience his wrath. But *fate* has nothing to do with the verse. Rather, *tithēmi* has the meaning of being *placed* for something, *appointed*, often showing the subject’s *intention*. It could be translated as “intend” here—meaning God did not intend for us to experience wrath.

**“to wrath.”** This could also be translated “to the wrath” because the preposition *eis* before the noun “wrath” can make the noun definite without having the definite article in the Greek text. “The wrath” is the Great Tribulation. Christians will be in the Rapture and taken off the earth to be with Jesus in heaven (Eph. 2:6) before the Tribulation that is foretold in the Bible (see commentary on 1 Thess. 1:10).

**“to obtain salvation.”** The Greek literally reads, “unto the possession/obtaining of salvation.” This is saying God intended (*tithemi*, see entry above on “appoint”) for us to obtain salvation in the future. The Christian’s salvation is presently guaranteed, but experienced in the future. To speak of “obtaining” salvation does not mean one has to work to meet a standard, or additional necessary conditions for salvation. The point is that God intends for us to receive salvation in the future.

[For future salvation, see commentary on 1 Thess. 5:8; “hope of salvation.”]

1Th 5:10

**“who died.”** The words “who died” are in the genitive case, which connects it to the phrase “our Lord Jesus Christ” and the preposition *dia* in the previous verse, 1 Thessalonians 5:9. *Dia* occurring with words in the genitive can indicate agency or means, as it does here. We “obtain salvation” (1 Thess. 5:9) *by means of*, or through, the death of Jesus Christ. In the Greek the words “who died” are not just a side note describing Jesus—as it can seem in English—but actually a part of the means by which we obtain salvation.

**“in our place.”** The Greek preposition *huper* (#5228 ὑπέρ) can be used in the sense of substitution, “in place of; instead of; in the name of.”[[54]](#footnote-22171) More than simply dying “for us,” Jesus actually died *in our place*; he died in our stead.

**“whether we are awake or asleep.”** The Greek verb for “sleeping” is *katheudō* (#2518 καθεύδω). This phrase is the figure of speech, “double entendre,” or amphibologia, which is when a phrase has two meanings. Up to this point, “sleeping” has been used in two senses in this First Epistle to the Thessalonians: it has been used to refer to dead believers who are sleeping the sleep of death (1 Thess. 4:13), and to living people who are walking in moral and spiritual blindness (1 Thess. 5:6). Now here in 1 Thessalonians 5:10 Paul says whether awake or asleep, we will live with the Lord. Which sense of sleeping is meant? The more immediate context is the depraved, living-sleepers of 1 Thessalonians 5:6, which uses the same Greek word for sleep as does verse 10, *katheudō*. The remoter context is the dead-sleepers of 1 Thessalonians 4:13, who are described with a synonymous word for sleep, *koimaō* (#2837 κοιμάω). Both meanings of “awake” and “asleep” are likely included in this one phrase. Whether we are actually dead, or spiritually and morally “dead” (i.e. inattentive and disobedient), we will nevertheless live with the Lord. Seen in this light, this verse becomes a powerful affirmation of the doctrine that one cannot lose his or her salvation, as well as the resurrection from among the dead.

[See figure of speech “amphibologia.”]

**“will live.”** Cf. HCSB, NASB, NET. The subjunctive mood of the verb does not cast any doubt on its fulfillment, but comes from the *hina* clause. Since the subjunctive mood frequently expresses uncertainty, the word “will” is often translated as “may.” However, the subjunctive mood, from which the “may” translation comes, does not always express uncertainty. Here the subjunctive is due to the *hina* purpose-result clause, and hence does not necessarily express any doubt that we will be glorified with Christ. As Wallace writes, “Sometimes the subjunctive acts like a future indicative… When used in result clauses, for example, the subjunctive cannot be said to express “probability.”[[55]](#footnote-18372) Seeing this is the case, we have rendered the verb with the future “will” to avoid mistakenly inferring doubt from the subjunctive, which grammatically is not intended here.

1Th 5:11

**“encourage.”** The word “encourage” is translated from the Greek verb *parakaleō* (#3870 παρακαλέω), which has a wide semantic range. The root meaning is “to call to one’s side,” and thus the meanings include encourage, comfort, exhort, entreat, urge, appeal to, help, etc. *Parakaleō* is translated “comfort” in 1 Thessalonians 4:18 because the context there seems to call more for comfort than exhortation or encouragement. There is certainly some comfort in the meaning of *parakaleō* in this context too, but “encourage” seemed to fit a little better here.

**“one another.”** The phrase “one another” occurs in the context of the Christian community, and while we are to be good to everyone, in the context of the New Testament Epistles, the commands toward “one another” are specifically to other Christians. Christians are to be “especially good to the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10). It is very important for the richness of our lives together here on earth, for our personal growth here on earth, and for rewards in the next life, that each Christian needs to be “other-focused,” focused on others and how we can help them. The phrase “one another” occurs many times in the New Testament, stating and reinforcing that truth.

[For more on the “one another” commands, see commentary on Gal. 5:13, “one another.” For more on “love one another,” see commentary on John 13:34.]

**“each one of you build up the other one.”** Paul includes the phrase “each one of you build up the other one” (*heis ton hena*) to stress to the Thessalonian believers the individual attention he expects them to give to each other. Just as Paul encouraged and built up the Thessalonian believers, he now exhorts them to do this for each other. Although many scholars think the Greek phrase is just another way of saying “one another,” there is much more emphasis in the Greek phrase that this help was to be done one-on-one as well as supporting each other in groups. It seems that Paul was an example of dealing with believers one-on-one as well as in groups (cf. 1 Thess. 2:11).

**“just as you are doing.”** There is a *kai* in this phrase serving as an intensifier, “just as you are *even* doing,” which the NET catches as “just as you are in fact doing.”

1Th 5:12

**“brothers and sisters.”** See Word Study: “Adelphos.”

**“are leading you in the Lord.”** The word for “leading” is an interesting word, *proistēmi* (#4291 προΐστημι). “Over you,” as some versions read, is not the best translation. The word means to be placed before, or first, to lead; and inherent in the word is also the sense of having an interest in, caring for, being enthusiastic about.[[56]](#footnote-16419) This paints a picture of a leader as one who cares for the people, has an interest in them, and who goes out before them (Greek: *pro*) “working hard” (1 Thess. 5:11). We express leadership not as an exercise of ecclesiastical authority or according to dominating models of secular leadership, but as one who supports people in love and cares for them.

[For more on *proistēmi* , see commentary on Rom. 12:8.]

**“and are admonishing you.”** “Admonishing” almost always involves a confrontation about something that someone is doing that they should not be doing, or about something that someone is not doing that they should be doing.

[For more information on proper admonishing, see commentary on Col. 3:16.]

1Th 5:13

**“hold them in very high regard with love.”** Believers are to esteem their leaders very highly. Paul is expressing to the Thessalonians the need to regard their leaders very highly, and that this is to be done, “with love.” The Greek phrase, “with love” is literally “in love,” meaning “in connection with love,” that is that the esteem with which the believers are to hold their leaders is to be connected with and based in love, not simply based in the authority or position in the Church that the leader has. Reciprocally, the leaders are to lead in love and not use their position as a “bully pulpit” to direct and control the believers.

1Th 5:14

**“Now we urge you.”** Paul gives instructions in this verse about four specific categories of action (“admonish,” “comfort,” “help,” and “be patient”) which he urges believers to do. First, the word “admonish” is the Greek word *noutheteō* (#3560 νουθετέω) and it means “to warn or counsel about avoidance or improper course of conduct.” Such a warning as Paul is mentioning here is against those who are “undisciplined,” which comes from the word *ataktos* (#813 ἄτακτος) which means “one who is out of step and going one’s own way.” These “undisciplined” individuals are idle and disruptive, thus *ataktos* is often translated as “unruly.” Second, he says to “comfort the discouraged,” which is simply to console or cheer up those who are cast down in spirit or are disheartened. Third, he says, “help the weak.” “Weak” is the word *asthenēs* (#772 ἀσθενής) and it means “one who is sick or ill, one who is powerless and weak, who is ineffective and limited in capacity, or one who is helpless and lost.” Believers are to have an interest in and offer assistance to those who are in a position of weakness, whatever that category might be. Finally, Paul says, “be patient with everyone.” “Be patient” is the Greek word *makrothumeō* and it means “to bear up under provocation (when being provoked, angry, or indignant) without complaint.” “Patience” is being forbearing and gracious toward others even when you do not feel like it or when you have a justified reason not to be. In these four things, Paul exhorts believers to pursue after the godly quality and virtue contained in such actions. In this way, you will do good unto others and God’s love will be seen in your actions.

**“brothers and sisters.”** See Word Study: “Adelphos.”

**“admonish.”** The Greek word translated “admonish” here in 1 Thessalonians 5:14 is *noutheteō* (#3560 νουθετέω) and means, “to counsel about avoidance or cessation of an improper course of conduct,”[[57]](#footnote-26721) hence it is usually translated “admonish” or “warn.” Although it can be translated “exhort,” “counsel,” or “instruct” in some specific contexts, the translator must be careful not to water down this powerful word. It almost always involves a confrontation over bad or unprofitable behavior.

[For more information on *noutheteō*, see commentary on Col. 3:16.]

1Th 5:15

**“one another and for all people​.”** The “one another” refers to believers; those in the Christian community (see commentary on Gal. 5:13). The phrase, “and for all people” refers to everyone who is not saved. This phrase also occurs in 1 Thessalonians 3:12.

1Th 5:17

**“never stop praying.”** The meaning of this verse must be properly understood. Even Paul, who penned the verse, did not pray 24 hours a day. The verse is not saying that Christians must be praying every minute of every day. The verse means not to give up on prayer and stop praying. Sadly, some people quit praying, often saying, “It never does any good.” Even if that were true and prayer did not help us in this life we should pray just because God tells us to (Rom. 12:12; Eph. 6:18; Col. 4:2; 1 Thess. 5:17). But prayer does help. It helps us in lots of ways, many of them unseen by our fleshly eyes, and it helps God by supporting what He is doing. To not stop praying means to pray every day, just as Scripture directs us to. The Greek text, which is more literally translated, “pray without ceasing,” or “pray constantly,” must be properly understood so that it is not a burden to Christians. Prayer is to be a great blessing, not a burden.

1Th 5:18

**“in Christ Jesus.”** Meaning, “in connection to Christ Jesus.” As Lenski writes, “This is his sweet gospel will ‘in connection with Christ,’ in connection with all that is embodied in the Anointed One.”[[58]](#footnote-15108)

1Th 5:19

**“Do not quench the spirit.”** 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21 all deal with the same subject, the manifestations of holy spirit, especially prophecy. We are not to quench the gift of holy spirit, but to encourage its use. Similarly, we are to encourage prophecy, and when a prophetic word comes, not to treat it with contempt, but rather think of it as being from the Lord. However, because prophecies can also come from people’s minds or even demons, God exhorts us to test everything. We hold on to what is good, and stay away from every form of evil, which in this context is any form of false manifestations, lying signs and wonders, and such as that.

The word for quench is *sbennumi* (#4570 σβέννυμι), meaning to *put out* or *extinguish*; the word also can mean, by figurative extension, *suppress*, *stifle*. Of course, the spirit can never be extinguished in the sense of being totally dissipated, so the lesson of this verse is a warning to not suppress the work of the spirit, especially to not hinder the manifestations, as can be seen in the context (1 Thess. 5:20-21).

1Th 5:20

**“treat…with contempt.”** This word, *exoutheneō* (#1848 ἐξουθενέω), is often translated as *treat with contempt*, *despise*, or *reject*. And all three meanings are inherent within the word. The basic meaning is “to show by one’s attitude or manner of treatment that an entity has no merit or worth.”[[59]](#footnote-20773) We have translated *exoutheneō* as “treat with contempt” in nine of its 11 usages, with the exceptions being, “reject” (Acts 4:11) and “have no standing” (1 Cor. 6:4).

1Th 5:21

**“test everything.”** Although there is a general lesson here, that Christians are to be wise and test everything, in this context, the “everything” has the more specific meaning of prophecies and other manifestations. So this verse is similar to 1 John 4:1, which says we are to test the prophecies (see commentary on 1 John 4:1).

1Th 5:22

**“stay away from.”** The Greek is *apechomai* (#567 ἀπέχομαι). The sense of this word is much more than “abstain” (e.g. KJV, ESV). To abstain from something is simply not to participate in an activity, even if one is in proximity to the action. For instance, one could be in the company of drunkards and yet abstain from alcohol. But *apechomai* is saying “to avoid contact with” and “keep away from” evil (BDAG). It is not enough to simply refrain from participating in evil actions; one must physically remove himself away from evil. The context of this is the manifestations of holy spirit, although there is, of course, a wider application as well. We are to stay away from false manifestations and lying signs and wonders.

**“kind.”** The KJV reads “appearance,” which is one possible definition of *eidos* (#1491 εἶδος). However, the meaning is more than just staying away from everything that *appears* to be evil, it also includes keeping away from every *kind* of evil (NIV). *Eidos* can have the meaning of “a variety of something, kind.[[60]](#footnote-27189)” The translation “form” captures both senses of appearance and kind.

1Th 5:23

**“make you completely holy.”** The Greek verb for “make holy” is *hagiazō* (#37 ἁγιάζω, pronounced häg-ee-'ad-zō), and it is the verb related to the noun *hagios* (“holy”) which is often translated “saints” or “holy ones,” and is also used as an adjective in “holy spirit.”

Scripture uses *hagiazō* in two senses. It is used to refer to the state of holiness we have in God’s sight; that we are “holy” as a free gift by the grace of God when we trust in Christ (e.g., Acts 26:18; Heb. 10:10). It is also used to refer to the Christian’s allowing Christ to make him more holy by helping to eliminate sinful behavior and energizing good works (e.g., 2 Tim. 2:21). Here in 1 Thessalonians 5:23, the phrase “make you completely holy” is used in the sense of becoming more like Christ by working on one’s personal holiness by more diligently obeying God and eliminating sin from one’s life. Paul would not ask God to make these believers completely holy in His sight from a spiritual perspective when they had already been made completely holy in God’s sight when they got born again and received the gift of holy spirit and became “holy ones” (“saints”). This is a gentle way Paul is encouraging the Thessalonians to be holy in every area of their lives by allowing the Lord to work in their lives.

**“soul.”** The Greek word often translated “soul” is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή, pronounced psoo-'kay), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here “soul” is inclusive of the thoughts, feelings, and emotions of the person himself. It is placed together with “spirit” which more specifically emphasizes the attitude or posture of the heart (thus this is similar to Phil. 1:27), and with the “body” which speaks to one’s physical well-being. Paul is concerned about the whole person: his attitude; his mental and emotional life, and his physical well-being.

[For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

**“at.”** Saying that the believer is preserved “at” the coming does not mean that the believer is not preserved until that time. Thus, R. C. H. Lenski writes, “the preservation occurs in this life.”[[61]](#footnote-26332) Paul’s prayer is that the believer will be preserved, which occurs in this life, but it is fully revealed and completed “at” the coming of the Lord Jesus. Since the fullness of the preservation occurs at the coming of Christ, that is the emphasis in the text. Whereas the believer is preserved “until” the coming of Christ, it is not like the preservation stops at that point or is even complete just short of that point. The preservation is complete and continues from the coming of the Lord. F. F. Bruce writes, “...the writers’ prayer is that their converts may be preserved entirely without fault *until* the Parousia and be so found *at* the Parousia, when they will be perfected in holiness.”[[62]](#footnote-25795)

1Th 5:24

**“he will do this.”** The one who calls us is faithful, so he will not just call us and then abandon us. He will call us, and then complete the goal of the calling; he will “do it.” God and the Lord Jesus Christ will keep us until the coming of the Lord. Christian salvation is secure. We were saved by believing in Christ and we will be kept secure until he comes.

[For more information on Christian salvation, see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.” For more on our New Birth, see commentary on 1 Pet. 1:3.]

1Th 5:25

**“Brothers and sisters.”** The Greek text is “brothers,” but that often includes men and women.

[For more on brothers and sisters, see Word Study: “Adelphos.” For more on women’s involvement in the early church, see Appendix 11: “The Role of Women in the Church.”]

1Th 5:27

**“I put you under oath...”** The word can also mean, to cause someone to take an oath.[[63]](#footnote-32420) The phrase “before the Lord,” is in essence saying, “as Christians.” This is a strong command to read the Scripture to the congregation, a necessity since very few people could read. Since Paul cannot in reality force anyone to take an oath, he is using a cultural phrase in an idiomatic way to communicate his seriousness. See commentary on 1 Timothy 4:13.

**“that this letter be read to all the brothers and sisters.”** The Epistle to the Thessalonians was not just for their church alone, but to the entire Body of Christ. But it was also to be read to the entire church at Thessalonica, not just a few leaders.

1Th 5:28

**“*be* with you.”** There is no verb for “be” in the sentence. The Greek reads: “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ—with you!” Like many languages, Greek does not need a “to be” verb for a sentence to be complete. Thus, the sentence “The cow brown” is understood in Greek to mean “The cow is brown.” Nevertheless, the Greek language does have a “to be” verb that can be used for clarity, so if God does not use it, He may be communicating multiple meanings or overtones besides the primary meaning, and that is the case here. This verse, the very end of the epistle, is a wish and prayer for the people, and the essence of it is: “May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you in an active way throughout your daily life.” The believers in Thessalonica had been severely persecuted (1 Thess. 1:6; 2:14), and only had a few weeks of teaching and training from the apostle Paul before he was chased out of the city (Acts 17:1-9, esp. v. 2), so they needed much grace. However, because the “to be” verb was purposely left out of the verse, it can also legitimately be translated, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *is* with you” (YLT). This is a secondary meaning, but one that is throughout the epistle, because the grace of Christ is with us. Our salvation is secure, our hope is assured, and the grace in the lives of the believers of Thessalonica was evident. It is possible to look at this verse as the figure of speech amphibologia, where one thing is said, but two things are meant.

[See figure of speech “amphibologia.”]

**“you all.”** The “you” is plural, thus “you all.”

1. R. C. H. Lenski, The interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon, 216. [↑](#footnote-ref-15560)
2. BDAG, s.v. “ἐν.” [↑](#footnote-ref-23483)
3. Leon Morris, First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians [NICNT], 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-28842)
4. Albert Barnes, *Barnes’ Notes.* [↑](#footnote-ref-29415)
5. William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: 1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 40; Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 4:6. [↑](#footnote-ref-15783)
6. E. W. Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 804, “amphibologia.” [↑](#footnote-ref-11532)
7. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary*. [↑](#footnote-ref-22846)
8. Cp. *Meyer’s Commentary*; Lenski, *Colossians and Thessalonians*, 223-24; Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Thessalonians*, 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-27927)
9. BDAG, s.v. “πολύς,” def. 3a. [↑](#footnote-ref-22941)
10. Lenski, *St Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and Thessalonians*, 232. [↑](#footnote-ref-23531)
11. Gene Green, *The Letter to the Thessalonians* [PNTC]. [↑](#footnote-ref-14660)
12. Jeffrey Weima, *1-2 Thessalonians* [BECNT]. [↑](#footnote-ref-23906)
13. Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* [WBC]; cf. also Peter E. Cousins, *1 Thessalonians* [NIBCNT], 1462; Alford, *The Greek Testament*, 253. [↑](#footnote-ref-25418)
14. R. C. H. Lenski, *St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus, and to Philemon*, 239. [↑](#footnote-ref-19015)
15. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, 238, “paradiastole.” [↑](#footnote-ref-12910)
16. BDAG, s.v. “βάρος.” [↑](#footnote-ref-18527)
17. Bullinger, *Critical Lexicon*, 379. [↑](#footnote-ref-23068)
18. BDAG, s.v. “ὁσίως.” [↑](#footnote-ref-21132)
19. Louw and Nida, s.v. “ὁσίως.” [↑](#footnote-ref-28196)
20. Bullinger, *Critical Lexicon*, s.v. “comfort.” [↑](#footnote-ref-24767)
21. Cp. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 4:20. [↑](#footnote-ref-15151)
22. Cp. C. Wanamaker, *Epistles to the Thessalonians* [NIGTC], 117-18; Jeffrey Weima, *1-2 Thessalonians* [BECNT]; A. Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians* [AB]. [↑](#footnote-ref-24045)
23. BDAG, s.v. “ἐγκόπτω.” [↑](#footnote-ref-22756)
24. C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*, 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-19167)
25. BDAG and Friberg lexicons, s.v. *σαίνω.* [↑](#footnote-ref-13208)
26. R. C. H. Lenski, *St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and Thessalonians*, 285. [↑](#footnote-ref-11793)
27. BDAG, s.v. “ἀγαθός.” [↑](#footnote-ref-32730)
28. Walvoord, *The John Walvoord Prophecy Commentaries: 1 & 2 Thessalonians*. [↑](#footnote-ref-17903)
29. BDAG, s.v. “περισσεύω.” [↑](#footnote-ref-29968)
30. A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 4:28-29. [↑](#footnote-ref-12284)
31. See F. F. Bruce [WBC]. [↑](#footnote-ref-19065)
32. See Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians* [PNTC]. [↑](#footnote-ref-23233)
33. BDAG, s.v. “ἡσυχάζω.” [↑](#footnote-ref-12539)
34. Gordon Fee, *First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians* [NICNT]. [↑](#footnote-ref-29419)
35. Cp. BDAG, s.v. “ἄγω.” [↑](#footnote-ref-12371)
36. Charles Wanamaker [NIGTC]. [↑](#footnote-ref-17907)
37. Leon Morris [NICNT]. [↑](#footnote-ref-20443)
38. Bruce [WBC]. [↑](#footnote-ref-27394)
39. Adam Clarke, *Clarke’s Commentary*, 519. [↑](#footnote-ref-28123)
40. Albert Barnes, *Barnes’ Notes*, 1098. [↑](#footnote-ref-13491)
41. BDAG, s.v. “κέλευσμα.” [↑](#footnote-ref-10627)
42. R. C. H. Lenski, *St. Paul’s Espistles to the Colossians and Thessalonians, 333-34.* [↑](#footnote-ref-10317)
43. Sabine MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity*, 21,17. [↑](#footnote-ref-13339)
44. F. F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* [WBC], 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-20008)
45. MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity*, 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-12958)
46. Lenski, *Colossians and Thessalonians*, 336-37; cf. BDAG, s.v. “οὕτως.” [↑](#footnote-ref-18562)
47. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 4:34 [↑](#footnote-ref-17341)
48. Lenski, *Colossians and Thessalonians*, 343. [↑](#footnote-ref-18247)
49. Louw and Nida, s.v. “νήφω,” 30.25 [↑](#footnote-ref-19619)
50. BDAG, s.v. “νήφω.” [↑](#footnote-ref-26083)
51. Louw and Nida, 88.86; cf. 30.25. [↑](#footnote-ref-31290)
52. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 267, “polyptoton.” [↑](#footnote-ref-21417)
53. I. Howard Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, New Century Bible Commentary, 138. [↑](#footnote-ref-19201)
54. BDAG, s.v. “ὑπέρ,” def. 1c; cf. Robertson, *The Minister and His Greek New Testament*, 35-42; Robertson, *Grammar*. [↑](#footnote-ref-22171)
55. Wallace, *Grammar*, 462. [↑](#footnote-ref-18372)
56. BDAG, s.v. “προΐστημι.” [↑](#footnote-ref-16419)
57. BDAG, s.v. “νουθετέω.” [↑](#footnote-ref-26721)
58. Lenski, *Colossians and Thessalonians*, 358-59. [↑](#footnote-ref-15108)
59. BDAG, s.v. “ἐξουθενέω.” [↑](#footnote-ref-20773)
60. BDAG, s.v. “εἶδος.” [↑](#footnote-ref-27189)
61. Lenski, *Colossians and Thessalonians*, 365. [↑](#footnote-ref-26332)
62. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians* [WBC], 131 (emphasis the author’s ). [↑](#footnote-ref-25795)
63. Friberg, *Analytical Lexicon*. [↑](#footnote-ref-32420)