The First Epistle of Paul to the THESSALONIANS

Opening Considerations

Greeting

1 [1]Paul, Silvanus and Timothy,[1] to the congregation[2] of Thessalonians
in God the Father and Sovereign Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to
you from God our Father and Sovereign Jesus Christ.[3]

The Thessalonians are praised

[2]We always give thanks to God for all of you, making mention of
you in our prayers, [3]continually remembering before our God and Father
your work for the Faith and your labor coming from the Love and your
perseverance based on the Hope, our Lord Jesus Christ being their
source,[4] [4]knowing as we do, brothers loved by God, that you are chosen.[5]

They became examples

[5]You see, our Gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in
power and in the Holy Spirit[6] and with complete certainty[7] (of course
you know what sort of men we proved to be among you for your sake).[8]
[6]Yes you became imitators of us and of the Lord,[9] having received the
Word with the Holy Spirit's joy,[10] in spite of severe affliction, [7]so that

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[1] Paul gives recognition to the junior members of the team.

[2] The first image that the term 'church' evokes in the minds of many is that of a building; what is in view here is a group of people, and a very particular group of people.

[3] To the 'western' mind the repetition of the full form, "God our Father and Sovereign Jesus Christ," may seem unnecessary, if not stylistically poor, but this letter was written by a Hebrew. By switching from 'the' to 'our' Father he claims a personal relationship. Some 7.5% of the Greek manuscripts omit "from God our Father and Sovereign Jesus Christ" (as in NIV, NASB, LB, TEV, etc.).

[4] We are used to the rendering: 'work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ'. However, "faith", "love", "hope" and "Lord" all have the definite article and are in the genitive/ablative case. If we translate the definite articles it changes the 'flavor'; we are looking at a particular faith, a particular love, a particular hope, and the three qualities either belong to the Lord or proceed from Him. The genitive/ablative case in Greek is quite 'versatile', and so just to render 'of' all the time is so ambiguous as to leave the precise intent undefined. (However, I can't guarantee that my attempt to 'disambiguate' is correct.)

[5] They are loved and chosen by God, marvelous privilege—verse 3 describes their appropriate response, which I suppose is how Paul 'knew' that they were chosen.

[6] In verses 1 and 2 it is clear that the Father and the Son are distinct persons; here Paul adds the Holy Spirit.

[7] Powerful manifestations of the Holy Spirit do have a way of adding certainty to the spoken word; they also help to face affliction with joy (next verse).

[8] Why "for your sake"? They were giving an example to be followed.

[9] To imitate the messengers was to imitate the Lord; their walk with God presumably had something to do with the powerful manifestations.

[10] "The Holy Spirit's joy" in the soul is an unanswerable proof of the reality of true conversion; it also enables you to face "severe affliction" with equanimity.

you became examples[1] to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. 8That is because the Word of the Lord sounded out from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia but also in every place[2]—your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we do not need to say anything.

Their hope

9They themselves report about you[3] what kind of entrance we had to you,[4] and how you turned to God from idols to be slaves to the living and true God, 10and to wait for His Son *coming* out of the heavens[5] (whom He raised from among the dead)[6]—Jesus, who preserves us from the coming wrath.[7]

Paul's ministry in Thessalonica

2 1Now you yourselves know, brothers, that our entrance to you did not happen without purpose. 2Rather, in spite of having already suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, we made bold in our God to speak to you the Gospel of God, in the face of strong opposition.[8] 3Further, our exhortation does not spring from delusion or impurity, nor is it in deception, 4but we speak precisely as those who have been approved by God to be entrusted with the Gospel,[9] not so as to please men, but to please the God who evaluates our hearts.[10] 5Further, you well know that we never used words to flatter, or to disguise greed (God is witness), 6or

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1 They bought into the messengers' life style of total commitment to Christ and His Kingdom.

2 For something to resound far and wide requires a sufficient cause. Their response to the Gospel was sufficiently vigorous that it caused widespread comment, comment about their transformed lives and the Message that could produce such transformation.

3 Instead of "you", perhaps 60% of the Greek manuscripts have 'us', as in most versions. I follow the best line of transmission.

4 Paul did not have to 'toot his own horn'.

5 Verses 9-10 give a good picture of true conversion. It involves turning your back on all the 'idols' that governed your life to trust in the true God; but the only acceptable way to truly relate to the Sovereign of the universe is as a slave = total commitment; this gives a valid hope for a bright future.

6 Resurrection has to do with bodies (it is the body that is resurrected, to be reunited with the spirit), so the Son will return with a visible body. As the angels said, He will return 'in like manner' (Acts 1:11).

7 Which expression of the Wrath is this? Jesus delivers us from the ultimate wrath, the Lake of fire, but based on 4:13-18 below I imagine that this refers to a pre-wrath Rapture.

8 They deliberately chose to pay a personal price to reach the Thessalonians. Are we prepared to do the same for the increase of Christ's Kingdom today?

9 They knew who they were and what they were about. They deny any form of delusion or hidden agenda—they were honest and aware. To be entrusted with the Gospel is a serious privilege.

10 There it is: if you want to be a serious servant of God, His approval must be more important to you than that of the people around you.

to seek glory from men (whether from you or from others)[1]—as apostles of Christ[2] we could have been 'heavy', **7**but we were gentle among you, like a nurse[3] cherishing her own children.

Paul's devotion to them

8Yearning over you in this way, we were well pleased to share with you not only the Gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become dear to us. **9**Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and exertion, because working night and day, so as not to burden any of you,[4] we proclaimed the Gospel of God to you.

10You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; **11**indeed, you know how we treated each one of you as a father does his own children, exhorting and comforting you, **12**insisting that you conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.[5]

Their conversion

13Another reason we give thanks to God continually is that when you received from us the spoken Word of God, you welcomed it not as the word of men but, as it actually is, the Word of God, which is indeed operative in you who believe.[6] **14**For you, brothers, became imitators of God's congregations in Christ Jesus, the ones in Judea,[7] in that you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen that they did from the Jews **15**(the ones who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, who have persecuted us, who do not please God and are hostile to everybody,[8] **16**trying to prevent us from speaking to the Gentiles so that

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[1] Wow! If all Christian workers could say the same—no impurity, no deception, no flattery, no greed, no seeking glory—the church and the world would be different than they presently are.

[2] By his use of the plural, Paul is saying that Silvanus and Timothy were also apostles, presumably.

[3] The basic meaning of the noun is 'nurse', but the reference to 'her own children' has led some to translate it as 'mother'. I take the point to be that whereas a professional nurse is supposed to take good care of anyone in her charge, she will be especially careful with her own children.

[4] It is clear that they supported themselves financially by working (making tents, or whatever). Between working, evangelizing and discipling (teaching), their sleeping time was probably short. So when could they be alone with God? In prison Paul had lots of time for contemplation (and writing letters), but not in Thessalonica. God places us in different situations at different times, and those situations place different demands upon us.

[5] They really involved themselves in the lives of their converts, a deliberate (and costly) investment, that produced remarkable results. God is calling us into His Kingdom and glory.

[6] Whether written or spoken, any word from God is powerful, and changes lives.

[7] Israel was God's congregation, but not in Christ Jesus.

[8] I take it that by "the Jews" Paul is referring to the leaders (John used the phrase in the same way).

they may be saved—so as to keep filling up the measure of their sins. They have received the full impact of the Wrath).[1]

Paul's concern for the Thessalonians

A sense of bereavement

17Now we, brothers, having been bereaved of you for a short season (in presence, not in heart), made every effort to see your face, from intense longing.[2] **18**(We actually tried to come to you—I, Paul, time and again—but Satan thwarted us.)[3] **19**For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of glorying? Is it not precisely you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus[4] at His coming?[5] **20**Indeed, you are our glory and our joy.

Concern leads to action

3 **1**So when we could not stand it any longer, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone **2**and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, also our fellow worker[6] in the Gospel of Christ, to confirm you and encourage you concerning your faith, **3**that no one be unsettled by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this.[7] **4**For indeed, when we were with you we kept telling you in advance that we

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[1] I did the best I could with this last sentence, but the concept seems difficult. The verb is in the past and it is <u>the</u> wrath (not just any old wrath). I get the impression that 'the Jews' described here had passed the point of no return (like Pharaoh and the plagues—at first he hardened his own heart, but after a while God hardened it and his doom was sealed) and were just making their accounting worse and worse, 'filling up the measure'—from God's perspective the "full impact" had already been decreed. When someone passes the point of no return, Satan takes over, and they just get worse and worse. (If you think about it, you can probably come up with some examples.)

Ephesians 4:19 speaks of persons who 'have abandoned themselves to depravity, greedily indulging in every kind of vileness'. And how should society defend itself against those who have 'abandoned themselves to depravity'? The consequences of depravity always spill over into the surrounding society, and according to Psalm 5:5-6 the LORD hates such people, and so presumably will not 'draw' them (John 6:44). 1 John 5:16-17 teaches that certain sinners are beyond the reach of prayer, they have passed the point of no return. If someone cannot be saved, then he needs to be neutralized (because of the harm he causes to others)—we need to ask God to teach us how to do this.

[2] I find the degree of emotional attachment described here to be surprising—perhaps a natural consequence of having poured himself into them as he did.

[3] I, for one, would like to know just how the enemy managed it.

[4] The Greek manuscripts are evenly divided between "Jesus" and 'Jesus Christ'. I follow the best line of transmission.

[5] The Thessalonian believers represented 'the fruit of their labor', evidence that they had been faithful servants, to be presented to the Lord at the Accounting.

[6] Instead of "minister of God, also our fellow worker", just two Greek manuscripts, of objectively inferior quality (06,33), have 'fellow worker of God', to be followed by NIV, NASB, LB, TEV, etc.

[7] We are appointed to affliction in this life. How many sermons have you heard on this topic? If the Son learned obedience through suffering (Hebrews 5:8), how about us? "Whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives" (Hebrews 12:6, Proverbs 3:12). Have you ever been scourged, literally? I have—I didn't enjoy it.

were going to be afflicted;[1] just as it happened, in fact, as you know. **5**Yes, that is why, no longer standing it, I sent to find out about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had *successfully* tempted you[2] and our labor come to be for nothing.

6But now that Timothy has come to us from you and brought us glad news of your faith and love, and that you have good memories of us always, longing to see us, just as we also long to see you—**7**because of this, brothers, in all our affliction and distress we were encouraged about you by your faith; **8**for now we live, if you are standing firm in the Lord.[3]

Paul's desire to go to them

9With what thankfulness can we repay God for you, for all the joy with which we are rejoicing in the presence of our God because of you;[4] **10**praying most earnestly night and day, that we may see your face and complete the things lacking in your faith?

11Now may our God and Father Himself and our Lord Jesus Christ[5] direct our way to you. **12**And may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love toward each other and toward all, just as we also do toward you, **13**so as to establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ[6] with all His holy ones.[7]

Holiness pleases God

4 **1**Finally then, brothers, we urge and exhort you in the Lord Jesus: as you received from us how you ought to behave and please God,[8] do so even more—**2**you know what instructions we gave you through Sovereign Jesus.[9]

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1 It was all a calculated risk. The messengers had their eyes open and wanted to make sure their hearers went into their new life with their eyes open—there were no misleading promises of peace and prosperity!

2 Paul was well aware that Satan would not leave them alone.

3 Again, I find the level of Paul's involvement with them to be surprising. (It would be physically and emotionally impossible to be this involved with every church he started.) But as a responsible father, he is properly concerned for their growth and well-being (verse 10).

4 To see our spiritual children growing in their walk with God is a source of considerable joy.

5 Perhaps 4% of the Greek manuscripts omit "Christ" (as in NIV, NASB, LB, TEV, etc.).

6 Perhaps 20% of the Greek manuscripts omit "Christ" (as in NIV, NASB, LB, TEV, etc.).

7 Another reference to the Accounting: a heart "blameless in holiness" is the ticket. But just what is the picture here; is the Son presenting us to the Father? Might Hebrews 2:13[b] (Isaiah 8:18) be a reference to this? In that event, "all His holy ones" are being presented to the Father.

8 Perhaps 10% of the Greek manuscripts add 'as indeed you are behaving' (as in NIV, NASB, LB, TEV, etc.).

9 Paul keeps insisting that he is God's spokesman, and as such should be obeyed (see also verse 8 below).

Sanctified sex

3Now this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you stay away from fornication;[1] 4that each of you know how to gain possession of his own 'vessel' in sanctification and honor, 5not in lustful passion (like the heathen who do not know God); 6that no one trespass and defraud his brother in this matter,[2] because the Lord is the avenger of all such behavior,[3] as, indeed, we have already told you and warned you. 7Because God did not call us for uncleanness, but by holiness.[4] 8So then, the rejecter is not rejecting man, but God, the very One who gave you[5] His Holy Spirit.[6]

An impressive life style

9Now about brotherly love you do not need to be written to, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another. 10And in fact you are doing so toward all the brothers throughout Macedonia.[7] Still, we exhort you to do even more, brothers, 11to make it a point to be peaceable and to mind your own business, to work with your hands (as we instructed you), 12so that outsiders may be well impressed by your life style, and that you may have no lack.[8]

Christ's second coming

The Rapture[9]

13Now then, brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who have 'fallen asleep',[10] so that you do not grieve like the rest, who have no hope. 14Because since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, just so will God bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him. 15For this we say to you by a word of the Lord,[11] that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will absolutely not

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1 "Fornication" refers to any sexual activity outside the marriage bond (distinct from adultery): it includes prostitution, rape, anal sex, sex with an animal; in short, sex without commitment and responsibility (sex that disregards the Creator's intention).

2 I take it that this clause clarifies the interpretation of 'vessel'; verse 4 refers to getting a wife. The term 'defraud' is quite strong, so I imagine it refers to courting (not to mention usurping) the affections of a girl already promised, if not betrothed, to another.

3 To behave so as to make yourself the object of God's vengeance does not sound like a good idea.

4 Called "by holiness" and to holiness—'without which no one will see the Lord' (Hebrews 12:14).

5 Instead of "you", perhaps 4% of the Greek manuscripts have 'us' (as in AV and NKJV).

6 Paul is writing to people who have the Holy Spirit.

7 They evidently had a strong sense of community in Christ.

8 Throughout the Bible, laziness and idleness are proscribed.

9 This paragraph defines the Rapture: Jesus comes down into the atmosphere of this planet ('clouds') and collects all those who belong to Him; the bodies of those who have died physically will be resurrected and reunited with their spirits; those still living will not have to die (death is separation); all their bodies will be glorified; the Christ will have His Bride.

10 This is a metaphor for dying.

11 Paul is claiming inspiration.

precede those who have fallen asleep; 16because the Lord Himself—with a commanding shout,[1] with the archangel's voice[2] and with God's trumpet—will come down from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first; 17then we who are still alive, who are left, will be snatched up together with them in clouds to meet the Lord in the air. In precisely this way we will always be with the Lord.[3] 18So then, comfort one another with these words.

The Day of the Lord

5 1Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you do not need to be written to, 2for you yourselves know very well that the Day of the Lord comes just like a thief in the night. 3For whenever they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction is standing near them, like labor pains to a pregnant woman, and they will <u>not</u> escape.[4]

Live as sons of light

4But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this Day should come upon you like a thief. 5You are all sons of light and sons of day; we are not of night, nor of darkness. 6So then, let us not sleep,[5] like the rest, but let us stay alert and sober;[6] 7because those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night; 8but we being of day, let us be sober, putting on a breastplate of faith and love, and a helmet of hope of salvation.[7] 9For God did not appoint us to *undergo* wrath but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,[8] 10who died for us so that whether awake or asleep we may live together with Him.[9] 11Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, as in fact you do.

Concluding instructions

Esteem spiritual leaders

12Now we urge you, brothers, to recognize those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, 13and to esteem

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1 One is reminded of Jesus' words in John 5:25-29. In verse 25 He says 'now is', so He is speaking of the spiritually dead who need to listen to Him and receive spiritual life. But in verse 28 He speaks plainly of those 'in the graves'—all the dead will be resurrected at Jesus' command, including the lost, who will then be condemned to the Lake. I take it that here in 4:16 Jesus resurrects only the "dead in Christ", and He uses a commanding shout. To raise Lazarus He gave a loud shout (John 11:43), that might have carried half a mile; this one will be heard around the globe.

2 There is only one archangel or top angel; once Lucifer, now Michael.

3 After the Rapture we will never again be separated.

4 The destruction will not necessarily strike when they speak. Just as a pregnant woman knows she will have labor pains (no Caesarean section)—the only uncertainty is when, not if—so the destruction will be inescapable.

5 Here the reference is to physical sleep or mental lethargy, not death.

6 If the Rapture is 'partial' (Matthew 25:1-13), only the 'alert' will escape.

7 Faith and love for the heart, hope for the head.

8 I suppose this refers to both manifestations of the Wrath: the Tribulation and the Lake.

9 Here is the bottom line: to be with the Creator throughout eternity.

them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.

A variety of instructions

14Now we exhort you, brothers: admonish the disorderly, encourage the fainthearted, be supportive of the weak, be patient toward all.[1] **15**See that no one pays back bad for bad to anyone,[2] but always pursue the good, both for one another and for all.[3] **16**Rejoice always! **17**Pray continually! **18**Give thanks in everything, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.[4] **19**Do not quench the Spirit![5] **20**Do not disdain prophesies, **21**but test everything;[6] hold on to the good. **22**Keep away from every form of evil![7]

Complete sanctification

23Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body[8] be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. **24**He who calls you is faithful, and He will do it.

Farewell

25Brothers, pray for us. **26**Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. **27**I adjure you by the Lord that this letter be read to all the holy brothers.[9] **28**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

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1 Notice that the response is appropriate to the occasion, or the need.

2 The term 'bad' is less strong than the term for malignant evil, so the reference is not to malignant activity.

3 The verb 'pursue' does not suggest a passive attitude; we should be actively promoting the good for the society at large wherever we live. The result will be a better place to live.

4 There are those who say we should give thanks <u>for</u> everything, as distinct from <u>in</u> everything. I doubt that our Lord in the garden of Gethsemane gave thanks for the suffering He was facing and already enduring. To give thanks <u>in</u> a distressful situation is a declaration of confidence in God and His disposition of our affairs.

5 When you quench a lighted candle, you put out its light. To quench the Spirit is presumably to 'put out' or refuse His light, to suppress or ignore His voice when He speaks to us—this would include any rejection of the revealed will of God.

6 All prophesy should be tested, but not disdained or rejected.

7 The evil here is aggressive, or malignant.

8 I take it that the grammatical structure of this phrase, "the spirit and the soul and the body" (in Greek), demands a tripartite/trichotomous view of the human being. I confess that I have trouble imagining complete sanctification for the body, in this life.

9 To adjure by the Lord that the letter be read is tantamount to claiming inspiration for it. By extension, does not "all the holy brothers" include us?