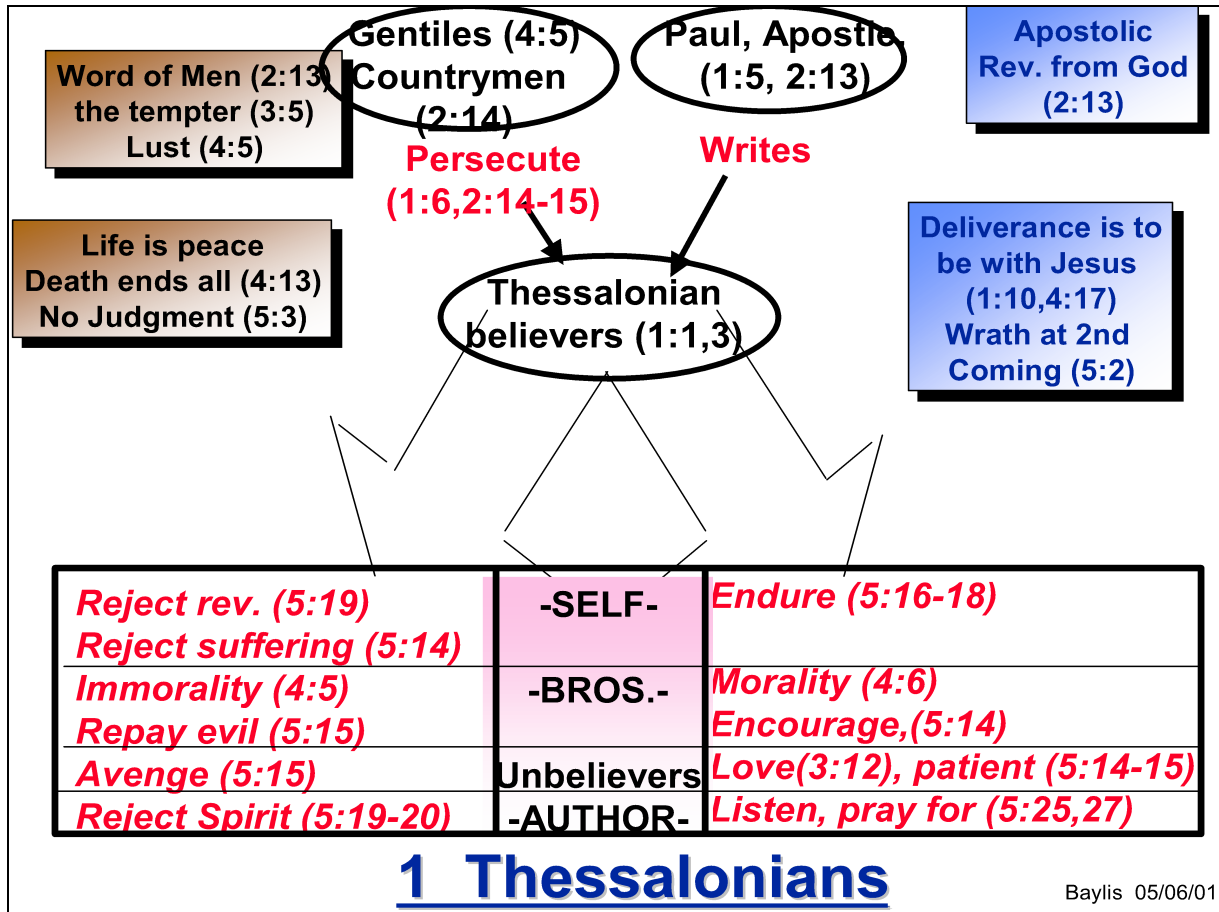


**FIRST THESSALONIANS**

**Is Christ Coming (Is there Reason to Endure in Holiness<sup>1</sup>)**



<sup>1</sup> The primary words in this book are “wrath” and “coming of the Lord”. The problem is that these believers had come under persecution from their pagan (and possibly Jewish) countrymen particularly for their holy living (and their condemnation of pagans and their habits). If Christ was not coming to judge unbelief and immorality, it seemed somewhat useless not to enjoy this life, instead of suffer persecution. The pagans advocated that this life was everything and death was the final end and a judgment. Paul’s revelation, not the visible “peace and safety” was the truth. Therefore the persecutors are under wrath, not them. The Lord will come to execute that wrath during a time when the persecutors visibly are the safest. Thus they are to live in light of Paul’s revelation, and not to act like pagans any longer.

- I. The history of Paul and the Thessalonians is reviewed in order to defend himself and his message in light of suffering (1:1-3:13).
  - A. Introduction: Paul introduces himself, Silvanus and Timothy, addresses the Thessalonians, and gives the groundwork of their common theology (1:1--2:16).
    1. Paul, Silvanus, Timothy are the writers (1:1a), the church at Thessalonica is the addressed (1:1b). Their foundation is Paul's revelation (faith), they have the sacrificial love for others and are steadfast in perseverance in the time of delay, waiting for Jesus to come (1:3).

1:1 Paul and Silvanus and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.<sup>2</sup> 2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention *of you* in our prayers;<sup>3</sup> 3 constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness<sup>4</sup> of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence<sup>5</sup> of our God and Father,
    2. ***SOURCE THEOLOGY:*** The process of the revelation from Paul to the Thessalonians (1:4-10).
      - a. God has chosen them to be separated from those under wrath (1:4).

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<sup>2</sup> The peace here is something that the Thessalonians were not sampling. They had their persecutors. Paul had emphasized the important peace was peace with God not with men (persecutors). They felt that wrath was on them since they were not at peace and death was the ultimate statement of being under wrath.

<sup>3</sup> This is the prayer for faithful endurance, which he will instruct them in chapter 5.

<sup>4</sup> Both steadfastness and hope are important here. The future is sure. They need to be steadfast in light of that.

<sup>5</sup> This word is ἐμπροσθεν which is translated elsewhere in the book as "before" (in front of). The most likely fit here as in which is translated elsewhere in the book as "before" (in front of). The most likely fit here as in 1 Thess. 2:19, 3:9, 3:13 is "presence".

4 knowing, brethren beloved by God, *His* choice of you;

- b. The apostolic word had come to them through supernatural verification (1:5).

5 for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

- c. They had responded by becoming imitators of the theology that they heard and saw in the apostolic band (1:6-10).

- 1) The apostolic word was supernaturally verified (1:6).

6 You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit,

- 2) The Thessalonians were imitators of the apostolic band (1:7-9).
- 3) The Thessalonians understood that they must suffer under persecution until Jesus appears when He would not only deliver them, but judge the persecutors (1:10).

- 3. The validity of the apostolic ministry to them has been demonstrated in apostolic perseverance in suffering as they cared for the believers (2:1-16).

- a. Validation of their message in humility and suffering: A verification of their message was that the apostolic band gave them the word amongst suffering and humility, not in things that are impressive to men (2:1-6).
- b. Validation of their message in their sacrificial care: Though they were apostles they themselves acted out the validity of their message by caring for the church before themselves (2:7-12).

- 4. The Thessalonians therefore had received the apostolic message as from God and had acted upon it as the apostles had (2:13-16).

- a. The Thessalonians received the apostolic message as the word of God which was able to change their lives (2:13).

- b. Based on that revelation they became like the apostles in that they too suffered at the hands of persecutors (2:14-16).
  - 1) The Thessalonians had suffered at the hands of persecutors in a similar fashion to the apostles (2:14).
  - 2) These persecutors are just like the Jews who killed Jesus and the prophets and hinder the apostles from preaching the gospel (2:15-16a).
  - 3) ***THEOLOGY:*** The opposition is under the wrath of God (2:16b).<sup>6</sup>
- B. ***PROBLEM RESPONSE:*** Explanation of Paul's not coming to them is that he longed to but was prevented by Satan (2:17--3:13).<sup>7</sup>
  1. Paul longed to see them since they were the fruit of his ministry, but could not (2:17-20).
  2. Paul sent Timothy to verify that they had indeed acted out the doctrine of suffering for this period of time (3:1-5).
    - a. Paul sent Timothy to ensure that they had endured (3:1-2).
    - b. ***PROBLEM:*** Paul wanted to insure that they had not misunderstood his affliction and abandoned their position returning to pagan life (3:3a).
    - c. ***THEOLOGY:*** Paul, as a minister of the gospel has been destined for suffering for the cause (3:3b-4).
  3. Timothy has come back and reported their faithfulness, and so Paul rejoices in them ((3:6-10).
  4. Paul exhorts them to establish themselves faithful in love for one another so that they might live in light of their presentation at the Second Coming of Christ in judgment on the world (3:11-13).

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<sup>6</sup> The "wrath has come upon them to the utmost (or 'forever' or 'altogether')" is speaking here not necessarily of any specific event (like AD70) but is speaking about positional wrath. The question in this book is the question of deliverance - wrath. The Thessalonians were seemingly not being delivered as Paul has preached (especially since some have died). However, his theology is that they are delivered presently (positional) and will be delivered physically at the coming of the Lord (future). Thus their persecutors (both Jews and Gentiles) are under the wrath (positional) and will experience it physically when the Lord comes (future).

<sup>7</sup> The last view they had of Paul was of his back as he raced from the town one step ahead of his persecutors. It was not a great image for one who preached deliverance. Thus it seemed that Paul's inability to come to them was possibly fear as opposed to what a man who represented God should have.

- II. ***APPLICATION:*** In light of the revelation through Paul, the Thessalonians are to continue a holy walk in light of the coming deliverance for believers and the wrath on unbelievers (4:1--5:28).
- A. ***APPLICATION:*** Paul defines the holy walk which they need to perform until the coming of the Lord (deliverance) (4:1-10).
1. ***Exhortation:*** Continue to walk in holiness (4:1).
  2. ***Apostolic Command:*** Toward brothers: Sexual immorality is a command of God through the apostle which expresses the love of brother (4:2-10).
  3. ***Apostolic Command:*** Toward pagans: Work conscientiously, providing for oneself so that one might not be in need of help from unbelievers (4:11-12).<sup>8</sup>
- B. ***THEOLOGY:*** The question of how those who die are delivered is answered.<sup>9</sup> They actually have a priority resurrection (4:13-18).
1. ***Problem Answered:*** The dead brethren<sup>10</sup> are with Jesus (4:13-14).

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<sup>8</sup> The problem of their lack of understanding of the ‘suffering now until the return of the Lord’ doctrine, resulted in several errors. One was a misunderstanding of Paul’s afflictions. Paul had run away to escape the persecutors and had not returned. Thus ‘deliverance’ of Paul was in question. Based on his example, they might feel that his theology also was in question and return to their pagan ways. Thus, Paul points out that they must love their brother, and this expresses itself in restriction to one woman in marriage.

The view that the anticipation of the Lord’s coming was so soon that some might get lazy and not work is unsupported. It had been perhaps 30 years since the Lord’s death and the promise of His return, and to consider that it would happen in the space of a day or a week (the space one would not have to work and still get fed) would be, even from observation, somewhat chancy. Ultimately, after he waited that week and got hungry, he would probably revise his theology. What it is saying is that if they adapt the theology of the antagonists that they will adapt their behavior, which is to take advantage of others and not pull their weight as is characteristic of those who are selfish and believe that everything is now.

<sup>9</sup> As is common to pagans (and many Christians unfortunately), their errant belief is that life here is the blessing (i.e., deliverance). Deliverance is not their visible possession. Deliverance is not the easy life, it is not now (during this time of delay and suffering), it is not here (earth during this time), and it is not without Jesus (His presence is deliverance). In other words, deliverance is being with Jesus. In the pagan view death is the end, a judgment, the wrath of God.

2. **Problem Answered:** Deliverance is not in this life, but all are delivered through resurrection (4:15-18)
  - a. The believer in Christ need not grieve in a believer's death since the believer has hope<sup>11</sup> (4:14).
  - b. **CONTENT THEOLOGY:** Living until the Lord comes is not better than dying for the Lord, for the dead rise first, but all live with the Lord forever (4:15-17).
    - 1) The dead believers have a priority position in the resurrection (4:15-16).
    - 2) The living believers will follow them to meet the Lord in the air (4:17).
  - c. Exhortation: Comfort one another confirming that deliverance is not in living, but through death, and not in absence from the Lord but in His presence (4:18).<sup>12</sup>
- C. **THEOLOGY AND APPLICATION:** Paul answers the question of 'when' will these things be (The coming of the Lord for judgment and their escape?) and then exhorts them to holy living in the light of the revelation (5:1-22).
  1. **THEOLOGY:** The judgment of mankind (and their deliverance) in the coming of the Lord will not come based on human evaluation of the times (pagans will think they are at peace with God)<sup>13</sup> but on the revelation (5:1-11).

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<sup>10</sup> Paul is using this term "fallen asleep" as a reference to Daniel 12:2.

<sup>11</sup> Note that 'hope' is not simply the possibility of a future, but *is* a future, guaranteed. 'Hope' is simply what will happen, but is not realized as yet.

<sup>12</sup> While deliverance was a great question in this book, and Paul answers it by saying deliverance is at the coming of the Lord. Endurance is now. The other problem is that men think that deliverance is living. Paul corrects them by saying deliverance is being in the presence of the Lord (4:17, 1:10, 3:13). Earthly life is hardly deliverance in view of the fact that Jesus is not present (bodily) and we must endure without Him (this is the point of the Spirit's accompaniment).

<sup>13</sup> Peace and safety may have implications for peace with others, but appears here to refer to the 'wrath of God'. In other words the people will be affirming that they are *not* under the wrath but are living within God's desires. This is typical of the pagan world. They have no sense that their lives are abominable to God.

- a. The Thessalonians are well aware that the time of judgment will not come based on human observation of the times, for humans under judgment will feel that their relationship with God is good (5:1-3).

1 Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you<sup>14</sup>.<sup>2</sup> For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night.<sup>3</sup> While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like birth pangs upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.

- b. While believers (the receivers of Paul's revelation) do not know the time, they do know that judgment is coming and know to act holy during that time (5:4-11).

- 1) The Thessalonians know the revelation of God through Paul (5:4-7).

4 But you, brethren, are not in darkness<sup>15</sup>, that the day<sup>16</sup> should overtake you like a thief;<sup>5</sup> for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness;<sup>6</sup> so then let us not sleep<sup>17</sup> as others do, but let us be alert and sober.<sup>7</sup> For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night.

- 2) They know how to act holy based on that revelation and that God has promised them that they will escape His judgment<sup>18</sup> (5:8-11).

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<sup>14</sup> Apparently this was a major emphasis of Paul's teaching when he was there since he assumes that they already know it. Since it is revelation they did not get it by observation or some other reasoning process.

<sup>15</sup> Lack of revelation of what is and will be in Christ.

<sup>16</sup> The "day" is where all is revealed. The pagans live in the darkness where they do not know what is real since they cannot see it.

<sup>17</sup> Sleeping here would be acting like one is in darkness (ignorant of truth) while "being alert" means that they know what is going to happen.

<sup>18</sup> This verse is pointing out that their behavior should be holy in light of the fact that they will be delivered by God at His coming and will not be under wrath (wrath here

8 But since we are of *the* day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation.<sup>9</sup> For God has not destined us for wrath<sup>19</sup>, but for obtaining salvation<sup>20</sup> through our Lord Jesus Christ,<sup>10</sup> who died for us, that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him.<sup>11</sup> Therefore encourage one another, and build up one another, just as you also are doing.

2. ***APPLICATION:*** Paul gives specific living instructions in light of the future deliverance (5:12-22).
  - a. Submit to the elders who teach (5:12-13).
  - b. Aid the brothers, and treat all men with patience and goodness (5:14-15).
  - c. In affliction one should rejoice, pray for deliverance, and give thanks for the privilege of suffering for Christ (5:16-18).
  - d. Study the word of God (5:19-21).
    - 1) When the word of God speaks to them about behavior they need to perform it and not reject it ('quench the Spirit')<sup>21</sup> (5:19).
    - 2) They need to give high regard to teachers who work to understand the Scriptures (5:20).

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is the final judgment of God at Christ's coming, i.e., final destruction). The context here is positional wrath.

<sup>19</sup> That this is positional wrath, ultimate wrath, may be seen from the following contrast where he says that we will be together with Him. Our ultimate destiny is to be with Christ, not to be experiencing wrath ultimately separated from Him.

What Paul is saying is a contrast between the believer's truth and what pagans believe. They will end up in wrath, but the theology of a believer keeps him from it.

<sup>20</sup> Should be translated "deliverance" and is indicated for the church age believer at the rapture and forever since he is with Christ.

<sup>21</sup> Here as throughout the New Testament, the function of the Holy Spirit is to reveal Jesus Christ to the believer through the Apostolic writings.



c) They need to examine all things carefully and not fall for false doctrine (5:21).

e. Avoid all things revealed as being against the revelation and practiced by pagans (5:22).

D. Closing remarks and exhortations (5:23-28).

1. ***THEOLOGY:*** Paul exhorts them to holy living so that they might be without guilt (in failing to identify with Jesus Christ in their walk) when Jesus comes to deliver them and to judge the unbelievers (5:23-24).
2. Pray for the apostles as they endure suffering for the gospel (5:25).
3. Express love for the brethren continually with a kiss (5:26).
4. Read the apostolic revelation to all the brethren (5:27).
5. Desire that they enjoy the graciousness of Jesus Christ in imputed righteousness (5:28).