

The First LETTER of PAUL to the THESSALONIANS

LAST GENERATION VERSION

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Chapter 1

Greeting

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

Included among the Elect

2 We are always thanking God concerning you all, making mention of you in our prayers, 3 remembering constantly your work of trust, and the labor of love, and the enduring anticipation² of our Master Jesus Christ before our God and Father, 4 having observed – brothers having been beloved³ – your election⁴ under God, 5 because our Good Message did not materialize in you in word alone, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit, and in great validation.⁵

Following Paul's Role Model

Just as you have observed, [this is] what we became among you, because of you.⁶ 6 And you became imitators of us and of the Master, receiving the message in much

¹ The formal name of Silas

² Paul noted especially their great anticipation for the prophesied return of Jesus Christ. The majority of both Thessalonian letters concerns this topic and related events.

³ In Ephesians 1:6 Paul thanked God that he and his fellow Jews had been included in “the one having been beloved” (singular) τῷ ἡγαπημένῳ, articular perfect passive participle. In that passage, Paul was quoting from Moses’ last words of blessing to Israel (Deut. 32:15 LXX; Deut. 33:3-5, 26-29 LXX), in which he coined this term – the one having been beloved – for Israel (the Hebrew text has “Yeshurun”). It refers to God’s love and election of Israel in delivering them from bondage in Egypt and giving them His Law. (See also: 2 Chron. 20:7 LXX; Isa. 44:2 LXX; Jer. 11:15 LXX). The perfect tense indicates past completed action as opposed to ongoing action. It refers to God’s love for that nation manifest in His election. However, in 1 Thess. 1:4, Paul used the plural form of the same perfect tense participle to modify “brothers,” most of whom were Greek. This subtle expanding of Israel’s title of election from the singular to the plural, using it for these Gentile Christians, was a subtle way of saying that they also are included within the elect nation. See Ephesians 2 for a thorough explanation of this concept.

⁴ God’s “election” is of a single class of people: the sons of God, Abraham’s Seed (Gal. 3:16ff).

⁵ That the Thessalonians were included within the “elect” was evident to Paul because of the spiritual gifts that accompanied their reception of the Good Message.

⁶ Paul apparently had in mind the fact, so eloquently explained in 1 Cor. 9:19-23, that he and his team adopted the customs of the people he sought to evangelize as long as doing so did not violate the teachings of Christ. Thus, being among Greeks, Paul did not feel it necessary to follow the Jewish customs and rituals, since these are not part of the

tribulation⁷ with the joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so also to become role models to all the believing ones in Macedonia and Achaia. 8 For the message of the Master has been echoed from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your trust towards God has come forth, so that we have no need to do any speaking! 9 For they are reporting about us, what kind of inroads we made towards you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the true and living God, 10 and to wait for His Son out of the skies, [the one] whom He awakened from among the dead – Jesus, the one rescuing us from the coming wrath.⁸

Chapter 2

The Behavior of Paul and His Team among Them

1 For you, brothers, have observed our coming to you, that it has not been unfruitful. 2 But also having previously suffered and been abused in Philippi,⁹ according as you have observed, we were bold in our God to proclaim the Good Message of God to you in great conflict.¹⁰ 3 For our plea was not out of deception, nor yet out of impurity, nor in trickery, 4 but according as we have been tested under God to be entrusted the Good Message, in this way we proclaim, not as being pleasing to men, but to God who is testing our hearts. 5 For neither did we at that time become flattering, as you have observed, neither in pretense for greed (God is witness), 6 neither seeking glory from men (not from you or from others), being able to be a burden¹¹ just like the Emissaries of Christ.¹² 7 But we became gentle in your midst, just as a nurse should cherish her own children. 8 Being nurturing of you like this, we were delighted to share with you not only the Good Message of God, but also our own souls, because you have become beloved to us. 9 For you remember, brothers, our toil and labor, working night and day, so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the Good Message of God. 10 You and God are witnesses to how rightly, justly, and blamelessly we became to you – the ones trusting – 11 just as you have observed how we were to each of you, just as a

Good Message to the Gentiles. Paul's practice was to adapt and model good Christian living within the customs of each culture where he ministered.

⁷ Acts 17:5-9

⁸ See: 1 Thess. 5:1-3 & 2 Thess. 1:4-7.

⁹ Acts 16:16-24

¹⁰ See Acts 17:1-9

¹¹ As Paul explained to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 9:1-18), the Apostles and other ministers had a right to expect material support for their work in ministry which was provided for both in the Law of Moses and in what Jesus had commanded His Apostles. Yet, in certain situations, Paul refused to use that right because it might have been perceived as exploiting his hearers for personal gain.

¹² Some translations give the impression that Paul was claiming "Apostleship" for not only himself, but also his two companions, Timothy and Silvanus. However, the Greek word "ὡς" means "just like" or "in the same manner as." It does not mean "being (the Apostles of Christ)." Thus, Paul was not saying that his companions were also Apostles of Christ, but instead was comparing his team's behavior with the practice of the rest of the Apostles of Christ.

father to his own children, consoling and comforting you, 12 and charging [you] to walk worthy of God, the one inviting you into His own Kingdom and glory.¹³

The Resulting Behavior of the Thessalonian Believers

13 Because of this we thank God constantly that in receiving the message you heard from us, you received [it] from God, not the message of man, but what it truly is – the message of God – which also is acting among you, the trusting ones. 14 For you became imitators, brothers, of the congregations of God in Christ Jesus which are in Judea because you suffered the same things from your own countrymen¹⁴ just as also they did under the Judeans, 15 who killed the Master Jesus and their own prophets and banished us, being displeasing to God and against all men, 16 forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles so that they might be saved to completely fill up their sins always. Yet the wrath upon them was anticipated¹⁵ unto the consummation.¹⁶

Paul's Desire to Visit Them Again

17 Yet we, brothers, having been separated from you for the season of an hour (by face, not by heart), endeavor greatly to see your face with great yearning 18 since we determined to come to you (indeed I, Paul, once and twice), but the Adversary detained us. 19 For what is our hope or joy or wreath¹⁷ of boasting? Is it not you before our Master Jesus Christ in His arrival?¹⁸ 20 For you are our glory and joy.

Chapter 3

Timothy's Good Report

1 Consequently, when we could no longer refrain it seemed appropriate [for me] to be left in Athens alone, 2 and we sent Timothy our brother, God's servant and our fellow-worker in the Good Message of Christ, to establish and comfort you concerning your trust. 3 No one is to be swayed by these troubles, for you have seen that we lay ourselves outstretched¹⁹ for this. 4 For even when we were with you, we predicted to you that "we are about to be harassed," just as it happened and you have seen. 5 Therefore, also no longer refraining, I sent to inquire of your trust, lest the Tempter had been tempting you and our toil may come to nothing. 6 However, just now the arrival

¹³ This is the ultimate goal of the arrival of Christ: to bring the faithful into His coming Kingdom (See: Dan. 7:13,26-27; 2 Thess. 1:5; 2 Pet. 1:11).

¹⁴ Acts 17:5-9

¹⁵ This is a reference to Jesus' prediction about the impending destruction of Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-44; Luke 21:20-24).

¹⁶ Paul apparently viewed the destruction of Jerusalem as God's way of canceling the Jewish persecution of the Christian missionaries, so that the Gospel could go out unhindered throughout the empire.

¹⁷ Phil. 4:1

¹⁸ See note on 1 Thess. 3:13

¹⁹ See Phil. 1:17

of Timothy to us from you and the good report, your trust and love, and because you always have a good remembrance of us, longing to see us just as we [long to see] you, 7 through this we were consoled, brothers, over you above all of our trouble and distress, by your trust 8 because now we live, if you should be standing firm in the Master. 9 For what thanks are we able to repay to God for you for all the joy in which we rejoice because of you before our God, 10 night and day, exceedingly requesting to see your face and to strengthen what is lacking in your trust? 11 Yet may our God and Father, and our Master Jesus Christ, straighten our road toward you. 12 And may the Master make you increase and super-abound in love to one another and to all (even as we also to you), 13 to establish your hearts flawless in holiness before our God and Father at the arrival²⁰ of our Master Jesus Christ with all His holy ones.²¹

Chapter 4

Warnings about Fornication

1 Furthermore, brothers, we ask you and we entreat in the Master Jesus. Exactly as you received [from] beside us, this is how you are required to walk and to be pleasing to God so that you may excel all the more. 2 For you have seen what commands we gave to you through the Master Jesus. 3 For this is the will of God: your holiness, for you to restrain yourselves from fornication, 4 for each of you to have perceived the self-instrument,²² to hold it in holiness and value, 5 not in lustful passion, like the gentiles who have not perceived God.²³ 6 No one is to overstep, overreaching his brother²⁴ in this matter, because the Master is the Avenger concerning all of these, just as we said before to you and witnessed. 7 For God did not call [you] in impurity, but in holiness. 8

²⁰ The Greek word “παρουσία” has no precedent in the Greek Old Testament (LXX), but was a term borrowed from its official use in the Roman Empire. It referred to the personal arrival of an emperor, governor, or dignitary who was usually received with a welcoming party and great celebration. It was first used in the Olivet Discourse in reference to Christ’s second coming in power and glory (Matt. 24:3,27,37,39) which was to be “*immediately after the tribulation,*” at which time Jesus would sound the trumpet and dispatch his celestial messengers to collect all His elect ones (Matt. 24:29-31). With this precedent, “παρουσία” became a New Testament technical term for Christ’s second coming in power and glory. In the Thessalonian letters, it is used in 1 Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:1,8,9, which explain the details of Christ’s second coming.

²¹ The “holy ones” that attend the arrival of Christ are not “saints,” but the holy messengers. “... [R]est along with us at the revealing of the Master Jesus from the sky with His mighty messengers...” (2 Thess. 1:7); “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy messengers with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory” (Matt 25:31-32). “For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy messengers” (Mark 8:38). It is the celestial messengers who are the “armies” in the sky who attend Jesus’ second coming. “And the armies in the sky, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses.” (Rev 19:14-15). “And the LORD my God shall come, and all the holy ones with Him” (Zech. 14:5).

²² The self as an instrument of God to use for His purposes on earth

²³ Romans 1:18-32

²⁴ Committing adultery was considered a serious crime against the husband of the woman with whom someone committed adultery. That is, more than merely defiling the woman, the greater crime was in the injury to the husband whose wife was defiled.

Consequently, the defiant one is not defying man, but God, the one also having given His Holy Spirit to us.

Living Honorably Before the World

9 Yet concerning brotherly love, you have no need [for me] to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another. 10 For you are doing this also to all the brothers, those in the whole of Macedonia. Yet, we urge you, brothers, to excel more, 11 and to be eager to be quiet, and to take care of your own affairs, and to work with your own hands (just as we charged you), 12 so that you should walk honorably towards those outside, and none of you should be in need.²⁵

The Hope of the Resurrection at the Arrival of the Master

13 Now I do not want you to be ignorant,²⁶ brothers, concerning those who have fallen asleep,²⁷ so that you may not grieve just like the rest – those having no hope. 14 For since we trust that Jesus died and arose, in the same manner God, through Jesus,²⁸ shall also with Him together lead forth those who have fallen asleep.²⁹ 15 For we say this by the word of the Master that we, the living (the ones surviving³⁰ unto the arrival of the Master), shall not precede those who have fallen asleep 16 because the Master Himself will descend from the sky with the command-shout,³¹ with the voice of the arch-

²⁵ See: 2 Thess. 3:6-15

²⁶ Many elements of Paul's discussion of Jesus' second coming in chapters 4 & 5 come directly out of Jesus' Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24) and Temple Discourse (Luke 21), which concerned the signs for which the living believers should watch. However, Jesus never mentioned the resurrection of the dead in either discourse, leaving the Thessalonians unsure about when the dead would join the living in Christ's Kingdom, and whether or not they would take part in the grand welcoming party implied in the term "παρουσια."

²⁷ Here Paul used "sleep" as the metaphor for death just as Jesus frequently did (Matt. 9:24; John 11:11,14). Jesus borrowed this metaphor from its Old Testament usage (cf. Dan. 12:1-2). The intent of the metaphor is to indicate an unconscious state with the hope of recovering (awakening) again to a conscious state in the resurrection. It is not merely a reference to the body, but to the whole person without consciousness (Job 3:11-13; Job 14:10-15; Psalm 6:5 & 13:3; Eccl. 9:5).

²⁸ Many translations incorrectly translate "in Jesus" and attach this prepositional phrase to "sleep." However, the preposition is "δια," (not "εν"), which indicates the means or instrument through which something is accomplished.

²⁹ In exactly the same way that God raised Jesus from the dead, He will also raise the sleeping ones. This will be accomplished by Jesus "leading forth" this multitude out of their graves. Thus, the resurrection of Jesus is set forth as the prototype of the resurrection of believers at Christ's arrival. Jesus Christ, the resurrected One, is the instrument through which God will raise believers by His sounding the trumpet and calling them forth, just as He did with Lazarus, the prototype (see: John 11:1-44).

³⁰ The Greek word used here is not the normal word for "remain." It appears only here (in verses 15 & 17). It implies surviving some catastrophe alive, in this case the "great tribulation" which Jesus said would immediately precede His arrival and the gathering together of His elect (Matt. 24:15-31). Jesus gave special survival instructions in Matt. 24:15-28; Luke 17:20-37; Luke 21:36. Revelation 12 also describes the remnant of survivors who have been found worthy to escape, who have been protected and fed by God in the wilderness.

³¹ See: John 11:43.

messenger, and with the trumpet of God,³² and the dead in Christ shall rise first. 17 Afterward, we the living, the ones surviving, will simultaneously together with them be seized away in the clouds to meet³³ the Master in the air. And we shall always be together like this with the Master. 18 So also, console one another with these words.³⁴

Chapter 5

Preparation for Enduring until His Arrival

1 Yet concerning the times and appointments, brothers, you have no need for me to write to you. 2 For you yourselves have observed that the Day of the Master is coming like a thief in the night.³⁵ 3 For whenever they may say “peace and security,”³⁶ at that time utter destruction stands beside them unseen, just like the labor [pains] of those having contractions,³⁷ and they shall not escape.³⁸ 4 But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that the Day may overtake you as a thief. 5 You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night, nor of the darkness. 6 Consequently then, we should not go to sleep like the rest, but we should watch and be sober.³⁹ 7 For those who are sleeping sleep at night and those becoming drunk are getting drunk at night. 8 Yet we, being of the day, should be sober, putting on the breastplate of trust and love, and

³² See: Zech. 9:14; Matt. 24:31; 1 Cor. 15:52

³³ The Greek word “*απαντησις*” is only used in reference to a greeting party going out to meet an arriving dignitary and accompany him back to where they were waiting. It is used in Matt. 25:1,6 of the virgins who went out to meet the arriving bridegroom when the “shout” was given. It was used in Acts 28:15 of the Roman Christians’ greeting party, going out to meet Paul at the Appii Forum, and escort him to his destination in Rome. During the “*παρουσια*” of Christ, both the resurrected believers, who have just come forth from their graves, and the living believers will be seized away together to become this greeting party for the returning King, and thus accompany Him back to earth.

³⁴ The only comfort provided by Paul to the bereaved, and the only comfort that he commanded the Thessalonians to provide each other, was the hope of resurrection – the calling forth out of their graves those who are asleep when Christ returns. There is no suggestion of the dead being conscious in a happy place during an intermediate state, something that Paul would certainly not have omitted if it were true since it would be of much more immediate comfort than the coming of Christ which was being delayed for some time (see: 2 Thess. 2:1-3). He elsewhere indicated that without the hope of resurrection, “*then those who have fallen asleep have [already] perished*” (1 Cor. 15:18). Thus, resurrection was the only hope for any kind of an afterlife according to Paul, and it was through the resurrection that man will finally have victory over his enemy, death (1 Cor. 15:54-56).

³⁵ They had observed this from Jesus’ parable of the “*thief in the night*” in Matthew 24:43-44. His command to the disciples was to “*become ready*” so that they would not be surprised by His coming “*immediately after the tribulation of those days*” (Matt. 24:29). Peter also alluded to the coming of the “*Day of the Master*” as a “*thief in the night*,” also borrowing from Jesus’ discourse (2 Pet. 3:10).

³⁶ The wicked saying “*peace and security*” seems to coincide with the killing of the two prophets in Revelation 11, immediately after which they rejoice and send gifts to one another. Yet, their utter destruction becomes imminent.

³⁷ Lit. “*the pain, having in the belly*”

³⁸ The sense is not that they are destroyed instantly, as some translations seem to imply, but that the beginning of their destruction overtakes them unexpectedly. The analogy to a woman’s initial labor pains is fitting, since labor may take a considerable time once the pains begin. Jesus also used the same analogy for the “*great tribulation*” in Matt. 24:8 (beginning of birth pains) and the “*great travail*” after the “*abomination of desolation*” (vs. 21).

³⁹ Remaining awake to “*watch*” and remaining “*sober*” come from Jesus’ warnings about His coming “*immediately after the tribulation.*” (cf. Mark 13:32-36; Luke 21:34).

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the helmet⁴⁰ – the hope of deliverance, 9 because God has not appointed us to wrath, but to procuring deliverance⁴¹ through our Master Jesus Christ, 10 the one who died for us, so that whether we may be watching or may be sleeping, simultaneously we should become alive together with Him. 11 Through this console one another and build up one another, just as you are also doing.

General Exhortations

12 Now we ask you, brothers, to observe those working among you, presiding over you in the Master and cautioning you, 13 to consider them greatly distinguished in love through their work. Be at peace among yourselves. 14 Yet we are pleading with you, brothers: warn the disorderly, comfort the faint-hearted, uphold the weak, be patient towards all. 15 Be sure that no one returns evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good. 16 Rejoice always. 17 Pray continuously. 18 Give thanks in everything, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 19 Do not extinguish the Spirit. 20 Do not scorn prophecies. 21 Test everything; retain what is good.⁴² 22 Refrain from every perception of wickedness. 23 And may the God of peace Himself purify you to completion.⁴³ And may your entire being⁴⁴ – the breath, and the soul, and the body⁴⁵ – be perfectly guarded in⁴⁶ the arrival of our Master Jesus Christ. 24 The one calling you is faithful, who will also do it.

⁴⁰ Putting on armor in anticipation of the things Jesus said would immediately precede His arrival is precisely what Paul instructed in Ephesians 6:11ff. "... Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand." The "evil day" is the great tribulation.

⁴¹ Notice that the "deliverance" must be procured and is not automatic. It is conditioned upon putting on the armor of God. Jesus also conditioned this "deliverance" upon enduring to the end; that is, not being deceived by false prophets, not succumbing to sin, and not allowing one's love to grow cold (Matt. 24:10-13).

⁴² 2 Tim. 4:1-4

⁴³ That is, complete the job of their perfection in the resurrection, as is evident from the words, "*in the arrival of our Master Jesus Christ.*"

⁴⁴ The entirety of one's person, what a man consists of, is first described in the creation account. "*And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul*" (Gen. 2:7). Thus, the body made of dust became a "living soul" when infused with the breath of God, the same three components mentioned by Paul. These three components are not mutually exclusive as many infer, but are those mentioned by Moses in his description of the creation of man. The same process described in Genesis 2:7 will be repeated for each one in the resurrection.

⁴⁵ Paul was alluding to the most vivid description of the resurrection in the Bible – Ezekiel 37:1-14 – where God promised to reassemble the bones of His people, reconstruct the muscle and flesh on the skeleton, and then breathe the breath of life back into them, then give them the permanent Land inheritance.

⁴⁶ Many read "until" into this statement, as though Paul's prayer was that they be preserved in the interim before the arrival of Jesus Christ. Yet, Paul's use of the preposition "εν" (in) along with the "παρουσια" (arrival) proves that he did not have a continuous preservation in mind, but rather an instantaneous perfecting of the whole person at Christ's coming.

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Closing Salutation

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

The first letter to the Thessalonians was written from Athens.