



# SECOND THESSALONIANS

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#### INTRODUCTION

The second letter to this congregation comes within one to two years after the first one while Paul is ministering in Corinth on the second missionary journey. The same level of admiration and devotion to the church as typified the first letter holds true for this second letter. Shorter in length, the letter essentially addresses the ongoing difficulties of the congregation to understand the idea of the second coming of Jesus.

#### 9.3 Second Thessalonians

The time between the writing of First and Second Thessalonians was not a long period. The most likely scenario is as follows.

Once Paul arrived in Athens (Acts 17:14-16), he was waiting for Timothy and Silas to join him there after they had remained behind in Berea to do follow up work with the newly established Christian community. The distressing level of idolatry in Athens motivated him to promote the Gospel both in the Jewish synagogue and in the market place in the city.



At some point during this stay in Athens both Timothy and Silas joined him with news from not just Berea but also from Thessalonica (1 Thess. 3:1-6).<sup>1</sup> The heart of their report was the continuing opposition being faced by the believers in Thessalonica, which concerned Paul. Consequently, First Thessalonians is composed in Athens with the help of Timothy and Silas, who are then dispatched back to Macedonia with this letter.

After delivery of the letter to the believers in Thessalonica and the spending of some time helping the believers both in the city and also in Philippi and Berea, these two missionary assistants head back south to Achaia to catch up with Paul who by this time is into his lengthy 18 month ministry (v. 11) in Corinth (Acts 18:1-17). Timothy and Silas rejoin Paul there (v. 5) and bring him news regarding the advancement of the Gospel in Macedonia. The persecution against believers continues in Thessalonica (2 Thess. 1:3-12). Additionally, unresolved questions about the second coming of Christ were brought from the church to Paul by Timothy and Silas. These two central concerns will prompt the composition of this second letter to Thessalonica, which Silas and Timothy will deliver. After spending time in Macedonia delivering the second letter, they again rejoin Paul in Corinth sometime shortly before his depar-

<sup>1</sup>Phil. 4:15-16 carries possible implications of a ministry of Timothy and Silas at Philippi as well. Clearly it refers to the financial help given by the Phillipians as early as when Paul was in Thessalonica. And this ministry continued on while Paul was in Achaia. Luke references this in Acts 18:5 with the arrival of Silas and Timothy from Macedonia.

ture from the city on his way to Antioch (Acts 18:18).<sup>2</sup>

### 9.3.1 Praescriptio

1.1 Παῦλος καὶ Σιλουανὸς καὶ Τιμόθεος τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ Θεσσαλονικέων ἐν θεῷ πατρὶ ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ, 2 χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς [ἡμῶν] καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

1.1 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The apostle follows the standard threefold structure of the [Praescriptio](#):

**9.3.1.1 Superscriptio:** Παῦλος καὶ Σιλουανὸς καὶ Τιμόθεος, [Paul and Silvanus and Timothy](#).

This matches exactly the [Superscriptio](#) in First Thessalonians: Παῦλος καὶ Σιλουανὸς καὶ Τιμόθεος (1:1). Thus the senders of letter are the same as with the first letter. The only difference is the circumstance for the sending of the letter. Now these three missionaries are in Corinth and the letter is a response to the report brought back by Timothy and Silas from their delivery of the first letter sent to the church from Athens about a year or so earlier.

**9.3.1.2 Adscriptio:** τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ Θεσσαλονικέων ἐν θεῷ πατρὶ ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ, [To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ](#).

Again the Adscriptio is almost an exact copy of the one in the first letter: τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ Θεσσαλονικέων ἐν θεῷ πατρὶ καὶ κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ, [to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ](#). The only difference is the insertion of ἡμῶν, *our*, in modification of θεῷ πατρὶ. The use of ἡμῶν brings this Adscriptio into conformity with the dominant pattern in the [Pauline letters](#).

By this point the church had been in existence for

<sup>2</sup>More information about Timothy surfaces inside the NT than does about Silas. But after Timothy joined Paul and Silas on the second missionary journey (Acts 16), it wasn't long until he was often being dispatched by Paul especially to Macedonia. On the second missionary journey this happened from Achaia twice. On the third missionary journey, it happened from Asia (Acts 19:22). Also from Ephesus he was sent to Corinth (1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10). After Paul's arrest in Jerusalem at the end of the third missionary journey and until the end of Paul's earthly life, Timothy divided time between being with Paul where ever he was and being on assignment to some other place, as the Prison Letters and the Pastoral Letters abundantly testify to.

Silas -- called by Paul and Peter Σιλουανός, his Latin name, and either Σιλᾶς or Σίλας, Silas, by Luke -- disappears from from the biblical narrative in Acts after the second missionary journey, and the last Pauline reference is in 2 Cor. 1:9 on the third missionary journey. Whether Silas continued to serve with Paul after the mid 50s or not is not known. It could well be that he opted to continue ministry in and around Antioch which was home for him as Acts 15 signals. .

well over a year and perhaps longer. Thus time had passed so that issues and concerns within the cluster of house church groups in the city could develop. As will be indicated in the letter Proem (see below), the church continued to mature in its spiritual commitment. But questions related to the second coming of Christ remained unanswered in the thinking of many of those in the church. Thus, this short letter will give major attention to the issues currently being discussed among the members at Thessalonica.

**9.3.1.3 Salutatio:** χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς [ἡμῶν]<sup>3</sup> καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. [Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ](#).

Interestingly the Salutatio here is longer than the one in First Thessalonians, just χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη. In this second letter the source of divine blessing is stated explicitly as ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς [ἡμῶν] καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, [from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ](#). Although implied in the first letter, here it is stated directly. Additionally, the phrase is almost exactly the same as is found in the Adscriptio: ἐν θεῷ πατρὶ ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ. Although no direct reason is given for repeating this phrase so close to the first instance, the effect is heightened emphasis upon God and Christ as the ultimate sources of divine blessing upon the Thessalonians. This signals an emphasis that we as readers would expect to see expanded in some manner in the letter body. The use of this specification of divine source of blessing in the Salutatio of Paul's letters is quite common.<sup>4</sup>

The combined reference to God and Christ on equal terms stresses the distinctly Christian perspective of Paul. Perhaps the emphasis here is connected to the reference to continued persecution of the believers in the city (cf. 1:5-10). At the heart of the Jewish synagogue opposition to the Christian community would have been both a denial of the divinity of Christ and an exclusive claim to possession of God as Father only by those in the synagogue.

<sup>3</sup>Some copyists omit ἡμῶν in order to make it conform exactly to its parallel in First Thessalonians: B D P 0111<sup>vid</sup>. 33. 1739. 1881 m bo<sup>pl</sup>. But the weight of manuscript evidence favors its inclusion: ⱼ A F G I K L 0278. 81. 104. 365. 630. 1175. 1241. 1505. 2464 M lat sy sa bo<sup>pl</sup> [Eberhard Nestle and Erwin Nestle, *Nestle-Aland: NTG Apparatus Criticus*, ed. Barbara Aland et al., 28. revidierte Auflage. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012), 630.

<sup>4</sup>“ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς [ἡμῶν] καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ‘from God [our] Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.’ These words, habitually appended to χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη in the Pauline letters (cf. Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; Phil 1:2; Col 1:2, with the omission of καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ; Phlm 3; also, with minor variations, 1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; Tit 1:4), are missing from 1 Thess 1:1 (for a possible stylistic reason see comment ad loc.)” [F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 142.]

### 9.3.2 Proem

3 Εὐχαριστεῖν ὀφείλομεν τῷ θεῷ πάντοτε περὶ ὑμῶν, ἀδελφοί, καθὼς ἄξιόν ἐστιν, ὅτι ὑπεραυξάνει ἡ πίστις ὑμῶν καὶ πλεονάζει ἡ ἀγάπη ἐνὸς ἐκάστου πάντων ὑμῶν εἰς ἀλλήλους, 4 ὥστε αὐτοὺς ἡμᾶς ἐν ὑμῖν ἐγκουχᾶσθαι ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τοῦ θεοῦ ὑπὲρ τῆς ὑπομονῆς ὑμῶν καὶ πίστεως ἐν πᾶσιν τοῖς διωγμοῖς ὑμῶν καὶ ταῖς θλίψεσιν αἷς ἀνέχεσθε, 5 ἔνδειγμα τῆς δικαίας κρίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ εἰς τὸ καταξιοθῆναι ὑμᾶς τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ, ὑπὲρ ἧς καὶ πάσχετε, 6 εἵπερ δίκαιον παρὰ θεῷ ἀνταποδοῦναι τοῖς θλίβουσιν ὑμᾶς θλίψιν 7 καὶ ὑμῖν τοῖς θλιβομένοις ἄνεσιν μεθ' ἡμῶν, ἐν τῇ ἀποκαλύψει τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ μετ' ἀγγέλων δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ 8 ἐν πυρὶ φλογός, διδόντος ἐκδίκησιν τοῖς μὴ εἰδόσιν θεὸν καὶ τοῖς μὴ ὑπακούουσιν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ, 9 οἵτινες δίκην τίσουσιν ὅλεθρον αἰώνιον ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ κυρίου καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς δόξης τῆς ἰσχύος αὐτοῦ, 10 ὅταν ἔλθῃ ἐνδοξασθῆναι ἐν τοῖς ἀγίοις αὐτοῦ καὶ θαυμασθῆναι ἐν πᾶσιν τοῖς πιστεύσασιν, ὅτι ἐπιστεύθη τὸ μαρτύριον ἡμῶν ἐφ' ὑμᾶς, ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ.

11 Εἰς ὃ καὶ προσευχόμεθα πάντοτε περὶ ὑμῶν, ἵνα ὑμᾶς ἀξιῶσῃ τῆς κλήσεως ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν καὶ πληρώσῃ πᾶσαν εὐδοκίαν ἀγαθωσύνης καὶ ἔργον πίστεως ἐν δυνάμει, 12 ὅπως ἐνδοξασθῇ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ ἐν ὑμῖν, καὶ ὑμεῖς ἐν αὐτῷ, κατὰ τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

3 We must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of everyone of you for one another is increasing. 4 Therefore we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith during all your persecutions and the afflictions that you are enduring. 5 This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, and is intended to make you worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering. 6 For it is indeed just of God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, 7 and to give relief to the afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels 8 in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 These will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, separated from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, 10 when he comes to be glorified by his saints and to be marveled at on that day among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.

11 To this end we always pray for you, asking that our God will make you worthy of his call and will fulfill by his power every good resolve and work of faith, 12 so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and

the Lord Jesus Christ.

**9.3.2.1 Prayer of Thanksgiving (vv. 3-10)**, Paul phrases the core expression in terms of compulsion with Εὐχαριστεῖν ὀφείλομεν τῷ θεῷ, *we are compelled to give thanks to God*. This is a slight modification<sup>5</sup> of the dominating pattern expressed either in the singular or plural form of the verb: Εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ / Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ. The meaning among all three forms is essentially the same: the apostle expressed prayerful thanksgiving to God for his targeted readers.

What distinguishes each of these core expressions in Paul's letters is the expansion elements attached to either the verb or the direct object, τῷ θεῷ, *to God*.<sup>6</sup> Here a long string of modifying expansions are attached, mostly to the verb expression Εὐχαριστεῖν ὀφείλομεν:

a) πάντοτε, *always* (v. 3b).

This temporal adverb underscores the ongoing sense of obligation that Paul felt for giving thanks to God for the Thessalonians.<sup>7</sup> They were consistent in obeying Christ and this generated an ongoing sense of thankfulness from Paul.

b) περὶ ὑμῶν, ἀδελφοί, *for you, brothers* (v. 3c).

The prepositional phrase περὶ ὑμῶν defines the

<sup>5</sup>“A certain formality has been detected in this language, by contrast with the warmth of 1 Thess 1:2 (εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ πάντοτε περὶ πάντων ὑμῶν, ‘we give thanks to God always for all of you’), and used as an argument against the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians. But if the Thessalonian Christians had protested against what they regarded as the excessive commendation expressed in the earlier letter, the writers might well have replied, ‘It is only fitting that we should thank God for you; it is indeed our bounden duty’—and that is the force of the present wording (much of which is repeated in 2:13). The Thessalonians deserve all the thanksgiving with which the writers’ hearts are filled on their account, because of the encouragement brought by the news of their ever-increasing faith and love.” [F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 144.]

<sup>6</sup>The Greek dative case is required here, rather than the accusative case, because of the personal object τῷ θεῷ.

<sup>7</sup>**πάντοτε** adv. (on the formation Schwyzer I 629) of time (Hellenist. and Mod. Gk.; Dionys. Hal.+; Peripl. Eryth. 29; Epict., Ench. 14, 1; Dio Chrys. 15 [32], 37; Herodian 3, 9, 8; Artem. 4, 20; Plut.; Athen.; Diog. L.; OGI 458, 76 [I B.C.], SIG 814, 37 [67 A.D.]; BGU 1123, 8 [I B.C.]; PGiss 17, 4; 72, 11 [II A.D.]; Wsd 11:21; 19:18; TestSol, Test12Patr; JosAs 7:6; SyrBar 12:2; Jos., Bell. 3, 42; Just., D. 49, 7; 93, 4; Ath., R. 1 p. 49, 1 al.—The Atticists preferred ἐκάστοτε, διαπαντός, or ἀεὶ [Phryn. 103 Lob.]) **always, at all times Mt 26:11ab; Mk 14:7ab; Lk 15:31; 18:1; J 6:34; 7:6** (seven times in J); **Ro 1:10; 1 Cor 1:4; 15:58; 2 Cor 2:14** (27 times in Paul); **Hb 7:25** (not found in Ac and Cath. Epistles; B-D-F §105; cp. Rob. 300); Dg 11:4; IEph 4:2; Hv 1, 1, 7 (24 times in Hermas).—B. 984. DELG s.v. *πάς*. 35–41. M-M.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 755.]

reference point of his thanksgiving, the Thessalonians whom Paul calls ἀδελφοί. The generic use of the masculine gender here justifies the NRSV rendering of this as **brothers and sisters**. Contextually it is obvious that all of those in the house churches are included in this designation, and not just the men, nor just the leaders.

c) καθὼς ἄξιόν ἐστιν, **just as it is proper** (v. 3d).

This adverbial comparative clause compares this expression of thanksgiving to a standard Paul considered to be ἄξιόν. The sense of the adjective ἄξιος, -ία, -ον<sup>8</sup> of **value or worth**, here moves in the direction of Paul's thanksgiving measuring up to a standard of propriety or correctness due to the circumstance of that thanksgiving. That is, the Thessalonians fully deserved such thanksgiving to God because of their track record of faithfulness to Him. He was then determine to express thanksgiving worthy of such commitment. This group of Christians was one of the few congregations that Paul could make such a claim about because of its shining record of faithful service.

d) ὅτι ὑπεραυξάνει ἡ πίστις ὑμῶν καὶ πλεονάζει ἡ ἀγάπη ἐνὸς ἐκάστου πάντων ὑμῶν εἰς ἀλλήλους, **because your faith is flourishing and your love abounds each one of all of you for one another** (v. 3e).

This causal dependent clause provides the basis for Paul's thanksgiving. Both their faith commitment to Christ and their love for one another were developing into mature expressions consistently in the life of the group. Two of the three traits mentioned in 1 Thess. 1:3 -- faith, love, hope -- find renewed expression here. This pair of faith / love stresses the foundational vertical / horizontal nature of the Christian religion which was inherited from Judaism. Both of these qualities are moving forward in a spiritually healthy fashion among the Thessalonians. The two verbs underscore this in terms of the unusually abundant growth of a plant, ὑπεραυξάνω, and the abundant accumulation of items of great value, πλεονάζω. The use of the present tense for both verbs stresses ongoing action rather than spasmodic or infrequent occurrence.

e) ὥστε αὐτοὺς ἡμᾶς ἐν ὑμῖν ἐγκαυχᾶσθαι ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τοῦ θεοῦ ὑπὲρ τῆς ὑπομονῆς ὑμῶν καὶ πίστεως ἐν πᾶσιν τοῖς διωγμοῖς ὑμῶν καὶ ταῖς θλίψεσιν αἷς ἀνέχεσθε, **so that we ourselves are able to boast about you among the churches of God in regard to your steadfastness and faithfulness in all your persecutions and afflictions which you are enduring** (v. 4).

This adverbial result infinitive phrase underscores the impact for Paul of the thanksgiving he has 'fleshed' out in the preceding expansions. The core infinitive ἐγκαυχᾶσθαι from ἐγκαυχάομαι is a part of a word group -- **καυχάομαι, καύχημα, καύχησις, ἐγκαυχάομαι,**

<sup>8</sup>The use of the neuter gender singular form of the adjective refers back to the preceding phrase, describing Paul's thanksgiving to God. .

κατακαυχάομαι<sup>9</sup> -- that connotes the idea of deep personal satisfaction and fulfillment that can be, and often is, expressed to others. The compound form ἐγκαυχάομαι is only used here in the entire NT, which is in line with sparse usage in ancient Greek generally. Its meaning is virtually identical to the much more common καυχάομαι. Their faith is deeply satisfying to him.

Paul indicates his mentioning of the Thessalonians ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τοῦ θεοῦ, **among the churches of God**. Does this imply the passing of a lot of time between the founding of the church and the writing of this second letter? From the time of the establishment of the Christian community in Thessalonica to the writing of this letter was a period of no more than two or so years, and Paul's movements were confined to the provinces of Macedonia and Achaia. Thus the intended reference here is confined to this geographical region and the number of Christian communities established in the core cities of Berea, Athens, and Corinth.<sup>10</sup> Although not emphasized in Luke's narrative in Acts, numerous references on the third missionary journey suggest strongly that these core cities began reaching out immediately to towns and villages surrounding them with new Christian communities being rapidly established. Thus within a two year span following this pattern quite a large number of Christian communities would have come into existence in these two provinces. Probably Paul visited at least some of them, given the **numerous activities and movements** by him that are not covered

<sup>9</sup>Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964--), 3:645.

<sup>10</sup>Reference has been made already to 'the churches of God' (1 Thess 2:14), but those were the Judean churches, comprising the mother church of Jerusalem and her daughter churches, formed either by evangelization or by dispersion. It is primarily the Jerusalem church that is meant by 'the church of God' which Paul in his earlier days persecuted (Gal 1:13; 1 Cor 15:9; cf. Phil 3:6). But now, with the advance of the gospel, other 'churches of God' have come into being — specially, from Paul's point of view, what he calls 'the churches of the Gentiles' (Rom 16:4). The believers in Corinth, for example, constitute 'the church of God which is at Corinth' (1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1; cf. 1 Cor 10:32; 11:22). The sum total of such local churches makes up 'the churches of God' in the sense intended here (cf. 1 Cor 11:16); they are also called 'the churches of Christ' (Rom 16:16) or 'the churches of the saints' (1 Cor 14:33). Mention is made of the church (singular) of a specified city (like Thessalonica) or the churches (plural) of a specified province (like Macedonia, 2 Cor 8:1). While the Christian use of ἐκκλησία was taken over from its LXX application to the religious community of Israel (see comment on 1 Thess 1:1), and was first current among the Jewish disciples in Jerusalem, it quickly became naturalized in the Gentile mission field, like most of the designations given to the OT people of God (see comment on v 10 below, ἐν τοῖς ἁγίοις αὐτοῦ).” [F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 145–146.]

by Luke in the Acts narrative.

The labeling of these Christian communities as ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τοῦ θεοῦ is particularly pointed to the mixture of Jewish and non-Jewish believers who were being opposed by the synagogues which themselves would have claimed this label as the 'gathering of God's people' as the label itself essentially means. It is a favorite label for Paul with 62 uses of ἐκκλησία in his letters.<sup>11</sup> The expanded label ἐκκλησία / ἐκκλησίαι τοῦ θεοῦ shows up some 8 times in 1 Cor. 1:2; 10:32; 11:16, 22; 15:9; 2 Cor. 1:1; 1 Thess. 2:14; 2 Thess. 1:4; 1 Tim. 3:15.

What the apostle takes great pride in regarding the Thessalonians is specified by the prepositional phrase ὑπὲρ τῆς ὑπομονῆς ὑμῶν καὶ πίστεως ἐν πᾶσιν τοῖς διωγμοῖς ὑμῶν καὶ ταῖς θλίψεσιν αἷς ἀνέχεσθε, *in regard to your endurance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and the afflictions which you endure*. The article noun + noun pattern of τῆς ὑπομονῆς καὶ πίστεως links the two traits as 'flip sides of the same coin.' Out of their faith commitment comes a steadfastness to Christ even in the midst of intense hostility. The use of ὑπομονῆς here picks up the third quality mentioned in 1 Thess. 1:3, τῆς ὑπομονῆς τῆς ἐλπίδος, *endurance from hope*.

The atmosphere of continuing hostility to the Christian community is underscored here with ἐν πᾶσιν τοῖς διωγμοῖς ὑμῶν καὶ ταῖς θλίψεσιν αἷς ἀνέχεσθε, *among all your persecutions and afflictions which you are enduring*. In his first letter, Paul alluded to it several times: 1:6 (ἐν θλίψει πολλῇ, *in much affliction*); 2:14 (τὰ αὐτὰ ἐπάθετε, *the same things you are suffering*); 3:3-5, 7. All of this began with the founding of the church as Luke describes in [Acts 17:1-9](#). The source of the opposition was the Jewish synagogue. But they manipulated the city officials against the Christians so that the government leaders also opposed the believers but not to the same level as did the Jewish leaders. Unlike in other places where over time the opposition lessened, here in Thessalonica it remained intense. One would presume this came from the synagogue, since the government authorities were not so involved. Although Paul mentions this here, he does not bring it back up in the letter body of Second Thessalonians, as he did in the first letter. Their being persecuted had not posed any problem in their spiritual life after having lived in it for this longer period of time.

f) ἔνδειγμα τῆς δικαίας κρίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ εἰς τὸ καταξιοθῆναι ὑμᾶς τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ, ὑπὲρ ἧς καὶ πάσχετε, *evidence of the righteous judgment of God in or-*

*der to make you worthy of the kingdom of God in which behalf you are suffering (v. 5).*

Grammar wise Paul does something here not possible to do in English grammar with proper style. The noun ἔνδειγμα, *evidence*, stands in apposition to the entire result infinitive phrase in v. 4. The experiencing of continued persecution by the Thessalonians becomes evidence for the righteous judgment of God. When viewed from the spiritual level, and not just the human level, their persecution is clear indication that God is using it for something far more significant than might otherwise be understood.

That is, God has correctly decided (τῆς δικαίας κρίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ) to use their persecution as preparation for heaven. It would be wrong to read Paul as asserting that God caused their persecution from his words. He is not claiming that at all! Rather in the framework of Rom. 8:28, God sought to use this human induced suffering for something good, rather than letting it go to waste. The target in view here is the day of judgment (vv. 6-10; remember that we are still working on the single sentence in Greek of vv. 3-10).

The immediate objective for God's working through their persecution is εἰς τὸ καταξιοθῆναι ὑμᾶς τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ, ὑπὲρ ἧς καὶ πάσχετε, *in order that you may be made worthy of the Kingdom of God in whose behalf you also are suffering*. The heart of this is the purpose infinitive εἰς τὸ καταξιοθῆναι, *in order to be made worthy*. The verb καταξιώ used here in the aorist passive infinitive is part of a group of words dealing with actions to qualify someone for something: ἄξιος, ἀνάξιος, ἀξιώ, καταξιώ. The sense here is not entering the Kingdom of God, but measuring up to the level of commitment by those already a part of the Kingdom. The emphasis in καταξιώ is particularly on this 'measuring up' aspect. Particularly insightful is the use of καταξιώ in Acts 5:41, Οἱ μὲν οὖν ἐπορεύοντο χαίροντες ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ συνεδρίου, ὅτι κατηξιώθησαν ὑπὲρ τοῦ ὀνόματος ἀτιμασθῆναι, *As they left the council, they rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name*. Interestingly, a key path toward accomplishing this is suffering persecution. This Paul emphasizes in the attached relative clause ὑπὲρ ἧς καὶ πάσχετε, *in whose behalf you are also suffering*. The clause is attached to βασιλείας via the feminine gender of the relative pronoun ἧς and the feminine noun βασιλείας. God would consider the Thessalonians to have measured up to the demands of the Kingdom by how they handled suffering from persecution.

g) εἴτερον δίκαιον παρὰ θεῶ ἀνταποδοῦναι τοῖς θλίβουσιν ὑμᾶς θλίψιν καὶ ὑμῖν τοῖς θλιβομένοις ἀνεσιν μεθ' ἡμῶν, *since it just for God to repay those afflicting you with afflictions and to repay you who are being oppressed*

<sup>11</sup>But it is not an exclusive label with official tones. The Christian communities are addressed in different ways using ἐκκλησία just in First and Second Thessalonians: church of the Thessalonians (1 Th. 1:1; 2 Th. 1:1); and churches of God in Christ Jesus (2 Th. 2:14). This [pattern](#) expands greatly when First / Second Corinthians and Romans are added.

with relief together with us (vv. 6b-7a).

Grammatically this causal prepositional phrase is attached to the appositional phrase ἔνδειγμα τῆς δικαίας κρίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ in verse 5a. The evidence of a just judgment is now defined as just action by God in judging those doing the persecuting and giving relief to the victims. What we also have in this expansion element and with the one that follows is a clear signal of a major theme to be developed in the letter body of Second Thessalonians.

h) ἐν τῇ ἀποκαλύψει τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ μετ' ἀγγέλων δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ ἐν πυρὶ φλογός, διδόντος ἐκδίκησιν τοῖς μὴ εἰδόσιν θεὸν καὶ τοῖς μὴ ὑπακούουσιν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ, οἵτινες δίκην τίσουσιν ὄλεθρον αἰώνιον ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ κυρίου καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς δόξης τῆς ἰσχύος αὐτοῦ, **when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, separated from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might** (vv. 7b-9).

The core prepositional phrase ἐν τῇ ἀποκαλύψει τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ, **in the revelation of the Lord Jesus**, goes back to the infinitive ἀνταποδοῦναι, **to repay**, by setting the time of this divine action of God. The return of Christ is closely linked to divine judgment on the ungodly. Everything else cited above grows out of this prepositional phrase.

The noun ἀποκάλυψις is linked consistently through the NT uses (18x) with Jesus Christ and His return, as well as the parallel verb ἀποκαλύπτω, **to reveal** (26x), although the verb is used more broadly, especially outside of Paul's writings. Both allude to a disclosing of Christ, coming in anticipation of the Day of Judgment. Paul had given some of the details of this in the letter body of First Thessalonians. But here he signals awareness of the need for further amplification that will come in the letter body of Second Thessalonians. With the constant hostility toward these believers in the city, one can understand clearly their anxiety about what this return of Christ would mean in giving them relief from their continual suffering.

The revelation of Christ will originate ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ, **from Heaven**. This is His present location and the disclosure will be a heavenly revelation. Also the ἀποκαλύψει of Christ will be accompanied μετ' ἀγγέλων δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ, **together with His angels of power**. The phrase here is a Hebraism, i.e., a Hebrew way of saying 'mighty angels,' as is reflected in the LXX (102) rendering of Psalm 103:20 in the Hebrew. Paul repeats his earlier depiction in 1 Thess. 3:13 with this statement, which corresponds to Matt. 25:31 as well.

Also the manner of this disclosure is specified with

ἐν πυρὶ φλογός, **with flaming fire**. Some uncertainty exists over whether this prepositional phrase is attached ἀποκαλύψει as an adjective modifier or to διδόντος, **giving**, that follows as an adverbial modifier. The Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* (28th rev. ed.) places it with the noun ἀποκαλύψει, or perhaps back to the infinitive ἀνταποδοῦναι, **to pay back**, although the grammar evidence would favor attaching it to the participle διδόντος. The background image in Exod. 3:2 (cf. Act 7:30) of the burning bush with Moses would favor attaching it to the noun as an accompanying signal of divine action and presence.

What will be given out at the ἐν τῇ ἀποκαλύψει τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ is now specified (v. 8) as διδόντος ἐκδίκησιν τοῖς μὴ εἰδόσιν θεὸν καὶ τοῖς μὴ ὑπακούουσιν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ, **giving vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus**. God will take vengeance upon the persecutors of His people. These are defined in two ways, since most of them were Jewish. First, they τοῖς μὴ εἰδόσιν θεὸν, **do not know God**, in spite of their claims to being God's covenant people Israel. Second, which grows out of the first, they μὴ ὑπακούουσιν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ, **are not obeying the Gospel of our Lord Jesus**. Their ignorance of God is due to their rejection of the Gospel and is what has led to their persecution of the believers in Thessalonica. To be clear, some Jews in the synagogues there did accept Christ and became a part of the Christian community during the initial preaching of the Gospel by Paul, and his associates. But the leadership and a majority of the members of the synagogue rejected this preaching and turned very hostile toward it. But at the revelation of Christ these will recognize their fatal mistake when God's ἐκδίκησιν<sup>12</sup> is poured out on them.

What does this διδόντος ἐκδίκησιν imply to these wrongdoers? The qualitative relative pronoun clause spells out some details: οἵτινες δίκην τίσουσιν ὄλεθρον αἰώνιον ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ κυρίου καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς δόξης τῆς ἰσχύος αὐτοῦ, **who are such who will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction separated from the face of the Lord and from the glory of His strength** (v. 9). This clause specifies that God's ἐκδίκησιν is eternal separation in damnation from Him. The heart of this punishment (δίκην τίσουσιν) is ὄλεθρον αἰώνιον, **eternal destruction**. Central to this destruction is separation from the presence of God: ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ κυρίου καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς δόξης τῆς ἰσχύος αὐτοῦ. They are left completely cut off from

<sup>12</sup>For the word group see ἐκδικέω, ἐκδικός, ἐκδίκησις. This verb, adjective, noun set underscores God setting the record of justice completely straight in inflicting punishment on wrongdoers according to His standards of justice. The LXX background, especially of the noun ἐκδίκησις, defines its meaning for NT writers out of OT standards, rather than Greek or Roman standards of justice.

God's protection and resources available to them, even in their evil life, through God as Creator and Sustainer of their life (cf. Mt. 25:41, 46; Lk. 13:27). They now belong totally to Satan for him to torment and abuse them at will for all eternity. Now that he has them totally in his grip, there's no deals cut for relief, no negotiating for lesser punishment etc. The miseries of eternal Hell are their fate without any relief ever. This is a fate totally unexpected by the synagogue leaders who persecuted the believers in the city.

ι) ὅταν ἔλθῃ ἐνδοξασθῆναι ἐν τοῖς ἀγίοις αὐτοῦ καὶ θαυμασθῆναι ἐν πᾶσιν τοῖς πιστεύουσιν, ὅτι ἐπιστεύθη τὸ μαρτύριον ἡμῶν ἐφ' ὑμᾶς, ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ, whenever He may come to be glorified by His saints and to be marveled at among all those who have put their faith in Him, because our witness was believed by you, on that day (v. 10).

What does this τῇ ἀποκαλύψει τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ mean for the believers at Thessalonica? It is laid out in the temporal clause. The τῇ ἀποκαλύψει τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ (v. 7b) now is defined in two ways. It is a coming of Christ ἐνδοξασθῆναι ἐν τοῖς ἀγίοις αὐτοῦ, **to be glorified by His saints**. The use of ἐνδοξάζομαι only here and in v. 12 underscore the sharing of the Divine presence with all its blessings in contrast to the total loss of this by the evil doers (v. 9). Second, his coming is θαυμασθῆναι ἐν πᾶσιν τοῖς πιστεύουσιν, **to be marveled at among all those who put their faith in Him**. The aorist participle πιστεύουσιν stresses conversion faith commitment that was then lived out in obedience. His coming will be overwhelming (θαυμάζω<sup>13</sup>) to believers because of its staggering greatness and awesomeness. The idea of vision and contemplation of what is seen stands central to this idea.<sup>14</sup> The theophanies of the OT stand in the background here with the overpowering presence of God made manifest in some way or another to the witness. The difference is that this manifestation of the presence of Christ will be the most overpowering experience ever for believers. Thus the believers at Thessalonica will move from τοῖς διωγμοῖς ὑμῶν καὶ ταῖς θλίψεσιν (**persecutions and afflictions**; v. 4b) to ἄνεσιν, **relief** (v. 7a), and this is what that will be, a sharing in His glorious presence in complete amazement (v. 10).

And all of it is connected to ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ, **on**

<sup>13</sup>See the word group † θαῦμα, † θαυμάζω, † θαυμάσιος, † θαυμαστός for more details. [Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 3:27.]

<sup>14</sup>“θαυμάζειν and the underlying θαῦμα, whose root is linked with θέα, ‘vision,’ and θεάομαι, ‘contemplate,’ are common from the time of Homer and Hesiod. The adj. θαυμάσιος, attested from the time of Hesiod, is preferred by Atticists to the verbal adj. θαυμαστός, which is found from the time of the Homeric hymns.” [Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 3:27.]

**that Day** (v. 10), which goes back to ἐν τῇ ἀποκαλύψει τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ, **at the revelation of the Lord Jesus** (v. 7b). By these two parallel phrases Paul ties the material between them together around the coming of Christ as Judgment Day.

Although all of these many expansion elements build off of Paul's thankfulness to God for the Thessalonians, they additionally send signals of the details yet to come in the letter body. Thus they are but ‘appetizers’ of the main course yet to come!

In vv. 11-12, Paul shifts into a typical **Prayer of Intercession** for the Thessalonians. In four of Paul's letters, he begins with his standard *Prayer of Thanksgiving* but before ending the *Proem* he will shift into a *Prayer of Intercession* for his targeted readers. Second Thessalonians is the first letter to contain this pattern. Note also Col. 1:9-23; Eph. 1:15-23; Phil. 1:7-11. Specific concerns for spiritual growth normally top the list in his prayer expressions in this prayer.

**9.3.2.2 Intercessory Prayer.** In 1:11-12, by the use of very different and creative grammar, Paul sets up a twofold prayer concern for the Thessalonians. The purpose prepositional phrase using a relative pronoun, Εἰς ὃ, **To this end**, comes at the beginning of the single sentence in vv. 11-12 and anticipates the purpose ἵνα dependent clause with its expansions in vv. 11c-12 after the main clause verb προσευχόμεθα. This purpose clause contains two verbs, ἀξιώση and πληρώση, stating the two objectives of Paul's intercession to God for the Thessalonians.

Thus Paul prays regarding these believers that ὑμᾶς ἀξιώση τῆς κλήσεως ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν καὶ πληρώση πᾶσαν εὐδοκίαν ἀγαθωσύνης καὶ ἔργον πίστεως ἐν δυνάμει, **our God will make you worthy of His calling and bring to fullness every desire for goodness and deed of faith in His power**. That is, Paul's prayer is for God to bless every expression of their deep faith commitment to Him.

These two verbal expressions of prayer objective extend first of all ὑπεραυξάνει ἢ πίστις ὑμῶν καὶ πλεονάζει ἢ ἀγάπη, **is flourishing your faith and is becoming abundant your love** (v. 3), which were the basis of his thanksgiving in v. 3. Also they amplify the purpose expression εἰς τὸ καταξιωθῆναι, **in order to be made worthy**, in v. 5. Additionally, ἐνδοξασθῆναι, in the adverbial result clause introduced by ὅπως, repeats the purpose infinitive ἐνδοξασθῆναι in v. 10. Thus a strong link between thanksgiving and intercession is set up here by Paul in regard to the Thessalonians. Paul's intercession for the Thessalonians is that God will prepare them well for the coming of Christ and the Day of Judgment.

His core expression, καὶ προσευχόμεθα πάντοτε περὶ ὑμῶν, **also we are always praying for you**, signals the shift from thanksgiving, Εὐχαριστεῖν ὀφείλομεν τῷ θεῷ

πάντοτε περὶ ὑμῶν, *we ought always give thanks to God for you* (v. 3), to intercession to God in behalf of his readers. The present tense verb combined with the temporal adverb πάντοτε present this prayer activity by Paul and his associates as an ongoing responsibility.

Praying for others, rather than just for ourselves, is a central emphasis on *prayer* inside the NT.<sup>15</sup> The goal of such praying is for the complete welfare of others, especially of fellow believers. Although praying for the sick is included in a few isolated instances in intercessory praying in the NT, the dominate emphasis found inside the NT in the teaching by Jesus and the apostles is praying for others to be guided by God in their living so that a life of unconditional obedience to Him emerges. That is, their spiritual welfare takes precedent over their physical welfare. The intercessory prayer here in 1:11-12 follows the basic pattern of Paul's teaching about *intercession* throughout his letters in almost 30 places. The most detailed presentation of his thinking on this point can be discovered in the five intercessory prayers of Paul in the *Proema* of his letters: 1 Thess. 1:11-12; Col. 1:9-23; Eph. 1:15-23; Phil. 1:7-11. The specific content of the intercession is customized to specific needs in each of the five churches. No 'set pattern' emerges from these.

What emerges from the Proem therefore is a strong emphasis upon prayer. This 'opening' prayer of the letter imitates the opening prayer of the gathered congregations at Thessalonica in the various house church groups. It underscores Paul's very positive feeling toward the Christian community in the city. The intercessory prayer stresses his pastoral concern for the group.

In the writing out of these two prayers, the apostle has also signaled significant themes that he intends to address in the body of the letter. Consequently the listeners in the gathered assemblies had some forewarning about the contents and themes of the letter before the main body of it was read to them.

### 9.3.3 Letter Body

In the letter body of 2:1 - 3:15, the apostle follows through on his signals in the Proem of discussing the coming of the Lord as the main topic.

**9.3.3.1 Core Topos.** He sets up the discussion in 2:1-2 that will be foundational to everything else in the

<sup>15</sup>Interestingly, the topic of intercessory prayer typically in internet based articles focuses on praying for the physical healing of other people, usually by a religious authority figure. Many of the articles center on the physical and psychological benefits of such both for the sick and to the person doing the praying, e.g., "Efficacy of prayer," [wikipedia.org](http://wikipedia.org). Of course, this emphasis misses the point of Jesus and the apostles regarding the role of prayer completely. Such an approach fosters an ego centric use of prayer and treats God as though He is obligated to do what we want Him to do..

letter body:<sup>16</sup>

Ἐρωτῶμεν δὲ ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, ὑπὲρ τῆς παρουσίας τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἡμῶν ἐπισυναγωγῆς ἐπ' αὐτὸν 2 εἰς τὸ μὴ ταχέως σαλευθῆναι ὑμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ νοῦς μηδὲ θροεῖσθαι, μήτε διὰ πνεύματος μήτε διὰ λόγου μήτε δι' ἐπιστολῆς ὡς δι' ἡμῶν, ὡς ὅτι ἐνέστηκεν ἡ ἡμέρα τοῦ κυρίου·

1 As to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we beg you, brothers and sisters, 2 not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as though from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord is already here.

The topic is identified in τῆς παρουσίας τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἡμῶν ἐπισυναγωγῆς ἐπ' αὐτὸν, *the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together with Him*. This links up to what Paul had written to them earlier in 1 Thess. 3:13-18.<sup>17</sup> Although this earlier expression seems simple enough, some kind of misunderstanding over it had emerged between the writing of the two letters. The specific nature of that misunderstanding is expressed by Paul in 2:2, εἰς τὸ μὴ ταχέως σαλευθῆναι ὑμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ νοῦς μηδὲ θροεῖσθαι, μήτε διὰ πνεύματος μήτε διὰ λόγου μήτε δι' ἐπιστολῆς ὡς δι' ἡμῶν,

<sup>16</sup>“Ἐρωτῶμεν δὲ ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, “we beg you, brothers” as in 1 Thess 5:12, is a variant form of the παρακαλοῦμεν construction (see 1 Thess 4:1 with comment), followed not only by the vocative ἀδελφοί but also by a prepositional phrase (ὑπὲρ τῆς παρουσίας κτλ) and a request expressed by εἰς τό with the infinitive (v 2).” [F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 163.]

<sup>17</sup>**First Thess. 3:13-18.** 13 Οὐ θέλομεν δὲ ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν, ἀδελφοί, περὶ τῶν κοιμηθέντων, ἵνα μὴ λυπηθῆτε καθὼς καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ οἱ μὴ ἔχοντες ἐλπίδα. 14 εἰ γὰρ πιστεύομεν ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἀπέθανεν καὶ ἀνέστη, οὕτως καὶ ὁ θεὸς τοὺς κοιμηθέντας διὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἄξει σὺν αὐτῷ. 15 Τοῦτο γὰρ ὑμῖν λέγομεν ἐν λόγῳ κυρίου, ὅτι ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες οἱ περιλειπόμενοι εἰς τὴν παρουσίαν τοῦ κυρίου οὐ μὴ φθάσωμεν τοὺς κοιμηθέντας· 16 ὅτι αὐτὸς ὁ κύριος ἐν κελεύσματι, ἐν φωνῇ ἀρχαγγέλου καὶ ἐν σάλπιγγι θεοῦ, καταβήσεται ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ καὶ οἱ νεκροὶ ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναστήσονται πρῶτον, 17 ἔπειτα ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες οἱ περιλειπόμενοι ἅμα σὺν αὐτοῖς ἀρπαγησόμεθα ἐν νεφέλαις εἰς ἀπάντησιν τοῦ κυρίου εἰς ἄερα· καὶ οὕτως πάντοτε σὺν κυρίῳ ἐσόμεθα. 18 Ὅστε παρακαλεῖτε ἀλλήλους ἐν τοῖς λόγοις τούτοις.

13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. 14 For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. 15 For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. 16 For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.



ὡς ὅτι ἐνέστηκεν ἡ ἡμέρα τοῦ κυρίου· *not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as though from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord is already here.* Somehow at least some of the Christians at Thessalonica had come to think that the second coming of Christ had already happened, or else that the beginning of the end was already taking place.

In order to understand clearly what Paul alludes to, we need to be reminded of the sets of terms used for the coming of Christ.

Here he speaks of it as ἐνέστηκεν ἡ ἡμέρα τοῦ κυρίου, *is present the Day of the Lord* (v. 2).<sup>18</sup> The verb ἐνέστηκεν comes from ἐνίστημι with the core idea of *to put something in place or into effect.* Inside the Thessalonian church were those who thought that this day of the Lord had already been instituted in terms of the final events of the end.

In verse three, Paul indicates the necessity of some other things happening first. Importantly for our concern is that this ‘already instituted day of the Lord’ thinking was coming from either a teacher or teachers: Μὴ τις ὑμᾶς ἐξαπατήσῃ κατὰ μηδένα τρόπον, *Let no one deceive you in any way.* The specific identity of these individuals is not given, because it’s not important. What was being taught is the important aspect because of the damage it was doing among the congregations.

Paul had signaled this time in the Proem statement in 1:7, ἐν τῇ ἀποκαλύψει τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ ἀπ’ οὐρανοῦ μετ’ ἀγγέλων δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ, *at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from Heaven with His mighty angels.* A major objective is this disclosure is then in v. 8 stated as ἐν πυρὶ φλογός, διδόντος ἐκδίκησιν τοῖς μὴ εἰδόσιν θεὸν καὶ τοῖς μὴ ὑπακούουσιν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ, *in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the Gospel*

<sup>18</sup>“It cannot be seriously disputed that “is present” is the natural sense of ἐνέστηκεν. This is the regular force of the perfect tense of ἐνιστάμαι in NT usage. Twice Paul distinguishes ἐνεστῶτα from μέλλοντα as ‘things present’ from ‘things to come’ (Rom 8:38; 1 Cor 3:22). The ἐνεστῶσα ἀνάγκη of 1 Cor 7:26 is the ‘present distress’; the αἰὼν ἐνεστῶς πονηρός of Gal 1:4 is the ‘present evil age’; the καιρὸς ἐνεστηκώς of Heb 9:9 is the ‘present time’ (whether the ‘time now present’ or ‘time then present’ is to be decided by exegesis). cf. RV ‘the day of the Lord is now present’; RSV ‘... has come’; NEB ‘... is already here.’ But there remains considerable support for the sense of imminence (which ἐνέστηκεν does not bear) rather than actual presence; cf. AV ‘the day of Christ is at hand’; ASV ‘the day of the Lord is just at hand.’ Lightfoot translates ἐνέστηκεν as ‘is imminent’ (‘The Apostle then does not deny that the day of the Lord may be near. He asserts that it is not imminent’); cf. Stephenson (‘On the Meaning ...’) for the argument that the rendering ‘is present’ or ‘has come’ is ‘logically impossible’: it cannot be supposed that ‘the Thessalonians could have been misled by false letters saying that the events which Paul has described in I Thessalonians had taken place.’” [F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 165.]

of our Lord Jesus. Another objective for this disclosure is also affirmed in v. 10: ὅταν ἔλθῃ ἐνδοξασθῆναι ἐν τοῖς ἁγίοις αὐτοῦ καὶ θαυμασθῆναι ἐν πᾶσιν τοῖς πιστεύουσιν, ὅτι ἐπιστεύθη τὸ μαρτύριον ἡμῶν ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς, ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ, *when he comes to be glorified by his saints and to be marveled at on that day among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.* This praising of Christ by His saints comes at the same time as the destruction of the wicked according to v. 9.

Trying to identify the specific content of this false teaching is very difficult, given the very limited amount of data that Paul provides in the letter. His initial readers already knew its content well, and thus he feels no need to spell out its details to them in this letter. The meager information provided in Second Thessalonians suggests that it moved along a sense of the hardships upon Christians at the very end of time were already happening, given the persecution being suffered by believers at Thessalonica. Or, possibly it represents some primitive form of a ‘realized eschatology’ teaching that the end is imminent and the church is already reigning victoriously by resisting both persecution and temptation coming from the world around them.<sup>19</sup> Whatever its contours, Paul adamantly denies any connection to it completely: ἀπὸ τοῦ νοὸς μηδὲ θροεῖσθαι, μήτε διὰ πνεύματος μήτε διὰ λόγου μήτε δι’ ἐπιστολῆς ὡς δι’ ἡμῶν, *neither through a spirit nor through a word nor through a letter as though from us* (v. 2b).

**9.3.3.2 Corrections.** Beginning in v. 3, he corrects the mistaken understanding about that moment in time when Jesus returns and sets in motion the eternal order. The ‘correction’ covers vv. 3-12. Then the apostle deals with implications of the coming day of the Lord in

<sup>19</sup>“Aus (“Relevance,” 263, 264) suggests that the severity of the Thessalonians’ persecution made them think that the eschatological birth pangs had begun (cf. Isa 66:7) and that the Day of the Lord had arrived — much as, at a later date, the severity of the persecution of Christians under Septimius Severus ‘disturbed the minds of the many’ and encouraged the opinion that the Parousia of Antichrist was then ‘already approaching’ (Euseb. Hist. Eccl. 6.7). But in the list of factors which might possibly have led the Thessalonians to their conclusion about the Day of the Lord no mention is made of the force of circumstances or the severity of persecution.

“Another possibility is that the Thessalonians had recently been exposed to teaching which moved some of them to accept a realized, or even overrealized, eschatology, not unlike that with which Paul later takes issue in 1 Cor 4:8, when certain members of the Corinthian church appear to have embraced the idea that the kingdom of Christ had already been consummated and that they themselves were reigning with him. If so, the new teaching was less developed than it was to become in Corinth; the arguments used to counter it at Thessalonica are not those which Paul used in his Corinthian correspondence.”

[F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 165.]

2:13-3:15.

What is his 'correction' in vv. 3-12? Essentially there must first rise up a *ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἀνομίας*, a *man of lawlessness*, also known as *ὁ υἱὸς τῆς ἀπωλείας*, the *son for destruction* (v. 3). His actions, character, and influence are then described. Currently he is being *restrained* τὸ κατέχον (vv. 6-7).<sup>20</sup> This doesn't mean that evil is not presently at work in the world, but instead that at the very end evil will become dramatically worse than at present because *the restrainer* (ὁ κατέχων, v. 7) will be removed (ἐκ μέσου γένηται, v. 7) at the very end. This will open a floodgate of evil upon the world just before Christ in His coming destroys evil by *the breath of His mouth* (τῷ πνεύματι τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ, v. 8).<sup>21</sup> Paul never identifies either *ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἀνομίας*, the *man of lawlessness* (v. 3) or *the restrainer* (ὁ κατέχων, v. 7).<sup>22</sup> But the context makes it clear that both these individuals represent forces in opposition to God and Christ. Whether they are human or supernatural is not spelled out. But what is asserted by Paul is their close connection to Satan (vv. 9-10). The impact of this activity is massive upon humanity in turning it against God. But in rejecting God, humanity ends up in deeper delusion and deception that will doom it to destruction (vv. 11-12).<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup>This correlates with John's 'thousand year' restraint of the devil in **Rev. 20:1-3**. Paul indicates a generally common perspective to that found in Revelation, even though he and John have dramatically different ways of describing the very end of human history.

<sup>21</sup>Compare to **Rev. 19:15a**, καὶ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ ἐκπορεύεται ῥομφαία ὀξεῖα, ἵνα ἐν αὐτῇ πατάξῃ τὰ ἔθνη, *From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations*,

<sup>22</sup>Evidently the apostle felt no need to rehearse all the details since this had been provided earlier when he was present at Thessalonica (vv. 5-6): 5 Οὐ μνημονεύετε ὅτι ἔτι ὦν πρὸς ὑμᾶς ταῦτα ἔλεγον ὑμῖν; 6 καὶ νῦν τὸ κατέχον οἴδατε εἰς τὸ ἀποκαλυφθῆναι αὐτὸν ἐν τῷ ἑαυτοῦ καιρῷ. 5 *Do you not remember that I told you these things when I was still with you? 6 And you know what is now restraining him, so that he may be revealed when his time comes.*

<sup>23</sup><sup>c</sup>In fact, all that we can learn about the sense in which they thought the Day of the Lord to have come must be inferred from the counterargument of vv 3-8, and the interpretation of the counterargument is so uncertain that the wise interpreter will recognize the limits placed here on his knowledge. Probably there was no question of the Thessalonians' replacing the teaching they had already received with a completely new system. But if some of them had drawn unwarranted inferences from the statement in 1 Thess 5:5 that they were all 'sons of the day' (so von Dobschütz ad loc.), or if a prophet had announced in the church that the Day of the Lord was now present, they might well have been bewildered; what had happened to the Resurrection and translation into the Lord's presence which they had been taught to expect at the Parousia? Paul and his colleagues, who knew more about their converts' problem than the exegete of today can know, judged that it would help them to be told something about the sequence of events leading up to the Day of the Lord. They had been taught about the actual events, but

What does emerge from this is that the false view (v. 3) also centered on a futuristic eschatology just as does Paul's view. The false teachers either had their 'facts' wrong, in that Paul's denial of connection to this in v. 2 suggests their teaching was claimed to have originated from him in connection to 1 Thess. 3:13-18. Or, else they made a false application of Paul's teaching to contend that this very end had begun in their day. This latter understanding would help account for the group that had withdrawn from society to 'wait for the Lord' as described in 3:6-13. But interpretive uncertainty remains over many of the details of Paul's correction in vv. 3-12. And this urges caution about drawing too many conclusions. The essence of Paul's correction, however, is clear. The day of the Lord has not yet been set in motion because the outburst of evil has not yet taken place like it will at the very end.

**9.3.3.3 Implications of the Second Coming.** What should Christians do as they anticipate the very end of time? Paul supplies some answers in 2:13 - 3:15. A quite overview of these will be helpful.

**First**, in 2:13-14 Paul frames an affirmation of the salvation in v. 13a of the Thessalonian believers in the repeated pattern of the *Proem Prayer of Thanksgiving*: Ἡμεῖς δὲ ὀφείλομεν εὐχαριστεῖν τῷ θεῷ πάντοτε περὶ ὑμῶν, ἀδελφοὶ ἠγαπημένοι ὑπὸ κυρίου, *But we must always give thank to God for you brothers beloved by the Lord...* (v. 1:3). By this, Paul's affirmation is set in the strongest possible affirmation of the Thessalonians themselves. Two points are asserted about them. First, εἶλατο ὑμᾶς ὁ θεὸς ἀπαρχὴν εἰς σωτηρίαν ἐν ἁγιασμῷ πνεύματος καὶ πίστει ἀληθείας, *God chose you [the Thessalonians] as a first fruit of salvation by setting them apart by the Spirit and by their faith coming out of Truth*. Second, this marvelous salvation has a purpose: εἰς ὃ [καὶ] ἐκάλεσεν ὑμᾶς διὰ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου ἡμῶν εἰς περιποίησιν δόξης τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. *Unto which He also called you through our Gospel for acquiring the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ*. Thus the first implication of correct understanding of τῆς παρουσίας τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἡμῶν ἐπισυναγωγῆς ἐπ' αὐτὸν *the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together with Him* (2:1) is to realize what that means for eternity for believers. Salvation and calling fundamentally mean being with Jesus in eternity who is the very Presence (δόξης) of Almighty God. As long as we are still in this body on earth, that salvation goal has not yet been reached, contrary to what the false teachers were possibly advocating.

**Second**, in 2:15-17, Paul draws the conclusion that believers need to stand firm in the apostolic teach-

they needed to have them set in their chronological relationship."<sup>24</sup> [F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 166.]

ing rather than being deceived by false teaching: Ἄρα οὖν, ἀδελφοί, στήκετε καὶ κρατεῖτε τὰς παραδόσεις ἃς ἐδιδάχθητε εἴτε διὰ λόγου εἴτε δι' ἐπιστολῆς ἡμῶν, *So then, brothers, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions which you were taught either by our word or by our letter.* Then in vv. 16-17 he repeats the tone of the Prayer of Intercession in the Proem (cf. 1:11-12) with a prayer wish for God παρακαλέσαι ὑμῶν τὰς καρδίας καὶ στηρίζαι ἐν παντὶ ἔργῳ καὶ λόγῳ ἀγαθῷ, *to encourage your hearts and to establish them in every good work and deed.*

**Third**, the apostle appeals to the Thessalonians for their prayers for him in 3:1-5. Paul's request is twofold. First, ἵνα ὁ λόγος τοῦ κυρίου τρέχη καὶ δοξάζεται καθὼς καὶ πρὸς ὑμᾶς, *that the Word of the Lord may run and be honored just as also with you.* Then second that καὶ ἵνα ῥυθθῶμεν ἀπὸ τῶν ἀτόπων καὶ πονηρῶν ἀνθρώπων· οὐ γὰρ πάντων ἡ πίστις, *and that we may be rescued from wicked and evil men for not all have faith.* The basis for these requests is seen in vv. 3-5 where Paul expresses his confidence in the steadfastness of the Thessalonians to remain true to the Gospel and thus stand under the blessing of God. He concludes this will a prayer (v. 5): Ὁ δὲ κύριος κατευθῆναι ὑμῶν τὰς καρδίας εἰς τὴν ἀγάπην τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ εἰς τὴν ὑπομονὴν τοῦ Χριστοῦ. *May the Lord direct your hearts into love for God and into steadfastness to Christ.* Thus prayer for one another should play an important role as believers await the coming of the Lord.

**Fourth**, Paul cautions the Thessalonians about idleness in 3:6-15. The core admonition comes in v. 6 as a solemn warning: Παραγγέλλομεν δὲ ὑμῖν, ἀδελφοί, ἐν ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου [ἡμῶν] Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ στέλλεσθαι ὑμᾶς ἀπὸ παντὸς ἀδελφοῦ ἀτάκτως περιπατοῦντος καὶ μὴ κατὰ τὴν παράδοσιν ἣν παρελάβοσαν παρ' ἡμῶν. *Now we admonish you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ for you to stand apart from every brother living in idleness and not according to the teaching which they received from us.* Critical to this warning is the idea in the adverb of ἀτάκτως, translated as *idleness*. Only used here in vv. 6 and 11 in the entire NT, the second use provides some depiction of what Paul meant. τινες περιπατοῦντας ἐν ὑμῖν ἀτάκτως μηδὲν ἐργαζομένους ἀλλὰ περιεργαζομένους, *some are walking among you in idleness, that is, doing nothing but being busybodies.* Paul's specific admonition to them in v. 12 provides additional clues about their idleness: τοῖς δὲ τοιοῦτοις παραγγέλλομεν καὶ παρακαλοῦμεν ἐν κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ, ἵνα μετὰ ἡσυχίας ἐργαζόμενοι τὸν ἑαυτῶν ἄρτον ἐσθίωσιν, *Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.* These idlers were 'waiting for the Lord' to come by quitting their jobs and sponging off the others in the larger community of believers. Such action is clearly wrong as Paul reminds them (v. 10) that he had told them this when he was with them

earlier. Additionally, he had set the right example before them by earning his own way while with them (vv. 7-9).

He does end this with an admonition for the Thessalonians reading this letter to not deal harshly with these wayward brothers but still to deal firmly with their idleness (vv. 14-15). The punishment was to center disciplinary expulsion from participation in the life of the church into order to shock them into realizing and acknowledging their wrong actions.

From Paul's advice to the Thessalonians, what should believers be doing to get ready for the Lord's return? Several helpful guidelines emerge here. Don't get led astray by false teaching about that return. Engage in prayer for one another. Stay deeply rooted in the principle of scripture about that return. Conduct your lives normally in the context of faithfulness to Christ so that no 'loose ends' will be present when that day arrives. In other words, Ὑμεῖς δέ, ἀδελφοί, μὴ ἐγκακήσητε καλοποιῶντες. *but you, brothers, do not grow weary while doing good things* (v. 13).

### 9.3.4 Conclusio

3.16 Αὐτὸς δὲ ὁ κύριος τῆς εἰρήνης δῶη ὑμῖν τὴν εἰρήνην διὰ παντὸς ἐν παντὶ τρόπῳ. ὁ κύριος μετὰ πάντων ὑμῶν. 17 Ὁ ἀσπασμὸς τῆ ἐμῆ χειρὶ Παύλου, ὃ ἐστὶν σημεῖον ἐν πάσῃ ἐπιστολῇ· οὕτως γράφω. 18 Ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ μετὰ πάντων ὑμῶν.

3.16 *Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in all ways. The Lord be with all of you.* 17 I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the mark in every letter of mine; it is the way I write. 18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you.

The *Conclusio* given in vv. 16-18 is rather standard for *Conclusia* in the letters of Paul, although it is one of the shorter ones to the churches along with Second Corinthians. This one in Second Thessalonians contains a prayer of blessing (v. 16), a sender verification (v. 17), and a benedictio (v. 18).

**Prayer of blessing, v. 16.** Αὐτὸς δὲ ὁ κύριος τῆς εἰρήνης δῶη ὑμῖν τὴν εἰρήνην διὰ παντὸς ἐν παντὶ τρόπῳ. ὁ κύριος μετὰ πάντων ὑμῶν. *Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in all ways. The Lord be with all of you.*

This prayer has echoes of the one at the end of First Thessalonians (5:23), Αὐτὸς δὲ ὁ θεὸς τῆς εἰρήνης ἀγιάσαι ὑμᾶς ὁλοτελεῖς, καὶ ὁλόκληρον ὑμῶν τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ τὸ σῶμα ἀμέμπτως ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ τηρηθεῖν, *May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.* The thrust of the two prayers are differ-

ent but Paul closes both letters with this similar prayer expression. Additionally, a shorter but similar prayer comes in Rom. 15:33, Ὁ δὲ θεὸς τῆς εἰρήνης μετὰ πάντων ὑμῶν, ἀμήν. [The God of peace be with all of you. Amen](#)

If you noticed as we surveyed the letter, the role of prayer in Second Thessalonians is significant with several prayer expressions being included in the letter. Paul's prayer concern for the believers at Thessalonica is significant, and he solicits their prayers for him in the confidence that these believers engage in prayer as a vital part of their Christian life.

The phrase ὁ θεὸς τῆς εἰρήνης, [the God of peace](#), is found also in Rom. 15:23; 16:20; Phil. 4:9; 1 Thess. 5:23; Heb. 13:20. The sense of the genitive case construction is the God who supplies peace. One should remember from the Salutatio discussions that εἰρήνη is a positive dynamic rather than just the absence of conflict as is the case with the English word peace.

The use of the optative mood form of the verb δῶν ὑμῖν τὴν εἰρήνην generates the sense of [‘May He give you peace’](#) that is clearly in the form of a prayer. The scope of this prayer request is inclusive: διὰ παντός ἐν παντὶ τρόπῳ, [through all things in all ways](#). What God can give to believers has no bounds or limits in filling their lives with His presence and blessing.

The second prayer petition follows and is closely linked to the first: ὁ κύριος μετὰ πάντων ὑμῶν, [The Lord be with all of you](#). Such short prayers are often without the core verb, as is the case here, because it was well understood that the optative form εἴη would be understood by the readers. The peace of God is linked inseparably to the presence of Christ. It is His presence that is the source of our peace with God. This connection is reflected in the Salutatio at the beginning of the letter: χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς [ἡμῶν] καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, [Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ](#) (1:2).

**Sender verification, v. 17.** Ὁ ἀσπασμὸς τῆ ἐμῆ χειρὶ Παύλου, ὃ ἐστὶν σημεῖον ἐν πάσῃ ἐπιστολῇ· οὕτως γράφω, [This greeting with my own hand Paul, which is the indication in every letter; thus I write](#). This somewhat awkward expression is more formulaic in nature than being intended as a regular sentence statement.<sup>24</sup> What Paul

<sup>24</sup>3:17. Ὁ ἀσπασμὸς τῆ ἐμῆ χειρὶ Παύλου, ‘The greeting in my own hands—Paul’s.’ The same formula is used in 1 Cor 16:21; Col 4:18; cf. also Gal 6:11, ‘see in what large letters I am writing with my own hand (τῆ ἐμῆ χειρὶ),’ and Philem 19a, where Paul signs his IOU (ἐγὼ Παῦλος ἔγραψα τῆ ἐμῆ χειρὶ).

“It was no uncommon thing in ancient letter-writing for the sender, having dictated the bulk of the letter, to write the last sentence or two in his own hand. This is the best explanation of the change of script at the end of several papyrus letters which have been preserved. This practice would help to authenticate the letter (for readers who recognized the sender’s writing); a more general purpose would be to make the letter look more personal than one written entirely by an amanuensis. Cicero seems commonly to

intends here is to validate the contents to the readers in Thessalonica who would be somewhat familiar with his own hand writing, more so than with that of the letter writer, either Timothy or Silas, or both. Additionally it added a person touch to the letter written by someone else. The singular phrase ἐν πάσῃ ἐπιστολῇ, [in every letter](#), poses no problem even though this is just the third letter of the thirteen in Paul’s collection. It’s point is to indicate that using a writing secretary will be the pattern the apostle will follow in every letter that he will write over the years of ministry. Such a practice was entirely standard in the culture, especially for more formal letters.

**Benedictio, v. 18.** Ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ μετὰ πάντων ὑμῶν. [The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you](#). This final benedictory prayer exactly matches that in First Thessalonians (5:28), except for the addition of πάντων, [all of](#). This is slightly more emphatic than Ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ μεθ’ ὑμῶν in 1 Thess. 5:28. It matches exactly Rom. 16:20b, Ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ μεθ’ ὑμῶν.

The double expression of final prayers is not that unusual for Paul as 1 Cor. 16:23-24 and 2 Cor. 13:11, 13 illustrate, comparable here to vv. 16, 18. But the more formal Benedictio at the very end echoes the synagogue pattern of closing their Friday evening gathering with a formal benediction. As the leader of the gathering orally pronounced this benediction, the blessing of God was invoked upon those who had assembled and were now committed to applying what had been studied from the Torah that evening. This was something the early church picked up and used in their meetings as well. But the Christian perspective focused on the powerful dynamic of divine grace to guide the believers to obedience rather than the powerless Torah commands.

## CONCLUSION

What can we conclude from these first three letters of Paul that were linked to his second missionary journey in the early 50s? Several things emerge that are worth examining as background.

1) The second missionary journey of the apostle Paul (Acts 15:40 - 18:22) brought him and his associates first into the familiar territory of his home in Tarsus and then among the Galatian churches established on the have written his letters himself, but where he uses an amanuensis, he indicates that the letter-closing is in his own hand (cf. Ad. Att. 13:28: *hoc manu mea*, ‘this in my own hand’). In another letter he quotes a sentence from one which he himself had received from Pompey and says that it came in *extremo, ipsius manu*, ‘at the end, in his own hand’ (Ad. Att. 8.1).”

[F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 215–216.]

first missionary journey. At Lystra in Galatia, Paul and Silas added Timothy to the group, and upon landing in Macedonia Luke was added. Ephesus was the intention after Galatia but it was not in God's plans at this point. Instead, after moving across to Macedonia from Troas, time was spent primarily in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Beroea. Timothy and Silas remained behind while Paul traveled into the province of Achaia stopping first at Athens, and then spending a lot of time at Corinth. This marked the terminus point of the journey, and from Corinth Paul and his group made their way back to Antioch by way of Ephesus and Jerusalem. This trip along with the first trip, limited to southern Galatia on the mainland, were the 'evangelizing' trips where numerous new congregations were planted.



Taking place in the late 40s and early 50s, it signaled the beginning of Paul's writing ministry that would gradually produce the thirteen letters contained in the canonical New Testament. The three letters coming out of this second missionary journey were Galatians, along with First and Second Thessalonians. Galatians comes either from Troas or soon after entering Macedonia, and it was addressed to the collection of churches established on the first missionary journey in the southern part of the province of Galatia. It is the only letter of Paul addressed to multiple congregations. First and Second Thessalonians were written while Paul was in Achaia -- first from Athens and second from Corinth -- to the Macedonian community located in the city of Thessalonica. The letter to the Galatians focuses almost totally on problems that had arisen in the church even after Paul's re-visiting of them at the beginning of the second missionary journey (Acts 16:1). The tone of the letter is sharp and blunt. But when First and Second Thessalonians were written several months later, they focus on a congregation with spiritual vitality and one trying to correctly understand Paul's teachings, especially in regard to the return of Christ at the end of time.

Both letters are divided between devoted affirmation of the believers and attempts to correct their misunderstanding of Paul's teachings.

2) In order to understand the contents of Paul's letters, one must understand the circumstances in the churches to whom the letters are written. All of his letters are 'circumstantial,' in that particular circumstances in the life of the house church groups in a location are what prompt the writing of the letter. Paul attempts to help each group find solutions to their problems.

Very importantly one must never treat any of Paul's letters as a theological treatise presenting the apostle's belief system in some kind of abstract manner, such as would be found in a modern systematic theology book. For the apostle, belief was centered in the Gospel that he preached and taught. But it was never detached from the functional day to day issues of Christian living. Thus his letters only treat the part of his Gospel understanding that he deems applicable to the specific issues present in the life of the church / churches being addressed by each letter. And Paul will express the same relevant aspect of his Gospel in different ways to different churches.

One of the greatest errors made by Christians over the past several hundred years is the false assumption that the apostle developed a detailed complex system of belief from which he chose relevant bits and pieces to apply in each of his letters. This reflects a way of thinking utterly irrelevant to the way religious understanding existed both in the background Jewish mind-set and certainly not in any of the early Christian apostles.<sup>25</sup> Consequently no supposed 'key' to Pauline theology exists outside of the minds of modern misguided theologians. The pursuit of such is an exercise in utter futility! As is witnessed by the complexity and contradictory nature of such modern efforts.

Also critical to remember is that Paul's understanding of the Gospel was a growing, evolving experience for him. By the time Second Timothy is written in the mid 60s, he understands far more about the Gospel than he did with the writing of Galatians in the beginning 50s. Central to this developing understanding is the simple reality that each new set of issues arising in the churches demanded seeking God's mind on how the Gospel should apply to the solving of the issues.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup>Careful analysis of the so-called 'classical' philosophers such as Plato will reveal that their mind never worked in any kind of systematic manner comparable to modern thinking either.

<sup>26</sup>My doctoral dissertation completed in 1975 on the Pauline concept of the intermediate state as reflected in 2 Cor. 5:1-10 exposed me dramatically to the developing and sometimes changing viewpoints of Paul on particular topics. Very few modern 'theologians' give adequate attention to this aspect of Paul's thinking about the Gospel which he preached and taught.

Thus Paul's early statement ἀποκαλύψαι τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν ἐμοί, [to reveal His Son in me](#), in Gal. 1:16 refers back to Paul's experience on the Damascus road, as described in Acts 9:3-19a, as a 'get acquainted with Christ' disclosure that provided the apostle to be with salvation and a basic understanding of what that meant. From this foundation, he would develop his understanding of the nature of that relationship with Christ and how it should impact life. He would learn more through continued revelation and also from others as is illustrated by Ananias in Acts 9, and affirmed later by Paul in 1 Cor. 15:3a, παρέδωκα γὰρ ὑμῖν ἐν πρώτοις, ὃ καὶ παρέλαβον, [for I passed on to you from the first what also I had received](#). Paul's 'theology' is a functional understanding of the Gospel, rather than a theoretical perception. But modern systematic theology seeks to turn it into abstract theory, and thus always fails in such an objective. Paul's religious thinking is geared for parish ministry, not for the academic classroom.

3) Additionally the contents of Paul's letters are intended to communicate his ideas to the typical believer in the various churches, not the educated elite among the early church. For a modern layperson reading Paul's letters, this may seem impossible. And when understanding of the style of Greek writing is present, that Paul was communicating to ordinal folks may seem questionable. But several things signal his intention to speak to the regular folks. First, at Corinth in 1 Cor. 6:9-11, the composition of the church membership clearly came from regular people in the city, not from the elite. One would assume that the composition of the church at Corinth was not too different than in the other churches. Second, the problems treated by Paul in his letters are not socially high status based problems that only wealthy, highly educated members would be having.

Third, Paul's style of writing Greek is labeled correctly as periodic Greek which reflects oral dictation kind of thinking. He does not reflect highly eloquent neoclassical patterns of writing Greek as is found in

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The reason for this is simple. Producing some kind of theology of Paul predicated on the growing understanding of Paul, rather than on a falsely assumed flat, one dimensional perspective, makes such a modern product enormously more complex and difficult, if not impossible.

More helpful from the modern perspective is the work in biblical theology perspectives that treat the themes of each of Paul's letters separately. Yet even here, many writers find it impossible to resist the tendency to see key themes in the individual letters and then develop their understanding of Paul around these in some kind of 'systematic' development. How many times have you heard even preachers claim that Romans is Paul's systematic theology? This is pure garbage! The modern western mind-set is very uncomfortable with the presentation of ideas that do not conform to its ways of 'logical' reasoning. Somehow if Paul doesn't 'out think' some modern brilliant mind, he cannot be a heroic figure to them. .

Hebrews and James, for example. His letters do not even match Luke - Acts in reflecting training in classical Greek. Unquestionably, his style is far better than the almost illiterate style of Greek in Second Peter. What we do encounter in Paul's letters are patterns of style reflecting mid level competency in writing and thinking in Greek. What cannot be determined precisely is how much of this is due to Paul and how much comes out of the skills of the various writing secretaries whom he used.

Peter's comment in 2 Pet. 3:15-16 needs to be properly understood in this connection:

15 καὶ τὴν τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν μακροθυμίαν σωτηρίαν ἠγεῖσθε, καθὼς καὶ ὁ ἀγαπητὸς ἡμῶν ἀδελφὸς Παῦλος κατὰ τὴν δοθεῖσαν αὐτῷ σοφίαν ἔγραψεν ὑμῖν, 16 ὡς καὶ ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ἐπιστολαῖς λαλῶν ἐν αὐταῖς περὶ τούτων, **ἐν αἷς ἐστὶν δυσνόητά τινα**, ἃ οἱ ἀμαθεῖς καὶ ἀστήρικτοι στρεβλώσουσιν ὡς καὶ τὰς λοιπὰς γραφὰς πρὸς τὴν ἰδίαν αὐτῶν ἀπώλειαν.

15 and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation. So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, 16 speaking of this as he does in all his letters. **There are some things in them hard to understand**, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures.

When Peter comments that some of the things in Paul's letters are [hard to understand](#), δυσνόητά τινα, his statement suggests difficult to interpret by οἱ ἀμαθεῖς καὶ ἀστήρικτοι, [the uninstructed and unstable](#) (v. 16), but not by those in tune with God and the apostolic Gospel. The assertion of some of the content of Paul's letters being [δυσνόητά](#) literarily means 'hard to interpret,' unless you are in tune with God.<sup>27</sup> Paul appears to be a clear, excellent communicator of his ideas. Difficulty comes when his ideas are lifted out of context and giv-

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<sup>27</sup>“δυσνόητά τινα ἃ οἱ ἀμαθεῖς καὶ ἀστήρικτοι στρεβλοῦσιν, ‘some things that are hard to understand, which the uninstructed and unstable people distort.’ δυσνόητος (‘hard to understand’) is a rare word, used of texts which are difficult to interpret (Diogenes Laertes, Vit. Phil. 9.13) and by Hermas of his symbolic visions (Herm. Sim. 9:14:4). It is no qualification of Paul's ‘wisdom’ (v 15) to admit that Paul's writings contain difficult passages, since it is only the ἀμαθεῖς καὶ ἀστήρικτοι (‘uninstructed and unstable people’) who will be liable to misinterpret them, and they also misinterpret the ‘other scriptures’ (see below; cf. Lindemann, Paulus, 94). The reference is probably therefore to passages which are liable to be misunderstood unless they are interpreted in the light of the rest of Paul's teaching and of the apostolic teaching generally, rather than to passages which are simply obscure. (The point is therefore different from that made by Origen, Comm. in. Rom. 6, who attributes the variety of interpretations of Paul to the fact that he was unable to express himself clearly.) For the correct interpretation of such passages some instruction in Christian teaching is required.” [Richard J. Bauckham, *2 Peter; Jude*, vol. 50, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 331.]

en different meanings.

Paul's thoughts become difficult for the modern reader primarily because we don't take adequate time to understand the contextual setting in which they were first presented. The more we learn of this setting -- both historical and literary -- the clearer his thinking becomes.

***What can we learn from this three letters coming out of ministry in the early 50s?*** It is helpful in answering such a question as this to first look at the Praescriptio and Proem expansion elements which signal foundational themes in the letter body.

From the Galatians Praescriptio (1:1-5) we are alerted to a major issue prompting the writing of the letter, i.e., the challenge to Paul's claim to being an apostle which then questioned the Gospel that he preached. He asserts the independence of his apostleship from human sources and authorizations (1:1) and summarizes the essence of his Gospel (1:4-5). Paul's claim to direct calling from God to preach the apostolic Gospel is then developed in 1:11-2:21.

What that means for us today is particularly important. When we read the letters of Paul we can know that we are reading the insights of one of the chosen Apostles who were given unique status and responsibility for establishing the Christian religion after the ascension of Jesus. To be even clearer, the Christian New Testament from start to finish is the apostolic witness to Jesus and His mission of discipling the world in commitment to Him as Savior. The Christian religion is grounded exclusively upon their testimony to Christ. As the source of thirteen of those twenty-seven documents, the credibility of Paul as an apostolic witness is of paramount importance.

The heart of that Gospel is summarized in 1:4, κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ 4 τοῦ δόντος ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν, ὅπως ἐξέλθῃται ἡμᾶς ἐκ τοῦ αἰῶνος τοῦ ἐνεστώτος πονηροῦ κατὰ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν, [Lord Jesus Christ who gave Himself for our sins, so that He might rescue us from the age of the now present evil one according to the will of God even our Father.](#) This is the Gospel that Paul preached to the Galatians and that was the basis to their claim to being Christians.

The Exordium, as a replacement Proem, in 1:6-10 summarizes the dire situation among the churches in the province giving urgency to the writing of the letter and signaling what Paul will assert in 3:1-6:10. False teachers, most likely from the outside, had appeared raising serious questions about the correctness of the Gospel that Paul had preached to them. Their Jewish orientation could not accept the idea of salvation through justification by faith apart from Torah commitment, particularly for non-Jews. Paul vigorously defends salvation based exclusively upon faith surrender to

Christ. This in no way opens a door to sinful living because in the Gospel the person is committed to the controlling leadership of the Holy Spirit (chap. 5) and out of this comes deep caring ministry to his fellow believers in living in obedience to Christ (chap. 6). It is the Judaizer's phony gospel that poses the danger because its placing of Torah demands upon the individual nullifies the freedom of the Holy Spirit to produce obedience to Christ.

Paul pleads then with the Galatian readers of this letter to remain firmly committed to the apostolic Gospel and to not modify or nullify it by shifting to the false gospel of the Judaizers.

At least a couple of important implications come out of this. For one thing, the apostolic Gospel must be correctly understood and preached. To preach and teach an alternative version to people is to doom them to eternal damnation. The Judaizers were so steeped in Torah understanding of life and relationship to God, that they could not, and did not, grasp the validity of the apostolic Gospel in its life transforming power. Also, Christ changes a person's life, not imposes new sets of rules. For Jews over many centuries, Torah meant the complete framing of one's life on a day to day basis. For non-Jews to come into God's salvation without commitment to Torah seemed impossible to them. But this was and is the radicalness of the apostolic Gospel: Christ becomes the defining framework of one's life, whether Jew or Gentile, completely separate from Torah (1:4). Properly understood Torah is not in conflict with Christ, but it can never substitute for Christ.

It is in this life changing faith surrender to the Lordship of Christ that the believer receives something far better than Torah. The very Spirit of Christ takes up residence in the person's life as the source of empowerment and guidance to live daily in obedience to God through Christ. Central to this will be a focus on brotherly love and ministry. The Christian community now replaces the synagogue community as the focus of living for and serving Christ. The superior nature of this kind of community to that offered by the synagogue is dramatically clear.

Paul's conviction was that when the Galatian believers understood what they already had in Christ, they would reject to counterfeit version being offered by the Judaizers. His letter attempted to spell this out clearly to them.

The challenge to us as believers in a modern world is to understand how the Gospel works like this in creating Christian communities. And then to commit ourselves to developing such communities. Central to this is the unconditional faith surrender to Christ that produces ongoing obedience to the Spirit of Christ in min-

istry to our brothers and sisters in the faith. Implicit also is a determination to fiercely resist any attempt to water down or pervert the apostolic Gospel that lays out this program.

When the apostle reached Athens in Achaia his concern for the newly formed churches in Macedonia weighed heavily on his mind while in this Greek city. Perhaps seeing the many idols in the city of Athens pressed him with the potential of paganism to corrupt and pervert human values and living. When Timothy and Silas arrived in the city from their ministry in Macedonia, he chose to write to the believers at Thessalonica and graciously thanked them for their marvelous commitment and steadfastness in service to the Lord in spite of the very hostile atmosphere against them in the city. They stood as a powerful validation of the Gospel he was preaching, and he thanked them profusely for this.

**First Thessalonians** represents a letter of pastoral joy from Paul to the church in the Macedonian city. The major focus of the letter, as signaled in the Proem, is on the solid faith commitment of the Thessalonians and how God is using that to inspire others to Christ. He sums it up in the Proem, v. 3, *μνημονεύοντες ὑμῶν τοῦ ἔργου τῆς πίστεως καὶ τοῦ κόπου τῆς ἀγάπης καὶ τῆς ὑπομονῆς τῆς ἐλπίδος τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Repeatedly through the letter body, he praises this church for its exemplary faith commitment. They illustrate a fundamental principle of Christianity: only a serving faith is genuine. Interestingly, in Galatians Paul spoke extensively about the nature of Christian conversion and how it is to transform one's living, but due to the perverse influences hanging over the churches from the Judaizing teachers he spends little time emphasizing this as being exemplified by how the Galatians Christians were living. Just the opposite is the case with the Thessalonian church. These people fell in love with Christ from the outset of Paul's missionary activity there and that devotion to the Lord continued to deepen and develop consistently from then on.

In order to provide additional insight into the pattern of a devoted Christian life, the apostle includes some brief paraenetic guidelines in 4:1-12 and 5:12-22. But the nature of these do not suggest gaps or deficiencies in how the Thessalonians were already living. Instead, their general nature would allow them to be applied to any group of believers however mature in the faith they might be.

The one area where lack of clarity seemed to be present had to do with the return of Christ at the end of time (4:13-5:11). Paul does not provide new infor-

mation to the congregation about this as he asserts in 5:1-2, 1 *Περὶ δὲ τῶν χρόνων καὶ τῶν καιρῶν, ἀδελφοί, οὐ χρεῖαν ἔχετε ὑμῖν γράφεσθαι, 2 αὐτοὶ γὰρ ἀκριβῶς οἶδατε ὅτι ἡμέρα κυρίου ὡς κλέπτης ἐν νυκτὶ οὕτως ἔρχεται. 1 Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. 2 For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.* As he will remind them in the second letter, these issues had already been discussed when he was first in their presence on the initial evangelizing visit: *Οὐ μνημονεύετε ὅτι ἔτι ὦν πρὸς ὑμᾶς ταῦτα ἔλεγον ὑμῖν; Do you not remember that I told you these things when I was still with you? (2:5).*

For the non-Jews and perhaps for many of the Jews in the church, the idea of Christ as Messiah making a return trip to the world at the very end of time was a radically new religious idea. Even though Paul had explained the basics during his initial visit, confusion about the details remained. By the time of the second letter, some in the church mistakenly thought they had it down right and began teaching wrong ideas (2 Thess. 2:2). In 1 Thess. 4:13-18, the confusion included uncertainty about whether the gathering up of the church at Christ's return only included those living at the time. What about those who had died? Paul assured them that it made no difference. Everyone, both living and dead, would participate in His return. Another uncertainty was over how soon this might happen. In 5:1-11 Paul's emphasis was upon the 'unknowability' of when this would happen. He compared Christ's coming to the coming of a thief into a person's house at night. Consequently, being continuously prepared for Christ's return is the bottom line.

How does all this apply to believers today? In general, what First Thessalonians teaches us is how the Christian life should be lived out day by day. The Thessalonian church both exemplified this and Paul's minimal supplementary admonitions provides some additional insight into the lifestyle of genuine Christianity. If we really want to know what Christianity is all about, we should read these sections in First Thessalonians where Paul praises the commitment of the Thessalonians, beginning with the Proem in chapter one.

After nearly two thousand years, many Christians have not yet gotten down correctly the idea of Christ's return. First Thessalonians assures us that when Christ returns all believers will participate whether living or dead at that moment in time. It reminds us of the uselessness and falseness and potential danger of trying to predict when this will take place. Paul's emphasis to the Thessalonians matches that of Jesus in the Little Apocalypse sections of the synoptic gospels: we must live in watchfulness for that day. And this means liv-



ing in obedience to Him rather than speculating about when it will happen.

**Second Thessalonians** comes sometime later perhaps as much as two years. It also reflects the reporting of Timothy and Silas back to Paul on how things were in the church at Thessalonica. Just as the first letter praised the church for its faithfulness to Christ, so also does the second letter beginning with the Proem in 1:3-4 especially. This will then be expanded in scattered texts in the letter body, especially in 2:13-3:5.

While the one uncertainty at Thessalonica in the first letter was concerning the return of Christ, it continued to be a major concern by the time of the second letter a year or so later. But now the situation was somewhat different. A few in the church were sure that they understood Paul to say that the nearness of the end meant it was already beginning (2:2) as signaled by persecution. Paul refutes this not by the image of the thief in the night as in 1 Thes. 5:1-11, but now by indicating that the end of time would bring a level of persecution and opposition to Christianity far greater than what they had been experiencing since their conversion.

When believers are caught up in brutal harm and physical violence against them due to their religious faith, one can understand how easy it would be to think that the end is upon them and Christ is coming any minute. But Paul emphasizes to the Thessalonians that no, the end hasn't yet arrived. Opposition must intensify far worse than it is presently before Christ calls a halt to it and sets in motion the eternal order of things. Here in the second letter he refuses to speculate about the timing of all this and reprimands those in the Thessalonian church for doing so. Speculation about it has led to idleness, which is sinful and contrary to the will of God (3:6-15). His earlier view that consistent obedience is the only way to prepare remains in tact in the second letter.

Only if believers caught up in speculating about Christ's return could hear Paul's reprimand today. It is not productive and turns attention away from the important matters of obeying Christ in ministry to others.

In summation, what comes out of the early writing ministry on the second missionary journey is a series of declarations about the basics of Christian conversion and Christian commitment in daily living, plus reaffirmation of the teachings of Jesus about the second coming of Christ at the end of time. Although in different ways, the emphasis upon conversion and Christian commitment came out of different circumstances between Galatians and the two letters to the Thessalonians. They are similar emphases but worded differently in order to meet very different spiritual needs in the two sets of congregations in Galatians and Thessalonians. Paul

therefore applied the Gospel in different ways in order to meet these distinctive needs. At Thessalonica the issue of the second coming of Christ was the distinctive concern, most likely due to the pressure of ongoing persecution from both the Jewish synagogue and the governing authorities. The issue at Thessalonica evolved from 'lack of understanding' to 'incorrect understanding' between the two letters. Paul corrected both in the two separate letters. No issue of heresy seems to have been present in either situation.

We have much that we can therefore learn from these first three letters.