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One Volume Overview

First Thessalonians

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INTRODUCTION

First Thessalonians brings us to the second writing of Paul that we have in our New Testament. It stands as a 'love letter' from the apostle to the community of believers in the Macedonian city of Thessalonika. Few of Paul's other letters come close to matching this one with expressions of appreciation and admiration for his readers. The resolute faith commitment of the Thessalonians to the apostolic Gospel stood as an example for all communities of believers to follow.

9.2. First Thessalonians

Paul's first letter, Galatians, was composed from somewhere in Macedonia on the second missionary journey, or perhaps just prior to arriving in Macedonia. His second letter was composed at Athens in the province of Achaia after passing through Macedonia with Silas, Timothy and others. Paul arrived in Macedonia sometime around 49 / 50 AD and within a few months, perhaps a year, he was in Athens, when this letter was composed to the Christian community at Thessalonika in the province of Macedonia.

Although written early in Paul's writing ministry, the letter displays textbook like use of basic Greek letter formatting styles, which reflect the work of someone quite knowledgeable of how to write letters effectively. Some of this, of course, would reflect the compositional skills of his writing secretary as well as his own skills. Added to this core structuring of the document are the creative variations and expansions that will come to typify most all of the thirteen letters in the Pauline corpus of the New Testament.



9.2.1 Praescriptio

The standard three *Praescriptio* elements are listed at the very beginning of the document. They are not as elaborate as the ones in Galatians, although they are built off the identical structure. We will observe some of these distinctives as we look at each of these elements.

9.2.1.1 Superscriptio: Παῦλος καὶ Σιλουανὸς καὶ Τιμόθεος

Paul and Silas and Timothy:

In comparing this Superscriptio with the one in Galatians notice some distinctives here.

Galatians Superscriptio:

1.1 Παῦλος ἀπόστολος οὐκ ἀπ' ἀνθρώπων οὐδὲ δι' ἀνθρώπου ἀλλὰ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ θεοῦ πατρὸς τοῦ ἐγείραντος αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν, 2 καὶ οἱ σὺν ἐμοὶ πάντες ἀδελφοί

Paul an apostle not from men neither through a man but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead and all the brothers with me. While the letter comes from multiple senders with Paul as the primary one, something different is present.¹ The

¹Three passages in particular, however, suggest that the letter



other senders are not named in Galatians but in First Thessalonians they are identified as Silas and Timothy by name. In doing this Paul then leaves off his title as ἀπόστολος since such a title would not have been appropriate for Silas and Timothy. Additionally, his status as an apostle is not an issue at Thessalonica as it was among the churches in the province of Galatia. In Thessalonica he was highly respected by the church. Thus not only does he leave off his title, but he then includes no expansion of it as a signal of coming themes in the letter body.

A comparison of [Paul's letters](#) with multiple senders listed reveals that where a title plays some role in the contents of the letter body, Paul will list it about himself, and occasionally an appropriate title for the other sender(s) when they are mentioned by name. Paul does not list a title after his name only in First and Second Thessalonians. Uniquely in Philippians he uses one title for him and Timothy appropriate to both of them, that of δοῦλοι, servants.

One particularity of note is the spelling of the name for Silas: Σιλουανός.² Most likely this plays off

should be read primarily as an embodiment of Paul's thought. In 2:18 the first person plural is replaced by the first person singular in the second part of the verse where Paul specifically identifies himself: διότι ἠθελήσαμεν ἐλθεῖν πρὸς ὑμᾶς, ἐγὼ μὲν Παῦλος καὶ ἄπαξ καὶ δὶς ('wherefore we wished to come to you, I Paul, once and again'). A few verses later, in 3:5, the first person singular occurs again. Given Paul's self-assertion in 2:18, we must assume that καὶ ἐπεμψα ('and I ... sent') in 3:5 also refers to Paul himself. This impression is further confirmed by the fact that the passage in question concerns an occasion when Timothy was sent as a substitute for the person who stands behind the 'I.' From other letters of Paul we know that this is precisely how Paul employed Timothy (cf. 1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10; Phil. 2:19). The other text in which the first person singular occurs is 5:27, where the author of the letter 'adjures' his readers to ensure that the letter is read to 'all the brothers.' The sheer authoritativeness of this injunction implies an author of the stature of Paul who could impose such a demand on his readers (see R. F. Collins, "Paul," 351–353 for further discussion of the 'I' passages.) [Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1990), 67–68.]

²Σιλουανός, οὗ, ὁ (Diod S 11, 27, 1, a Σ. as contemporary with the battle of Salamis [480 B.C.]; OGI 533, 50 [time of Augustus] and later ins and pap; Jos., Ant. 20:14; in rabbinic lit. אַילָוּן CIJ I, 596) *Silvanus*; surely the same man who appears in Ac as Σίλας (q.v.). Either he had two names (like Paul), one Semit. and one Lat. (Zahn), or Σιλουανός is the Lat. form of the same name that is Grecized in Σίλας (B-D-F §125, 2; Mlt-H. 109f; 146). **2 Cor 1:19** (v.l. Σιλβανός, which is also found Diod S 11, 41, 1); **1 Th 1:1**; **2 Th 1:1** (s. also the subscr. of 2 Th); **1 Pt 5:12** (this pass. has given rise to the conclusion that Silvanus was somehow or other [as translator? in Sb 8246, 38 Germanus speaks before the court δι' Ἀνουβίωνος ἐρμηνεύοντος] connected w. the writing of 1 Pt; e.g., Zahn [Einleitung II3 10f], GWohlenberg [NKZ 24, 1913, 742–62], WBornemann [Der erste Petrusbrief—eine Taufrede des Silvanus?: ZNW 19, 1920, 143ff], Harnack [Mission I4 1923, 85],

Silas' Latin name *Silvanus* brought over into Greek as Σιλουανός. The more natural Greek spelling of the Latin *Silvanus* is Σιλᾶς. The Latin based spelling is only used four times in the NT: 2 Cor. 1:19; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; 1 Pet. 5:12, while Σίλας shows up twelve times exclusively in Acts.³ Much less likely is the much later Hebrew spelling in rabbinic Judaism אַילָוּן suggesting a Semitic origin for Σιλουανός. Why Paul uses the latinized form here is not entirely clear. Perhaps it was because Silas had a distinctly Roman background more than a Greek one, and Paul desired to highlight this every time he referred to him. The NT texts imply rather strongly that Silas was Jewish, but with a Latin name most likely was Diaspora Jewish. But we can't be certain because no specific background information on him is ever provided in the NT. Perhaps Silas was also a Roman citizen as somewhat implied in Paul's statement to the Roman jailor in Acts 16:37.

Both he and Timothy were companions of Paul on the second missionary journey with Timothy having joined the group at Lystra in Galatia (cf. Acts 16). Silas first appears inside the NT as a trusted member of the Jewish Christian community in Jerusalem (Acts 15:22, 32). He surfaces as a fellow missionary with Paul in Acts 15:40-18:5 and then disappears from the Acts narrative. He had been chosen by Paul after the rather intense disagreement between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark (Acts 15:40). All of this certainly points in the direction of Silas having the same viewpoint as Paul toward non-Jews coming into the Christian faith. Evidently he was more suited to the task of evangelizing Gentiles than others in the church at Antioch at the beginning of the second missionary journey.

The inclusion of both these men as letter senders along with Paul signals that at least they were well known by the Christian community in Thessalonica. Acts 17:1-9 describes the founding of that community by Paul, Silas, and Timothy -- and probably also Luke who joined the group either at Troas or Philippi. When Paul was forced to leave Macedonia from Jewish synagogue pressures both Timothy and Silas were left behind at Berea to assist the newly formed Christian

LRadermacher [Der 1 Pt u. Silvanus: ZNW 25, 1926, 287ff]; ES-elwyn, 1 Pt '46, 9–17 but s. WKümmel [Intro. NT, tr. HKee, '75, 416–25].—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), 923.]

³“The name Silvanus is a Roman cognomen, a Latinized form of Silas. Derived from the Latin *silva*, meaning ‘wood,’ Silvanus is also the name of a Roman deity, who represents the life-giving force of nature.” [John Gillman, “Silas (Person),” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 22.]

communities. But they had instructions to join Paul in the southern province of Achaia without too much delay (Acts 17:15).

Paul first landed at Athens in Achaia and spent some time there evangelizing. First Thessalonians 3:2 states that at least Timothy, most likely Silas as well, joined him in Athens. This somewhat differs from Luke's statement in Acts 18:5 that both Timothy and Silas joined Paul at Corinth upon coming from Macedonia.

Though scholars sometimes try to make a big issue over this apparent difference, the solution is simply that Timothy and Silas joined Paul in Athens sometime during the month or so that he was in the city.⁴ They brought news about the condition of the churches in Macedonia that included the community at Thessalonica. This prompted the writing of the first letter to the church which both of them carried back to Thessalonica. After delivering the letter and visiting the other communities at both Philippi and Berea they returned again to Achaia and caught up with Paul now at Corinth. This prompted the writing of Second Thessalonians which they then carried back to Thessalonica, revisited the churches at Philippi and Berea before rejoining Paul in Corinth during his eighteen month stay in the city before all of them returned to Judea.

The Acts 18:1 reference clearly implies in Luke's depiction that a generous financial offering was brought to Paul from the churches in Macedonia that relieved the apostle from splitting time earning a living and doing ministry. From that point he focused all of this time on ministry which enabled a more extensive evangelizing of the city.

9.2.1.2 Adscriptio: 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.*

This specification of readers is rather short and without much elaboration. The two most common elements, the specification of the group and the geographical location of the group, τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ Θεσσαλονικέων *to the church of the Thessalonians*, comprise the core of the *Adscriptio*. This is followed by the lengthy prepositional phrase ἐν θεῷ πατρὶ καὶ κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ, *in God the Father and Lord Jesus Christ*, that stands as the exclusive expansion to the core.

One thing to be noted is the exact reproduction of this *Adscriptio* in Second Thessalonians only with the

⁴The one variable in this scenario is whether or not Silas made the first trip to Athens, or whether he remained in Macedonia and then returned with Timothy later when they found Paul in Corinth. The inclusion of Silas in the *Superscriptio* of First Thessalonians would point strongly toward him being in Athens at the time of the writing of this letter, as well as in Corinth with Timothy at the writing of Second Thessalonians. This would best account for the almost identical *Superscriptio* between these two letters.

insertion of 'our': τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ Θεσσαλονικέων ἐν θεῷ πατρὶ *ἡμῶν* καὶ κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ, *to the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and Lord Jesus Christ*,

Also interesting to note is the manner of addressing his letters to congregations during his active missionary work in comparison to how he addressed them upon being taken prisoner in Jerusalem. The *Adscriptio* in Romans (1:7) marks the switch in pattern.⁵ The early pattern uses ἐκκλησία, *church*, while the later pattern uses αἰγιοί, *saints*. To be sure, both designations are found in all of the letters but this beginning designation follows a specific pattern. And not much difference in meaning exists between the two terms. With the ending of Romans at chapter 15 anticipating imprisonment, it may well be that this reality loomed large in Paul's mind as he wrote to different congregations after finishing the third missionary journey. The time difference is from the late 40s to the mid 50s and then the mid 50s to the early 60s, about seven or eight years for both patterns.

The use of ἐκκλησία here in First Thessalonians to designate groups of house churches meeting independently across the city is not unusual. It is one of the most commonly used designations of Christian congregations in the NT with 114 uses. The Jewish heritage of the term becomes obvious with ἐκκλησία used six of these 114 times in reference to Israel: Acts 7:38; 19:39, 41; Heb. 2:12; 12:23. The emphasis is upon 'gathering' or 'meeting' of a group of God's people. They come together as a group under His direction. In the collective sense of the geographical designations in the *Adscriptio* each of the house church gatherings reflected one part of the larger people of God in meeting to glorify God as His people in the city. Drawing close lines of distinction in subcategories is mostly the nonsense born of modern denominationalism.⁶ Although the moderns distinc-

⁵Paul's earlier letters are explicitly addressed to churches (cf. 2 Thess 1:1; Gal 1:2; 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1), but his later letters to churches are variously addressed to 'all God's beloved ... , called to be saints' (Rom 1:7); 'all the saints' (Phil 1:1); 'the saints and faithful brethren in Christ' (Col 1:2); 'the saints who are also faithful in Christ Jesus' (Eph 1:1)." [F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 6–7.]

⁶General dictionaries like Passow, Pape, K. Jacobitz-E. E. Seller (1839–41), Bensenler 15(1931), give the two senses 1. 'assembly' and 2. 'church'; they call the former secular and the latter biblical or ecclesiastical. Following the general scheme, Liddell-Scott refers also to the LXX and gives us the following senses: 1. 'assembly duly summoned, less general than σύλλογος,' 2. a. in the LXX 'the Jewish congregation,' b. in the NT 'the Church as a body of Christians.'

"NT lexicons follow the same arrangement, but go on to make a distinction between the Church a. as the whole body of believers and b. as the individual congregation, e.g., the house church. This raises the question whether a. or b. comes first, i.e., in what sense we have a succession as well as co-existence of the two meanings.

Various answers are given. Wilke-Grimm. has as the *christianus sensus the coetus Christianorum* in the following order: ... *qui alicubi regionum, urbium, vicorum eiusmodi coetum constituunt atque in unam societatem coniuncti sunt, and universus Christianorum coetus per totam terrain dispersus*. The Roman Catholic F. Zorell (Lexic. Graec. Novi Testamenti 2[1931]) has the opposite order, *coetus religiosus ... universitas eorum qui ad societatem religiosam a Christo institutam pertinent, and ecclesia aliqua particularis, i.e. alicuius regionis vel civitatis Christi fideles suo episcopo subditi, fere == dioecesis*. Pr.-Bauer accepts the former order: ‘The congregation as the gathering of Christians living in a given place, and universally the Church in which all those who are called are together’; he goes on to speak accordingly of the local and the universal ἐκκλησία. The dictionaries vary in their distinction between the congregation and the Church. In some passages it is hard to tell which is really meant according to our current use of the terms.

“The distinctions mentioned are mostly those of denomination or school rather than of lexical or biblical and theological enquiry. Thus an Anglican may speak of the ἐκκλησία as the one Church, ‘the body of Christians.’ A Roman Catholic will begin with the universal ecclesia on the basis of Mt. 16:18,1 and he will then go on to emphasise the subordination of the individual congregation to the bishop. The orthodox Protestant will refer first to the whole community, while the liberal Protestant will think of the local congregation, and some confusion may be caused by earlier territorial church government (*alicubi regionum*). The translations and commentaries reflect this. As always, Cr.-Kö. is a notable exception. This digs deeper, and from the standpoint of biblical theology reaches more valuable lexical conclusions. On the basis of the OT use of ἐκκλησία for the total community of Israel, it speaks of the ‘saved community of the NT’ which finds expression first as the total community and then as the same community in ‘local circumscription’ (a carefully selected phrase). Express reference is made to the fact that there is not always a hard and fast distinction between the local community and the universal community. In this respect the remark of Zorell is apposite: *Cum primo tempore 1 et 2 (sc. ecclesia universalis et ecclesia particularis) coinciderent, ad utrumvis licebit referre A.* (Ac.) 2:47; 5:11 al.

“In translation and exposition of ἐκκλησία there is no point in the pedantic piling up of different expressions. This is primarily shown by the simple but cogent fact that the NT always uses the same word even where we usually distinguish between the ‘Church’ and the ‘congregation.’ The further fact that the same word is used in secular Greek on the one side and the OT and NT on the other is an additional reason why we should try to find a single rendering. We must first ask whether we might not always use either ‘Church’ or ‘congregation’ in the NT. This concern for a single, unequivocal rendering leads us further and raises the decisive questions of church government in the NT: How is the so-called Church related to the so-called congregation? What is the bearing of Mt. 16:18? Is the primitive community at Jerusalem Church or congregation? What is its relation to other communities throughout the Roman Empire? What does ἐκκλησία mean in Jewish Christianity (Peter), in Gentile Christianity (Paul), in primitive Catholicism? We must also ask whether a single translation, Church or congregation, can be adopted for the whole range of biblical usage. This enquiry also leads us further and raises the question of the interrelation of the OT and the NT. As a Heb. term lies behind the LXX ἐκκλησία,² it is also necessary to find the Aram. equivalent which would be used by Jesus and the first congregation in Jerusalem. This is another question which plunges us at once into material problems. Finally,

tions are perceived as important, one must never forget that this discussion has absolutely no foundation in the NT, and would not have occurred to the apostles. The simple visible gathering of a group of people committed to Christ is the heart of ἐκκλησία in the NT. Paul sees these either in terms of individual house church groups (cf. Rom. 16: 5) or as in the *Adscripta* as one collection of gatherings across a city, or cities as in the case of Gal. 1. Both the Jewish background and also the extensive use of ἐκκλησία in the Greek social structures for group meetings⁷ provide the foundation for understanding what Paul meant here in First Thessalonians. The rest is useless theological baggage obscuring our understanding of the NT text.



we must ask whether a single rendering cannot be found to cover all Gk. usage, secular as well as sacred. ‘Community’ or ‘assembly’ might be suggested. But this again leads us a step further and raises the question of the special term which the NT community had for itself. Why did it avoid a cultic term and choose instead a secular one?

“In both the secular and the biblical use of ἐκκλησία the dictionaries distinguish between the assembling of men and the men thus assembled. Hence a prima facie case V 3, p 504 can be made out for a word like ‘assembly,’ which has both an abstract and a concrete sense.”

[Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 3:502–504.]

⁷“The Greek word was used of a summoned assembly, for example, a regularly summoned political body (cf. Josephus, Ant. 12.164) or a public gathering of a more general sort (cf. Acts 19:32).” [Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1990), 70.]

The open meetings of groups of believers in Thessalonica made an important statement to the city. Although the Jewish synagogue would claim the term $\lambda\eta\gamma$ which the LXX renders as $\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\kappa\lambda\eta\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$, the assertion of believers in this label is their right to this term as the new people of God in Christ. The Jewish gravitation toward $\sigma\upsilon\nu\alpha\gamma\omega\gamma\acute{\eta}$ for an open gathering of God's people⁸ may have very well opened the door for the Christian preference for $\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\kappa\lambda\eta\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$, with the almost identical meaning.⁹ Therefore one understands much of the tension between synagogue and church in the Diaspora, where Paul worked and preached. With non-Jews rapidly becoming the dominate ethnic element in these Christian gatherings the tensions begin reaching a boiling point. Also this creates a growing distinction between the synagogue and church where the synagogue enjoys *religio licita* status with the government and the church doesn't.

The geographical designation $\Theta\epsilon\sigma\sigma\alpha\lambda\omicron\nu\iota\kappa\acute{\epsilon}\omega\nu$, the personal noun from $\Theta\epsilon\sigma\sigma\alpha\lambda\omicron\nu\iota\kappa\acute{\epsilon}\upsilon\varsigma$, of the **Thessalonians**, does not seem to have a particular significance as used in the *Adscriptio*. Both Luke in Acts and Paul in several letters shifts back and forth at will between the pure geographical noun $\Theta\epsilon\sigma\sigma\alpha\lambda\omicron\nu\iota\kappa\eta$, **Thessalonica**, and the personal geographical noun $\Theta\epsilon\sigma\sigma\alpha\lambda\omicron\nu\iota\kappa\acute{\epsilon}\upsilon\varsigma$, **Thessalonian**.¹⁰ First and Second Thessalonians are the only two letters where just the personal geographical noun is used.

The Greek city by the name of $\Theta\epsilon\sigma\sigma\alpha\lambda\omicron\nu\iota\kappa\eta$ dates

⁸It is critically important to not overlook the historical reality that in the first century virtually all Jewish synagogue meetings took place in private homes. Most secular social groups did the same thing and would label their meeting as an $\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\kappa\lambda\eta\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$.

⁹“Because the Christian community constituted the new people of God who assembled regularly for worship and fellowship, the word was taken over by Paul and others as a designation for any local Christian community (cf. 1 Cor. 4:17; Gal. 1:22), for the wider Christian community (cf. 1 Cor. 12:28), and even for house churches (Rom. 16:5). Use of $\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\kappa\lambda\eta\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$ for the assembly of the Christian community may also reflect the desire for a distinctively “Christian” identity in the face of Jewish use of $\sigma\upsilon\nu\alpha\gamma\omega\gamma\acute{\eta}$ for local Jewish congregations (cf. Acts 6:9).” [Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1990), 70.]

¹⁰ $\Theta\epsilon\sigma\sigma\alpha\lambda\omicron\nu\iota\kappa\acute{\epsilon}\upsilon\varsigma$, $\acute{\epsilon}\omega\varsigma$, $\acute{\omicron}$ (Mel., HE 4, 26, 10; Steph. Byz. s.v. $\Theta\epsilon\sigma\sigma\alpha\lambda\omicron\nu\iota\kappa\eta$) **Thessalonian**, *an inhabitant of Thessalonica* **Ac 20:4; 27:2; 1 Th 1:1**, ins; **2 Th 1:1**, ins.

$\Theta\epsilon\sigma\sigma\alpha\lambda\omicron\nu\iota\kappa\eta$, $\eta\varsigma$, $\acute{\eta}$ (Polyb. 22, 11, 2; Strabo 7 Fgm. 24; Ps.-Lucian, Asin. 46; anon. De Historia Diadochorum [time unknown]: 155 Fgm. 2, 3 Jac.; ins [SIG index vol. IV 94]) **Thessalonica**, *a city in Macedonia on the Thermaic Gulf*. Paul founded a congregation here **Ac 17:1, 11, 13; Phil 4:16; 2 Ti 4:10**.—BHHW III 1968; DACL XV 1 and 624–713; Kl. Pauly V 761–63.

[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), 454.]



back to 316 BCE and was named after Alexander the Great's stepsister.¹¹ It had a checkered past in its dealings with the Romans, sometimes being on the winning side and often not, in the midst of the internal struggles for dominance in the transition from Roman Republic to Roman Empire. It was located on the important *Via Egnatia* as an important port city. Along this Roman road, Philippi to Amphipolis to Apollonia and to Thessalonica were about 30 to 35 miles apart, requiring a two day journey to each one. By the middle of the first Christian century the city was relatively prosperous and enjoyed the favor of Rome. By this point in time the process of “Romanization” of the culture in the city was unusually thorough for cities in this part of the ancient world.¹²

¹¹“City mentioned in Acts 17:1–13; 1–2 Thessalonians; Phil 4:16; and 2 Tim 4:10. It was founded in 316 B.C.E. by Cassander, the son of Antipater, whom Alexander the Great had left in charge of Macedonia. It was named in honor of Cassander's wife, Thessalonike, a stepsister of Alexander and the last surviving member of the ancient royal family of Macedonia. Built at the head of the Thermaikos Gulf below the Hortiates mountains, the city rose steeply above its harbor.

“It is possible that Thessalonica was constructed on the site of an earlier settlement, Therme. Remains of foundations and fragments of an archaic temple (ca. 500 B.C.E.) have been found in the W part of the city, but it has not been possible to ascertain the deity in whose honor it was erected or the structure's precise size and plan. A series of ancient Greek coins without a legend but bearing a Pegasus obverse type found at Thessalonica has been connected with Therme (Gaebler 1906). On the basis of the association, it has been suggested that Therme was a Corinthian foundation, colonized perhaps under Periander's rule (ca. 600 B.C.E.).”

[Holland L. Hendrix, “Thessalonica (Place),” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:523.]

¹²“Aside from a number of tombs, some pottery, terra-cotta figurines, and smaller objects, surprisingly few Hellenistic remains have been discovered in Thessalonica. An inscription dated to 60 B.C.E. (IT [= Edson 1972]no. 7) found near the Roman forum makes mention of an agora. It is possible that this earlier Hellenistic agora was rebuilt later into the Roman forum, at least part of which has been excavated. Beneath the forum's pavement were found varieties of Hellenistic pottery and a late Hellenistic “Atlas” now on display in the city's Archaeological Museum.” [Holland L. Hendrix, “Thessalonica (Place),” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992),

The tumultuous beginning of the Christian church there is described by Luke in Acts 17:1-9. From this description it appears that Paul and his missionary team were in the city barely a month before being forced out by Jewish opposition. The city leaders ended up being manipulated by Jewish leaders who were the real villains in this scene. The unfounded charge of treason against Rome proved to be the needed 'hot button' with the authorities that these Jewish leaders could use. Just calling Christianity a new religion being introduced would not have gained the attention of these authorities. From archaeological records it appears that the city itself was relatively open minded about accepting the worship of new gods into the city. Numerous Egyptian deities were brought into the city during this same period of time and received very favorably. Ultimately the irony is the later flourishing of Christianity and the complete disappearance of Judaism from the city.

The limited expansion elements of ἐν θεῷ πατρὶ καὶ κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ, *in God the Father and Lord Jesus Christ*, serves the purpose of affirming the role of both God and Christ in the existence of the church in the city. The Jewish synagogues in the city would have claimed the reference to God, but would have vigorously denied the latter. The close linking of God and Christ more typically surfaces in the *Salutatio* of Paul's letters rather than in the *Adscriptio*. His mentioning of this in the *Adscriptio* accounts for not listing it in the *Salutatio*.

Additionally, the congregation in Thessalonica is not labeled τῆ ἐκκλησίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ, *the church of God* (cf. 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1). Instead it is τῆ ἐκκλησίᾳ Θεσσαλονικέων ἐν θεῷ, *the church of the Thessalonians in God*. This has a strong emphasis on the very existence of the life of the church being in God and then also in Christ.¹³ It would have stressed this identity especially to those Jewish Christian members with

6:523.]

¹³“Here, however, the believing community in Thessalonica is not called the church of God, but the church ‘in God.’ This is an unusual expression in the Pauline corpus, where otherwise “in God” is used of boasting in God (Rom 2:17; 5:11) or of being hidden in God (Eph 3:9; Col 3:3). On the other hand, ‘in Christ,’ ‘in Christ Jesus’ or ‘in the Lord’ is a characteristic Pauline expression, especially when it has ‘incorporative’ force, pointing to believers’ participation in Christ’s risen life or their membership in his body. If this is the force of the words ‘in ... the Lord Jesus Christ’ here, then ‘in God the Father’ must be understood in the same way. This is so uncharacteristic of Paul that Best (62) thinks the preposition ἐν must have instrumental force: ‘the Christian community brought into being by God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.’ (The affirmation of Acts 17:28, ‘in him we live and move and have our being,’ perhaps quoted from Epimenides of Crete, refers to the old creation and not to the new order of grace.) Possibly Silvanus rather than Paul is responsible for the present wording, which designates God and Christ as the sphere in which the church exists.” [F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 7.

continued participation in the Jewish synagogue that brought criticism toward this new Christian religion. Clearly the theme of the Thessalonian church being both in God and in Christ will surface repeatedly in the letter body of this document.

9.2.1.3 Salutatio: χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη *Grace to you and peace.*

This initial greeting is the shortest of all those in Paul's letters. For a foundational understanding of the role of the *Salutatio* in ancient letters and of Paul's distinctive use of it in his letters, see the above discussion on the *Salutatio* in [Gal. 1:1-5](#). The principles set forth there are assumed here as well.

The twin Greek and Hebrew peace greetings are used by Paul here. The ethnic composition of the house church groups in the city of both Jewish and non-Jewish Christians may play some role in this unique combination of greeting. The formula nature of the statement is reflected in the absence of any verb. Evidently the typical joining of God and Christ as a common source of greeting is omitted here, perhaps due to the unusual insertion of it in the *Adscriptio*. But one shouldn't read very much into this, since it is added in both places in the *Adscriptio / Salutatio* of Second Thessalonians.

The contents of the letter body reflect that the apostle feels himself to be on good terms with the Christian community in Thessalonica. His commendation of them in the expansion elements of the Proem confirms this positive stance toward the congregation. Therefore he does not believe that special emphasis upon their relationship needs to be expressed here in the *Salutatio*.

9.2.2 Proem, 1:2-10

2 Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ πάντοτε περὶ πάντων ὑμῶν μνεῖαν ποιούμενοι ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν ἡμῶν, ἀδιαλείπτως 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, 4 εἰδότες, ἀδελφοὶ ἠγαπημένοι ὑπὸ [τοῦ] θεοῦ, τὴν ἐκλογὴν ὑμῶν, 5 ὅτι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ἡμῶν οὐκ ἐγενήθη εἰς ὑμᾶς ἐν λόγῳ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν δυνάμει καὶ ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ καὶ [ἐν] πληροφορίᾳ πολλῇ, καθὼς οἴδατε οἳοι ἐγενήθημεν [ἐν] ὑμῖν δι' ὑμᾶς. 6 Καὶ ὑμεῖς μιμηταὶ ἡμῶν ἐγενήθητε καὶ τοῦ κυρίου, δεξάμενοι τὸν λόγον ἐν θλίψει πολλῇ μετὰ χαρᾶς πνεύματος ἁγίου, 7 ὥστε γενέσθαι ὑμᾶς τύπον πᾶσιν τοῖς πιστεύουσιν ἐν τῇ Μακεδονίᾳ καὶ ἐν τῇ Ἀχαΐᾳ. 8 ἅψ' ὑμῶν γὰρ ἐξήχηται ὁ λόγος τοῦ κυρίου οὐ μόνον ἐν τῇ Μακεδονίᾳ καὶ [ἐν τῇ] Ἀχαΐᾳ, ἀλλ' ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ ἢ πίστις ὑμῶν ἢ πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ἐξελήλυθεν, ὥστε μὴ χρεῖαν ἔχειν ἡμᾶς λαλεῖν τι. 9 αὐτοὶ γὰρ περὶ ἡμῶν ἀπαγγέλλουσιν ὅποιαν εἴσοδον ἔσχομεν πρὸς ὑμᾶς,

καὶ πῶς ἐπεστρέψατε πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ἀπὸ τῶν εἰδώλων δουλεύειν θεῷ ζῶντι καὶ ἀληθινῷ 10 καὶ ἀναμένειν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν, ὃν ἤγειρεν ἐκ [τῶν] νεκρῶν, Ἰησοῦν τὸν ῥυόμενον ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῆς ὀργῆς τῆς ἐρχομένης.

2 We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly 3 remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. 4 For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of persons we proved to be among you for your sake. 6 And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. 8 For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it. 9 For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, 10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.

Here is where we first encounter one of Paul's almost formula like sentences expressing a formal prayer wish in behalf of his targeted readers. The *Prayer of Thanksgiving* is expressed in a single sentence in vv. 2-5, which a little shorter than the typical ones. Vv. 6-10 become an extended tribute to the quality of Christian commitment that had typified the Thessalonians from the beginning to the writing of this letter several months later. This replaces the more common *Prayer of Intercession* for his readers in the many other *Proema* of his letters.

9.2.2.1 Prayer of Thanksgiving. vv. 2-5. This single sentence is built off the core main clause of Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ, *we give thanks to God*. Everything else is an expansion of this foundational declaration.

Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ

- 1) πάντοτε
- 2) περὶ πάντων ὑμῶν
- 3) μνεῖαν *ποιούμενοι* ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν ἡμῶν,
- 4) ἀδιαλείπτως *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,
- 5) *εἰδότες*, ἀδελφοὶ ἠγαπημένοι ὑπὸ [τοῦ] θεοῦ, *τὴν ἐκλογὴν* ὑμῶν, *ὅτι* τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ἡμῶν

οὐκ ἐγενήθη εἰς ὑμᾶς ἐν λόγῳ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν δυνάμει καὶ ἐν πνεύματι ἀγίῳ καὶ [ἐν] πληροφῶρᾳ πολλῇ, καθὼς οἴδατε οἷοι ἐγενήθημεν [ἐν] ὑμῖν δι' ὑμᾶς.

When separated out into the component elements it becomes a beautiful picture of gratitude by Paul for his readers. The adverb followed by the adverbial preposition then followed by *three adverbial functioning participle phrases* provide a detailed expression of his stance toward the congregation.

The introductory declaration Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ is repeated either in the singular or plural depending upon how many senders are specified in the *Superscriptio* in 1 Thess. 1:2; 1 Cor. 1:4; Rom. 1:8; Philm. 4; Col. 1:3; Phil. 1:3. Slight deviations of it surface in Εὐχαριστεῖν ὀφείλομεν τῷ θεῷ, *we ought to give thanks to God* (2 Thess 1:3); Εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ* (2 Cor. 1:3; Eph. 1:3); Χάριν ἔχω τῷ ἐνδυναμώσαντί με, *I am grateful to the One who strengthened me* (1 Tim. 1:12); Χάριν ἔχω τῷ θεῷ, *I have praise to God* (2 Tim. 1:3).

The present tense form of the verb Εὐχαριστοῦμεν stresses ongoing gratitude to God for the Thessalonians. The formula nature of the core expression signal an 'opening prayer' for the letter following in the standard Jewish synagogue opening prayer which early Christians incorporated into their meeting patterns. Also Paul's letters end with a prayer following that same meeting pattern of ending with a prayer.

This was important for Paul and the impact of his letters. The formula pattern in the opening prayer had the effect of formally asking God to bless the group, and as the letter was read by the one who brought it from Paul the listeners could hear the voice of the respected apostle asking God to bless them, as well as acknowledging to God his appreciation of them in their service to Christ.

The expansion elements in v. 2-5 add richness of detail to Paul's gratitude to God for his readers.

1) *πάντοτε, always*. This temporal adverb underscores the apostle's continuing gratitude to God for the Thessalonians. It highlights the continuing action of the present tense verb. As a compound adverb built from πᾶν plus τότε the strict literal sense is *at all times*.

2) *περὶ πάντων ὑμῶν, for all of you*. The inclusiveness of Paul's continuing gratitude is stated by this prepositional phrase. Although commentators will often debate whether the phrase modifies the main verb Εὐχαριστοῦμεν (before it) or the participle ποιούμενοι (after it), the reality of Greek syntax in this world was that by placing it strategically between the two, it impacted both. That is, Paul was grateful for all of the

believers at Thessalonica, and also, he prayed for all of them regularly as well.

3) **μνειάν ποιούμενοι ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν ἡμῶν, making mention (of you all)¹⁴ in our prayers.** The phrase μνειάν ποιούμενοι is somewhat common prayer language in Paul: Rom. 1:9 (μνειάν ὑμῶν ποιούμαι); Eph. 1:16 (ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν μνειάν ποιούμενος ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν μου); Phlm. 4 (μνειάν σου ποιούμενος ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν μου). In the secular Attic writers, μνειάν ποιούμενοι has the equivalent meaning of ‘mentioning’ (cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 254a; Protagoras 317e). In the prayer life of the apostle, he mentioned the Thessalonians to the Lord in gratefulness. The phrase μνειάν ποιούμενοι doesn’t itself imply praying as 3:6 illustrates. Thus the addition of ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν ἡμῶν, **in our prayers**, specifies Paul’s prayers as his point of mentioning the Thessalonians to God. Important to remember here: ‘our’ prayers, thus alluding to a regular pattern of the three individuals in the *Superscriptio* coming together to pray for various concerns, and the Thessalonians were one of those concerns.

4) **ἀδιαλείπτως μνημονεύοντες ὑμῶν..., unceasingly remembering your...** The temporal adverb ἀδιαλείπτως is very similar in meaning to πάντοτε with both emphasizing continuing verbal action. The participle μνημονεύοντες is virtually a synonym of μνειάν ποιούμενοι. The introductory expression here ἀδιαλείπτως μνημονεύοντες essentially repeats the preceding phrase μνειάν ποιούμενοι in order to put specifics on the table regarding things that Paul is grateful to God for the Thessalonians.

In lyrical phraseology, Paul mentions a trilogy of virtues among the Thessalonians:

**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,

These three virtues -- work, labor, endurance -- are focused on two objectives:

τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ
in our Lord Jesus Christ
ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν,
before our God and Father

Thus faith, love, and hope are centered **in our Lord Jesus Christ**. Additionally these are being expressed in the very presence of God within the imagery of temple service done before the Holy of Holies. Further, the subjective genitive case function is used for these three

¹⁴Note how several manuscript copyists added ὑμῶν between μνειάν and ποιούμενοι in order to smooth out the construction: κ² C D F G K L P Ψ 104. 365. 630. 1175. 1241. 1505. 2464 M it vg^{cl}. ww sy; Ambst [Eberhard Nestle and Erwin Nestle, *Nestle-Aland: NTG Apparatus Criticus*, ed. Barbara Aland et al., 28. revidierte Auflage. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012), 622.]

qualities. The impact of this is simply:

**work produced by faith
labor produced by love
endurance produced by hope.**

The structure is just complicated enough to make clear English translation exceedingly difficult, but relatively simple in Greek syntax.¹⁵

5) **εἰδότες, ἀδελφοὶ ἠγαπημένοι ὑπὸ [τοῦ] θεοῦ, τὴν ἐκλογὴν ὑμῶν, ὅτι..., knowing, brothers beloved by God, your election that...** This final appendage to Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ both defines specific thanksgiving and serves also to set up the lengthy tribute in vv. 6-10. The apostle is grateful for the divine election of the Thessalonians.¹⁶ What Paul means by τὴν ἐκλογὴν ὑμῶν is explained by the epegetically functioning ὅτι in v. 5.¹⁷ This explanation is somewhat surprising in its focus on Paul’s initial preaching of the Gospel to them and their choosing to accept this message.

Paul’s expressing thanksgiving to God grows out of what he knows about the Thessalonians: Εὐχαριστοῦμεν.... εἰδότες. The knowledge here has come from observation of the behavior of these people after professing faith in Christ. Their actions provide clear evidence of the hand of God upon them changing and directing their lives. Central to this τὴν ἐκλογὴν is the clear indication of being objects of God’s love: ἀδελφοὶ ἠγαπημένοι ὑπὸ [τοῦ] θεοῦ. God has committed Himself to them, and they in turn are committed to Him in sacrificial service.

In v. 5 Paul gives an excellent picture of his evangelistic preaching of the Gospel. It contains several as-

¹⁵“The thanksgiving’s rhythmic flair is matched in rhetorical force only by its choice of diction, as if Paul brushed his epistolary canvas in colors drawn from the rich palette of the Septuagint or from other Jewish literature. Often deemed a signal of ‘group identity or a close sense of group kinship’ (e.g., Deut 15:3),³² the expression ἀδελφοὶ (adelphoi, ‘brothers and sisters’) here connotes a fictive kinship group, all of whose members can claim God as their Father (cf. 1:1). Similarly, the expressions “‘loved by God’ (Deut 33:12) and ‘chosen’ (Deut 4:37; 7:6–8; 10:14–15; 14:2) are election terms drawn from the OT, leading one scholar to aver: ‘It is clear by this early stage in his thinking Paul has already developed the concept of the church as the Israel of God.’³³” [Abraham Smith, “The First Letter to the Thessalonians,” in *New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 11 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994–2004), 688.]

¹⁶Divine ἐκλογή is linked to ἐκλέγομαι in God choosing someone for Himself. The purpose of such choosing is stated in Eph. 1:4 as εἶναι ἡμᾶς ἁγίους, **that we might be holy**.

One should not forget that the secular use of both noun and verb was simply to choose or select something or someone. The attached baggage to the modern religious use of ‘divine election’ was not present in NT usage.

¹⁷The NRSV ‘because’ for ὅτι is not correct. The clause defines the Thessalonians’ experience of being called to God through the preaching of Paul. Not gives a reason for it.

pects:¹⁸

τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ἡμῶν οὐκ ἐγενήθη εἰς ὑμᾶς
ἐν λόγῳ μόνον
ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν δυνάμει
καὶ ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ
καὶ [ἐν] πληροφορίᾳ πολλῇ,
καθὼς οἴδατε
οἳ ἐγενήθημεν
[ἐν] ὑμῖν δι' ὑμᾶς.

The double use of the aorist γίνομαι at the beginning and ending of this depiction underscores the divine presence and activity in Paul's preaching of the Gospel. This is 'fleshed' out both in the qualities of that preaching and in the pure character of Paul in preaching it. All of these emphases stand in stark contrast to the ungodly behavior of the synagogue leaders in their treatment of Paul and his message, which Luke emphasizes in Acts 17:1-9.

The qualities specified are set up in a not only ...but also pattern. The first trait ἐν λόγῳ μόνον, *in word only*, underscores the oral communication of the Gospel in that initial presentation. Luke provides an insightful depiction of this in Acts. 17:2-3

2 κατὰ δὲ τὸ εἰωθὸς τῷ Παύλῳ εἰσῆλθεν πρὸς αὐτοὺς καὶ ἐπὶ σάββατα τρία διελέξατο αὐτοῖς ἀπὸ τῶν γραφῶν, 3 διανοίγων καὶ παρατιθέμενος ὅτι τὸν χριστὸν ἔδει παθεῖν καὶ ἀναστῆναι ἐκ νεκρῶν καὶ ὅτι οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ χριστὸς [ὁ] Ἰησοῦς ὃν ἐγὼ καταγγέλλω ὑμῖν.

2 And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three sabbath days discussed with them from the scriptures, 3 explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This is the Messiah, Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you."

What Paul labels as ἐν λόγῳ, Luke describes with verbs of speaking: διελέξατο αὐτοῖς, *discussing with them*; διανοίγων καὶ παρατιθέμενος ὅτι, *explaining and demonstrating that*. No terms like preaching (κηρύσσω), proclaiming (καταγγέλλω) etc. are used either by Paul or Luke. The reason is due to the situational specific setting of a Friday evening Jewish synagogue setting, as described in Acts 17:1-9. The gatherings were not for 'worship' but for prayer and Torah study. The study of the Torah began with a reading and was followed by vigorous discussion and debate regarding its applicative meaning(s).¹⁹ Thus Paul as one invited to pres-

¹⁸This provides us a 'theological' description of Luke's 'historical' description in Acts 17:1-9

¹⁹This was standard and also reflected the educational training of Jewish boys from early childhood. Gaining a correct understanding of an issue could only be achieved through presentation of conflicting interpretations that would be evaluated back and forth until consensus was reached. In adulthood the Jewish male continued this pattern of learning in the Friday evening synagogue meetings.

ent his ideas was given the privilege to read portions of the Torah, followed by supporting sections of the Prophets and the Writings. Once these were read, he presented his interpretation. This in turn was followed by opposing critiques and probing questions regarding various interpretive points made. All of this Paul labels τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ἡμῶν οὐκ ἐγενήθη εἰς ὑμᾶς ἐν λόγῳ, *our Gospel was presented to you not just by word*. Luke, on the other hand, describes the same thing in the more conventional terms διελέξατο αὐτοῖς ἀπὸ τῶν γραφῶν, διανοίγων καὶ παρατιθέμενος ὅτι, *he was discussing with them from the scriptures, as he was explaining and presenting that...*²⁰

For Paul the bottom line of this presentation was not simply how he presented it. Far more important was the spiritual dynamic at work from God in the presentation. The presentation dynamics are defined as ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν δυνάμει καὶ ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ καὶ [ἐν] πληροφορίᾳ πολλῇ, *but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and in deep assurance*. What Paul recalled about that experience was that what was presented was done in the expression of divine authority and power, not in a man's skills. Central to this was the active presence and working of the Holy Spirit not just in Paul's presentation but more importantly in the lives of the listeners. Out of this came a presentation saturated with confidence and assurance this Christ is indeed the promised Messiah as presented in the Torah. Important to Paul was the memory of how deeply God worked in the minds and hearts of those hearing his presentation.

The final recollection is an important one: καθὼς οἴδατε οἳ ἐγενήθημεν [ἐν] ὑμῖν δι' ὑμᾶς, *just as you know the character of us who presented among you for your sakes*. The genuineness and spiritual purity of the presenter are just as crucial as his message, for they become a major persuader used by God to convince the listener and to validate his message.

Did everyone in the synagogue respond positively? Absolutely not, according to Luke in Acts 17:4-5a, καὶ τινες ἐξ αὐτῶν ἐπέισθησαν καὶ προσεκληρώθησαν τῷ Παύλῳ καὶ τῷ Σιλᾷ, τῶν τε σεβομένων Ἑλλήνων πλῆθος πολὺ, γυναικῶν τε τῶν πρώτων οὐκ ὀλίγαι. Ζηλώσαντες δὲ οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι..., *Some of them were persuaded and joined*

²⁰The highly picturesque language of Luke's verbs is impossible to capture in translation. διαλέγομαι has the sense of 'talking all the way through a topic' with an instructional thrust. The old former Pharisee set out to teach his listeners something new about the Torah. διανοίγω has the core sense of opening a topic to full exposure to others to see and understand. His goal was to so open up the Torah to these listeners that they could clearly see this new understanding. παρατίθημι has the sense of setting an idea in front of someone by standing it side by side with another idea and establishing connecting links. Here Paul put Christ as Messiah alongside the Torah and linked the two together in the presence of the synagogue listeners.

Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. 5 But the Jews became jealous,... Both Jews and non-Jews accepted Paul's Gospel, but the majority of the Jews in the synagogue did not.

With deep insight into what happened in that earlier experience, Paul labels this τὴν ἐκλογὴν ὑμῶν, *your election*. That is, their positive response reflected God's choosing of them to become His people, in contrast to the synagogue claims. God was at work and in this Gospel presentation brought into His people those who accepted the message of Paul.

9.2.2.2 Extended Tribute, vv. 6-10. Usually Paul moves from a *Prayer of Thanksgiving* to a *Prayer of Intercession* in these longer proems. But parallel to this second prayer is the noting of the existence of problems and needs in the congregations. He signals by this prayer some of what he intends to address in the letter body. But in the instance of this first letter to the Thessalonians, he has nothing but praise to offer and no criticisms. So the Prayer of Intercession is replaced by an extended praise of the Thessalonian believers.

The overarching structure is the core complement ὑμεῖς μιμηταὶ ἡμῶν ἐγενήθητε καὶ τοῦ κυρίου, *you became imitators of us and of the Lord*, in the first sentence (vv. 6-7). This is followed by two supporting sentences, each introduced by the causal conjunction γὰρ in v. 8 and in vv. 9-10. All three sentences are loaded with expansion elements that 'flesh out' the primary idea with details.

Core complement, vv. 6-7. 6 Καὶ ὑμεῖς μιμηταὶ ἡμῶν ἐγενήθητε καὶ τοῦ κυρίου, δεξάμενοι τὸν λόγον ἐν θλίψει πολλῇ μετὰ χαρᾶς πνεύματος ἁγίου, 7 ὥστε γενέσθαι ὑμᾶς τύπον πᾶσιν τοῖς πιστεύουσιν ἐν τῇ Μακεδονίᾳ καὶ ἐν τῇ Ἀχαΐᾳ. **6 And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.**

For early Christians, with no New Testament scriptures available, knowing how to properly live the Christian life depended largely upon a visible example. In the apostle Paul who first preached the Gospel to them they found a worthy example. But also that of Silas and Timothy provided insights as well. This pattern of 'imitating' would be stressed all through Paul's ministry as is reflected in Gal. 4:12; Phil. 3:17; 4:9. But the example of these men was worthy to follow only because it exemplified that of Christ Himself.

The atmosphere for the imitation was the unique

mixture of persecution and joy: δεξάμενοι τὸν λόγον ἐν θλίψει πολλῇ μετὰ χαρᾶς πνεύματος ἁγίου, *having welcomed the Word in much affliction with joy from the Holy Spirit*. The initial group of believers referenced in Acts 17:4 paid a big price for their commitment. When the mob tried to find Paul at the home of Jason, one of these believers, both he and some other believers, ἰάσονα καὶ τινας ἀδελφούς, were dragged before the local magistrates and forced to put up bail pledging they were not seeking to overthrow the empire with their new religious beliefs (17:8-9).

But what the synagogue leaders did not understand was that, contrary to customary thinking that to get in trouble with the local authorities was a stigma, these new believers rather found the joy of God in this because it helped them identify with Christ who had suffered persecution in dying for them on the cross. Their persecution became a validation from Heaven of the genuineness of their commitment and of their experience.

What was the impact of this kind of conversion experience? ὥστε γενέσθαι ὑμᾶς τύπον πᾶσιν τοῖς πιστεύουσιν ἐν τῇ Μακεδονίᾳ καὶ ἐν τῇ Ἀχαΐᾳ, *so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia*. All across these two significant Roman provinces others who were coming to faith in Christ had an example worthy to follow. Built into his declaration is the assumption that the established communities in these two provinces by the missionary team would automatically be spreading out to towns and cities in their province. The letter was written just a few months after Paul came through Thessalonica. Thus this sharing of the Gospel by these initial communities would have taken place rapidly.

First supporting declaration, v. 8. ἀφ' ὑμῶν γὰρ ἐξήχηται ὁ λόγος τοῦ κυρίου οὐ μόνον ἐν τῇ Μακεδονίᾳ καὶ [ἐν τῇ] Ἀχαΐᾳ, ἀλλ' ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ ἢ πίστις ὑμῶν ἢ πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ἐξελέλυθεν, ὥστε μὴ χρεῖαν ἔχειν ἡμᾶς λαλεῖν τι. **For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it.**

Here Paul asserts that news of the Christian conversion of these folks in Thessalonica has already begun to spread, due in part to the interaction of new converts in different cities but also due in part to the Jewish synagogue spreading news about what had happened in Thessalonica. Especially significant in a cultural atmosphere where non-Jewish interest in anything Jewish would have attracted attention, that numbers of these folks were converting to a religious faith in a Jewish leader such as Christ would have really caught attention. The reports especially from Timothy and Silas, as



they found their way to Athens, would have given Paul some awareness of this. But I suspect that other sources while in Athens provided this information as well. With Thessalonica both as a port city and as a major stopping point on the [Via Egnatia](#), news could and did travel out rapidly in several directions. The courageous commitment of these people to Christ became a point of common discussion.

Paul concludes with the comment that their example so speaks for itself that he doesn't need to describe it further: ὥστε μὴ χρεῖαν ἔχειν ἡμᾶς λαλεῖν τι.

Second supporting declaration, vv. 9-10. 9 αὐτοὶ γὰρ περὶ ἡμῶν ἀπαγγέλλουσιν ὅποιαν εἴσοδον ἔσχομεν πρὸς ὑμᾶς, καὶ πῶς ἐπεστρέψατε πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ἀπὸ τῶν εἰδώλων δουλεῦειν θεῷ ζῶντι καὶ ἀληθινῷ 10 καὶ ἀναμένειν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν, ὃν ἤγειρεν ἐκ [τῶν] νεκρῶν, Ἰησοῦν τὸν ρυόμενον ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῆς ὀργῆς τῆς ἐρχομένης. [For these inform concerning us what kind of welcome we have with you, and how you turned to God from idols in order to serve the living and true God and how you await His Son out of heaven, whom He raised from the dead, Jesus Who rescues us from the coming wrath.](#)

This second declaration primarily elaborates upon the kind of reception of the missionaries and their message given by these who became believers in Thessalonica. This complements the first supporting statement asserting the exemplary manner of their commitment and how news of it spread rapidly.

Paul's unnamed sources of information, αὐτοὶ... ἀπαγγέλλουσιν, reported on the welcoming of Paul by these converts. The noun εἴσοδος is difficult to capture fully in translation. In 2:1, it references Paul's coming to the city and his positive reception by those who became Christians. This broader meaning is what Paul means here by the word as well. Plus, the qualitative relative pronoun adjective ὅποιαν stresses a high value kind of reception of Paul. Then don't overlook the present tense verb ἔσχομεν stressing an ongoing posture. Their reception of Paul was not limited to just this initial visit. Notice the emphasis upon such a positive reception of him by those who formed the beginning Christian community. This stands in stark contrast to the abusive treatment of him and his team by the leaders of the Jewish synagogue that Luke describes in Acts 17:5-7.

Now what did the εἴσοδος of the Thessalonians imply? Paul elaborates on one central point in the second main clause of this compound sentence:

πῶς ἐπεστρέψατε πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ἀπὸ τῶν εἰδώλων, [how you turned to God from idols.](#) This is the core aspect of conversion. In v. 4, Paul referenced τὴν ἐκλογὴν ὑμῶν, [your election.](#) Then in v. 5, he elaborated on what this meant for the Thessalonians in terms of the spiritual transforming of the Gospel message upon them in their choosing to accept the message. Now in v. 9b another

depiction of this moment is given in terms of turning from idols to God. The aorist verb ἐπεστρέψατε beautifully captures the essence of conversion as a turning to God while turning away from idols. It is not just turning to God, but is also a turning away from something. The verb ἐπιστρέφω emphasizes a genuine lifestyle turning. If shallow, or superficial, it is not a ἐπιστρέφω.

Coming out of this 'turning' is serving and waiting: δουλεῦειν θεῷ ζῶντι καὶ ἀληθινῷ καὶ ἀναμένειν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν, [in order to serve the living and true God and to await His Son out of heaven.](#) The twin purpose clauses, both in the present tense participle forms, stress that coming out of the turning is both serving and waiting. The turning of the Thessalonians to God meant δουλεῦειν θεῷ ζῶντι καὶ ἀληθινῷ, [in order to be serving the living and true God.](#) Converted to serve -- this is the heart of the Gospel message as Paul both lived it and preached it (cf. Gal. 1:15-17).

But also this turning produces καὶ ἀναμένειν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν, [and to await His Son out of Heaven.](#) Quite interestingly, Paul does not use the common terms for expecting the return of Christ.²¹ Rather he chooses a one time NT use word, ἀναμένω. The meaning is rather similar to the more common ἀπεκδέχεσθαι, but it draws attention to itself. One will note the anticipatory nature of Paul's reference here, which will be treated in greater detail in 2:19; 3:13; 4:13-18; and 5:1-11. Being ready for Christ's coming means serving God day in and day out, not retiring to some mountain top to look for Him in the sky.

Notice that This One who is coming out of Heaven is also ὃν ἤγειρεν ἐκ [τῶν] νεκρῶν, Ἰησοῦν τὸν ρυόμενον ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῆς ὀργῆς τῆς ἐρχομένης, [Whom He raised from the dead, Jesus the One rescuing us from the coming wrath.](#) This rounds out the message of the Gospel preached at Thessalonica and that the folks there accepted. Jesus is coming because He was raised from the dead. His mission is rescuing His people of the coming wrath of God in judgment at the end of times. This wrath is already being poured out (cf. Rom. 1:18) but will come in full force at the end (Rom. 2:5, 16).

In this glowing tribute to the faith of the Thessalonian believers, Paul also inserts expansion elements that give signal of themes to come in the letter body. Thus from the Proem we glean insight into the essential content of this letter.

9.2.3 Letter Body

²¹For a listing see topics 25.59-25.64 on **Hope, Look Forward to** in Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene Albert Nida. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains.* New York: United Bible Societies, 1996. These are 25.59 ἐλπίζω^a; ἐλπίζω^a, ἴδος; 25.60 προελπίζω; 25.61 ἐλπίζω^b, ἴδος; 25.62 ἐλπίζω^c, ἴδος; 25.63 ἀπεκδέχομαι^a; 25.64 ἀποκαταδοκία, ας.



How Paul develops the content of the body of each of his letters is dictated by the needs of the readers more than anything else. There is no 'set pattern' such as doctrine/practical divisions, as is commonly asserted. The apostle was a much too skilled letter composer to fall into such a repetitive trap as this. Thus each letter body must be analyzed on its own merits; none fit into some kind of mold at the letter body part.

9.2.3.1 How does one then go about analyzing the content in order to determine its thought flow?

Let me suggest a rather simple but fundamentally accurate way to do this, especially for readers unable to read and [diagram the Greek text](#). Go through at least three or four translations of the text which have both paragraph divisions and section headings. Don't read just one; that's more harmful than helpful. Most translations are available online and a majority of the web sites will preserve both the paragraph and section heading in their online digital copy of the translation.²² But one has to be cautious here. A few, e.g., Bible Study Tools, only contain the embedded paragraph markers which are visible on the display screen. Others such as Bible Gateway have each verse formatted separately, which makes this kind of analysis impossible.

NRSV	Zürcher Bibel	NLT	LBLA
2:1-16	2.1-12	2:1-16	2.1-12
2:17-3:5	2:13-16	2:17-3:13	2.13-20
3:6-13	2:17-20	4:1-12	3.1-10
4:1-12	3:1-13	4:13-5:11	3.11-12
4:13-5:11	4.1-12	5:12-22	3.13-4.12
5:12-22	4:13-18		4.13-18
	5:1-11		5.1-11
	5:12-24		5.12-22

Make notes on the text divisions contained in such a comparative study. Note how this works for 1 Thess. 2:1-5:22, the letter body.

²²A very helpful additional step would be to create a document file in the landscape format with four columns. Copy and paste from the internet source each of the four translations into the created document. Probably some formatting 'clean up' work will be needed. But once these are created with your translations displayed side by side, you will be able to compare similarities and differences more effectively.

For detailed instructions -- and examples -- on how to do this, check out the "Analysis Paper" assignment, especially [Phase One Assignment](#), in [Religion 102](#) at Gardner-Webb University. This was an exegesis paper assignment required of all undergraduates taking the required Religion 102, New Testament Introduction, course during the time I taught there from 1998 to 2008. Most of the freshmen Bible class students thought this was too complex for them but upon getting into it, the Bible study patterns for many of the students was transformed forever. And studying the Bible became a real joy now that they had some knowledge of how to go about doing it productively. Remember that these R102 students are eighteen and nineteen year old teenagers fresh out of high school and many with very minimal background in Christianity. If they can do it, I'm confident you can also.

The NRSV and NLT reflect an English speaking mindset, but the ZB is German and the LBLA is Spanish.²³ Clearly the English thought pattern is to group larger units together under a single heading, while the other two are more oriented toward smaller units in each section. Notice, however, the points where larger agreement on thought shifts occur: 2:16; 3:13; 4:13; 5:11. These would function as a helpful starting point in analyzing places where topic shifts take place.

But it is helpful to note the paragraph divisions as well:²⁴

NRSV	Zürcher Bibel	NLT	LBLA
2:1-16	2.1-12	2:1-16	2.1-12
¶ 2.1-8	¶ 2.1-4	¶ 2.1-3	¶ 2.1-12
¶ 2.9-12	¶ 2.5-9	¶ 2.4-6	2.13-20
¶ 2:13-16	¶ 2.10-12	¶ 2.7-8	¶ 2.13-16
2:17-3:5	2:13-16	¶ 2.9-12	¶ 2.17-20
¶ 2.17-20	¶ 2.13-16	¶ 2.13	3.1-10
¶ 3.1-5	2:17-20	¶ 2.14-16	¶ 3.1-10
3:6-13	¶ 2.17-20	2:17-3:13	3.11-13
¶ 3.6-10	3:1-13	¶ 2.17-20	¶ 3.11-13
¶ 3.11-13	¶ 3.1-5	¶ 3.1-5	4.1-4.12
4:1-12	¶ 3.6-10	¶ 3.6-8	¶ 4.1-8
¶ 4.1-8	¶ 3.11-13	¶ 3.9-10	¶ 4.9-12
¶ 4.9-12	4.1-12	¶ 3.11-13	4.13-18
4:13-5:11	¶ 4.1-2	4:1-4:12	¶ 4.13-18
¶ 4.13-18	¶ 4.3-8	¶ 4.1-2	5.1-11
¶ 5.1-11	¶ 4.9-12	¶ 4.3-8	¶ 5.1-11
5:12-22	4:13-18	¶ 4.9-10	5.12-22
¶ 5.12-22	¶ 4.13	¶ 4.11-12	¶ 5.12-22
	¶ 4.14-17	4:13-5:11	
	¶ 4.18	¶ 4.13-14	
	5:1-11	¶ 4.15-18	
	¶ 5.1-3	¶ 5.1-3	
	¶ 5.4-10	¶ 5.4-8	
	¶ 5.11	¶ 5.9-11	
	5:12-24	5:12-22	
	¶ 5.12-13	¶ 5.12-13	
	¶ 5.14-15	¶ 5.14	
	¶ 5.16	¶ 5.15	
	¶ 5.17	¶ 5.16-18	
	¶ 5.18	¶ 5.19-22	
	¶ 5.19		
	¶ 5.20		
	¶ 5.21		
	¶ 5.22		
	¶ 5.23-24		

Once again the paragraph divisions will generally reflect the thought patterns common to each language. But one can note numerous places where the breaks intersect one another across most or all of the languages. There are helpful signals for shift in the thought flow in the underlying Greek text.

To be clear, ancient writers did not employ paragraph divisions in their compositions. The earliest man-

²³What are included in the table are the section heading divisions of text. Most have multiple paragraphs inside each heading.

²⁴The LBLA unfortunately lists each verse separately in screen display, but does contain the paragraph marker symbol ¶ to signal a new paragraph.

uscripts of the NT, for example, were written in uncial script with no spacing or punctuation marks at all. Uncial script somewhat compares to modern western printed capital letters only. Such markers of thought units as paragraphing do not show up until much later in the history of literary compositions in western society. But they unquestionably did create small units of thought expression and often followed one of the many established ways of linking these together. These could include coordinate conjunctions such as γάρ, οὖν, ὥστε etc. indicating that the second unit was linked to the preceding one as reason, implication, consequence etc. Additionally words in the grammar category of corroborative adverbs such οὕτως could achieve a connecting role between units. A particularly Hebrew oriented pattern found some in the NT is the use of linking 'headers.' For example in James 1:2-8 the two subunits of vv. 2-4 and 5-8 are linked together by λειπόμενοι, *lacking* at the end of v. 4 and λείπεται, *lacks* at the beginning of v. 5.

What then do paragraph divisions represent? Two basic things. First, they signal the attempt of the Bible translators to identify the 'built-in' sub units of text materials. With this being an interpretive issue, differences of understanding will inevitably surface from translation to translation. But as you utilize this skill of marking off units from comparison of translation paragraphing, you will discover an amazing amount of uniformity across different translations, especially when the translations are of the same language. Second, paragraph units are culturally conditioned. British writers have a different view about setting up paragraphs than do American writers. German paragraphing is very different than either British or American patterns. Translators by necessity must give due consideration to guidelines for paragraphing in the receptor language in which they are working. This since their goal in translating is clear, understandable expression of the Bible text in the receptor language.

Now a listing of the section headings from specific translations for each text unit will suggest possible themes for each section:

NRSV: **ZB:** **NLT:** **LBLA:**

Paul's Ministry in Thessalonica (2:1-16)

Erinnerung an den Anfang (2:1-12)

Annahme des Evangeliums in Bedrängnis (2:13-16)

Paul Remembers His Visit (2:1-16)

Comportamiento de Pablo como ministro de Jesucristo (2:1-12)

Pablo da gracias por los tessalonicenses (2:13-20)

Interés de Pablo por sus hijos

NRSV: **ZB:** **NLT:** **LBLA:**

en la fe (3:1-10)

Paul's Desire to Visit the Thessalonians Again (2:17-3:5)

Sehnsucht des Paulus nach seiner Gemeinde (2:17-20)

Gute Nachrichten aus Thessalonich (3:1-13)

Timothy's Good Report about the Church (2:17-3:13)

Timothy's Encouraging Report (3:6-13)

A Life Pleasing to God (4:1-12)

Leben im Glauben (4:1-12)

Live to Please God (4:1-12)

Exhortación a la santidad (3:11-4:12)

The Coming of the Lord (4:13-5:11)

Die Toten in Christus (4:13-18)

Leben im Vorschein der Zukunft (5:1-11)

The Hope of the Resurrection (4:13-5:11)

La venida del Señor (4:13-18)

Preparados para el día del Señor (5:1-11)

Final Exhortations, Greetings, and Benediction (5:12-28)

Das Zusammenleben in der Gemeinde (5:12-24)

Paul's Final Advice (5:12-22)

Deberes prácticos de la vida cristiana (5:13-22)

9.2.3.2 Content of Letter Body.

A careful comparison of these headings reveals that just as he signaled in both the Praescriptio and especially in the Proem, three or four themes will dominate the body proper of the letter. First he elaborates upon the ὁποῖαν εἴσοδον ἔσχομεν πρὸς ὑμᾶς (1:9) in 2:1-16. This leads to an expression of his desire to return to Thessalonica (2:17-20) but since this is not possible at the moment, he decided to send Timothy and probably Silas to the church (3:1-5). But now Timothy has returned to Athens with an excellent report on things (3:6-10). This encourages Paul greatly about the church (3:11-13).

He turns to some exhortations to pass on to the church in 4:1-12. Then the topic of the Lord's return is mentioned in 4:13-18 which prompts the encouragement to be prepared in 5:1-11. Then 5:12-22 closes out the body of the letter with admonitions on taking care of their leaders, living the Christian life fully, and in being prepared for the Lord's coming.

The content then of the letter body is a mixture of looking back in personal terms, dealing with the connections of Timothy and Silas to the church presently, and then looking forward to the Lord's coming again. These are woven together in a delightful manner. And they reflect the signals given in the beginning sections.

This letter was much easier for Paul to compose in Athens than Galatians was at Philippi several months earlier!

9.2.4 Conclusio

The precise boundaries for the *Conclusio* are not as clear in this letter as in others. Clearly by 5:23 the *Conclusio* has begun. Some commentators, however, are inclined to include 5:12-22 in the *Conclusio* as well. But this unit of paraenesis material centers on taking care of spiritual leaders who faithfully discharge their duties of giving proper leadership to the house churches in the city. These areas of leadership become general principles of Christian living in vv. 14-22. Such materials are not part of an ancient letter *Conclusio*. Instead they often come at the end of the letter body, especially in Paul's letters.

Additionally, a difference of opinion surfaces over 5:23-24. This prayer wish somewhat parallels the one in 3:11-13 standing at the end of a major unit of material in chapters two and three. A case can be made then for 5:23-24 functioning in the same role for the material in chapters four and five which begin with Λουπόν, *Finally*, in 4:1. Although this view has merits, the alternative of seeing the beginning of the *Conclusio* in 5:23 is more attractive as a general prayer wish signaling the closing of the letter.

Thus the more formal elements of the *Conclusio* begin with 5:23 and continue to the end of the letter in v. 28. Several elements often found in the *Conclusio* of Paul's letters surface here.

Two prayer desires²⁵ are expressed by the apostle for the Thessalonians. **First**, Αὐτός δὲ ὁ θεὸς τῆς εἰρήνης ἀγιάσαι ὑμᾶς ὁλοτελεῖς, *And may the God of peace Himself make you completely holy*. To be sure, some similarity exists with the opening of the prayer wish in 3:11, Αὐτός δὲ ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ ἡμῶν καὶ ὁ κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς κατευθύνει τὴν ὁδὸν ἡμῶν πρὸς ὑμᾶς, *And may God even our Father Himself and our Lord Jesus direct our path to you*. But as is readily noticeable, significantly different emphases are present as well. The phrase 'God of peace' is somewhat common in the Pauline letters; cf. Rom. 15:33; 16:20; Phil. 4:9; 2 Thess. 3:16. Note 2 Cor. 13:11 for a slight variation: ὁ θεὸς τῆς ἀγάπης καὶ εἰρήνης,

²⁵Here, as there, the optatives are in the aorist tense. The 'complexive' aorist is regularly used in prayers (BDF §337[4]). In direct prayers the aorist imperative is used; in a wish-prayer the imperative is replaced by the optative, but the aorist remains. That is sufficient explanation of the aorist ἀγιάσαι but it is clear from the context that, if ἀγιάζειν is a process, it is the completion of the process that is in view here, as in 3:13. The importance of sanctification (ἀγιασμός) in the practical area of sexual life has been emphasized in 4:3, 4, 7, where it is implied that sanctification (in all areas of life) is the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit (4:8). [F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 129.]

the God of love and peace. These rather set forms consistently introduce prayer wishes in Paul's writings. The prayer wish itself centers on holiness being established in the lives of the Thessalonians: ἀγιάσαι ὑμᾶς ὁλοτελεῖς, *make you holy completely*. A somewhat similar emphasis is in the second prayer wish of 3:13, but with a slightly different twist: εἰς τὸ στηρίξει ὑμῶν τὰς καρδίας ἀμέμπτους ἐν ἀγιωσύνῃ ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ μετὰ πάντων τῶν ἁγίων αὐτοῦ, [ἀμήν]. *And may He so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints*. The purpose infinitive εἰς τὸ στηρίξει sees the objective of strengthening the resolve (ὑμῶν τὰς καρδίας) of the Thessalonians in holiness as the outgrowth of their abounding in love for the brothers (v. 12).

But in 5:23 the general wish is for God to complete the process begun in conversion of completely²⁶ setting apart from the world the believers in the city.

Second, the next prayer wish grows out of the first one: καὶ ὁλόκληρον ὑμῶν τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ τὸ σῶμα ἀμέμπτως ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ τηρηθεῖ, *and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*. The interior of a person is defined within the standard Jewish and also the somewhat standard Greco-Roman dualistic perspective of τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ, *spirit and soul*.²⁷ To the interior designations is then added the exterior reference of τὸ σῶμα, *the body*. All together they become Paul's wish for this process of sanctification to envelope the entirety of the life of each Thessalonian.²⁸

²⁶This is the only place in the NT where ὁλοτελής occurs. Its earliest attestation is in Aristotle (Plant 1.2.20.817b). Vettius Valens uses it (Anth. 247.8), but an instance closer in date to ours comes in an inscription recording Nero's announcement of "complete exemption from taxation" (ἀνεισφορίαν ... ὁλοτελή) to all Greeks at the Isthmian Games of A.D. 67 (SIG3 814.45; IG 7.2713.45). [F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 129.]

²⁷Plato speaks of the mind as being in the soul, and the soul in the body (νοῦν μὲν ἐν ψυχῇ, ψυχὴν δὲ ἐν σώματι, Tim. 30B), but for him the νοῦς was part of the ψυχὴ. Marcus Aurelius distinguishes σῶμα, ψυχὴ, νοῦς by saying that sensations belong to the body, impulses to the soul and opinions to the mind (σώματος αἰσθήσεις, ψυχῆς ὄρμαι, νοῦ δόγματα, Med. 3.16). MM (s.v. ὁλόκληρος) quote from the third-century magic P Lond 121, line 590, διαφύλασσε μου τὸ σῶμα τὴν ψυχὴν ὁλόκληρον, 'keep my body [and] my soul in sound health.' These are partial parallels to the present terminology, but throw little light on its details: what the writers mean is, 'May every part of you be kept entirely without fault.' On the 'complexive' aorist optative τηρηθεῖ cf. what is said on ἀγιάσαι earlier in the verse. [F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 130.]

²⁸It is not legitimate to conclude a tripartite doctrine of human nature from this single listing in the entire NT. Paul is stressing

Interestingly, the term of inclusiveness in this prayer, ὀλόκληρον, matches its parallel term ὀλοτελεῖς in the first prayer and they are placed back to back to each other for heightened emphasis.

Just as in 3:13, the ultimate objective is ἀμέμπτους ἐν ἀγιωσύνη ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ μετὰ πάντων τῶν ἁγίων αὐτοῦ, [ἀμήν], **in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints**, here also the second coming of Christ is in view: ἀμέμπτως ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ τηρηθεῖη, **blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ will be kept**. Paul's deep concern was that when the Thessalonians stood before Christ in final judgment there would not be any point of divine criticism about how they had lived the Christian life.

The twin prayer wish then is concluded with the affirmation that God will enable the Thessalonians to stand before Christ in blamelessness: πιστὸς ὁ καλῶν ὑμᾶς, ὃς καὶ ποιήσει, **Faithful is the One calling you, Who also will do it**. What a positive note to conclude with! Compare also Phil. 1:6, πεποιθὼς αὐτὸ τοῦτο, ὅτι ὁ ἐναρξάμενος ἐν ὑμῖν ἔργον ἀγαθὸν ἐπιτελέσει ἄχρι ἡμέρας Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, **I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ**.

Prayer request for the apostle, v. 25. Ἀδελφοί, complete inclusiveness of one's life in this set of terms.

It is precarious to try to construct a tripartite doctrine of human nature on the juxtaposition of the three nouns, πνεῦμα, ψυχὴ and σῶμα. The three together give further emphasis to the completeness of sanctification for which the writers pray, but the three together add but little to the sense of ὑμῶν τὰς καρδίας ("your hearts") in 3:13. The distinction between the bodily and spiritual aspects of human nature is easily made, but to make a comparable distinction between "spirit" and "soul" is forced. Few would care to distinguish sharply among the four elements "heart" (καρδία), "soul" (ψυχὴ), "mind" (διάνοια) and "strength" (ισχύς) of Mark 12:30 (amplifying the threefold "heart, ... soul, and ... might" of Deut 6:5). The distinction made by Paul between ψυχὴ and πνεῦμα in 1 Cor 15:45 has no bearing on the present passage: there the distinction lies between the "living person" (ψυχὴ ζῶσα) which the first Adam became at his creation (Gen 2:7) and the "life-giving spirit" (πνεῦμα ζωοποιῶν) which the second Adam has become in resurrection. It is the contrast between the two nouns in that sense that constitutes the contrast between the adjectives ψυχικός and πνευματικός in 1 Cor 15:44, 46 (ψυχικός means χοϊκός as πνευματικός means ἐπουράνιος). The contrast between ψυχικός and πνευματικός in 1 Cor 2:14, 15 depends on the contrast between the soul of man and the Spirit of God; the understanding of the ψυχικός ἄνθρωπος is confined to the capacity of "the spirit of man (τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου) within him" (1 Cor 2:11), and without the indwelling Spirit of God he cannot appreciate the πνευματικά, the "things of God" (1 Cor 2:11). In that context πνεῦμα is practically synonymous with νοῦς (cf. 1 Cor 2:16).

[F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 130.]

προσεύχεσθε [καὶ] περὶ ἡμῶν. **Brothers, be praying also for us**. Paul's indication of what he is praying for the Thessalonians about is then followed by a request for the Thessalonians to be praying for him, Timothy, and Silas in their ministry. Requests for prayer by Paul to his readers is common place in his letters: Rom 15:30–32; 2 Cor 1:11; Eph 6:19, 20; Phil 1:19; Col 4:3, 18; Phlm 22. Note the present tense imperative verb form προσεύχεσθε which asks for ongoing prayers, rather than a one time action.

Greetings to the brothers, v. 26. Ἀσπάσασθε τοὺς ἀδελφούς πάντας ἐν φιλήματι ἁγίῳ. **Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss**. A kiss on the cheek was standard greeting among friends in the first century world, as is still the tradition in most modern European countries.²⁹ What made such a greeting 'holy' ἁγίῳ was that it was done in the name of Christ as an expression of brotherly love.³⁰

One interesting possibility here is the possible Lord's Supper setting implied in this admonition.³¹

²⁹Shaking hands as a gesture of greeting is the option with those whom one has not yet established a formal friendship with. In my personal experience of living in Germany, France, and Costa Rica, I have found this to be true. Yet the 'kiss' differs from culture to culture. There's a slightly different greeting kiss in all three cultures.

³⁰Practically the same injunction appears in Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12. In 1 Pet 5:14 the same kiss is called the 'kiss of love' (φιλήμα ἀγάπης); later it was generally called the 'kiss of peace' (cf. Hippolytus, Ap. Trad. 4.1; 18.3; 22.6). The *Apostolic Constitutions* (early 4th century) lay it down that at the Eucharist "the men are to give one another the kiss in the Lord (τὸ ἐν κυρίῳ φίλημα) and the women likewise to one another" (2.57.17)." [F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 134.]

³¹The direction regarding the 'holy kiss' in v 26 suggests a eucharistic setting. The exchange of the kiss in such a setting is attested by Justin Martyr (c. A.D. 150): it came after the prayers and before the bringing in of the bread and wine (Justin, Apol. 65.2). The omission of the kiss of greeting even at an ordinary social meal was an occasion for remark (Luke 7:45); it was the more appropriate that it should feature in the meal where those in the fellowship of the reconciled celebrated the one whose reconciling sacrifice had united them.

"It may well be that the writers envisage the letter being read at a eucharistic assembly of the church—after the prayers, perhaps, and just before the normal moment for the exchanged kiss. This would not be an isolated instance among the Pauline letters: at the end of 1 Cor (16:20–22) the direction to 'greet one another with a holy kiss' is followed by the quotation of some words from the eucharistic service. 'If we may regard the closing verses of 1 Corinthians as a lead-in to the Lord's Supper, we can draw the conclusion that the Supper was introduced by the kiss of peace as a sign of loving fellowship among the members. This was accompanied both by the pronouncement of a curse upon any who did not truly love the Lord and by the pronouncement of a blessing upon the Lord's people' (Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper*, 145). (In the light of this, a comparison of Marana-tha in 1 Cor



Clearly by the middle of the second century this was the case for Christians gathered together. Although a few of the NT passages with the ‘holy kiss’ mentioned do suggest a Lord’s Supper setting, it is not possible to conclude this strongly until one is well into the second century. And then, how long such a practice had existed is not indicated by any of these church father texts.

Apostolic admonition for the reading of the letter, v. 27. Ἐνορκίζω ὑμᾶς τὸν κύριον ἀναγνωσθῆναι τὴν ἐπιστολὴν πᾶσιν τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς. **I solemnly command you by the Lord that this letter be read to all of the brothers.** In this, Paul expresses his desire that this letter be read to all of the house church groups in and around the city of Thessalonica. The shift from the plural verb forms, we / you, to the first person singular I most likely signals that the apostle has taken over the writing of the Conclusio as his letter validation indication.³²

The use of the verb Ἐνορκίζω, **I solemnly command**, is rare; this is the sole NT usage.³³ The alternative form ὀρκίζεῖν is somewhat more frequent with four NT uses. The sense of ἔνορκίζω is to demand that another person pledge to do something under oath.³⁴ Paul is not

16:22 with ἔρχου κύριε Ἰησοῦ, ‘Come, Lord Jesus’ in Rev 22:20 may suggest that the Apocalypse similarly was read at eucharistic assemblies of the churches of Asia to which it was sent.” [F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 133–134.]

³²“The sudden switch from the plural to the singular of the first person is significant; the most probable explanation is that Paul took over the pen at this point and added the adjuration and the concluding benediction with his own hand (cf. Askwith, “‘I’ and ‘we’ ...”). Earlier instances of Paul’s interposing something on his own account have come at 2:18 and 3:5 (see also 2 Thess 2:5 and especially 3:17, with comment).” [F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 135.]

³³It is a part of a word group: ὄρκος, ὀρκίζω, ὀρκωμοσία, ἔνορκίζω, ἔξορκίζω (ἔξορκιστής), ἐπιόρκος, ἐπιορκέω. Also included is ὀμνύω. These have to do with the making and implementing of oaths, something very significant to first century society both Jewish, and also Greco-Roman.

³⁴“**33.467 ὀρκίζω; ἔνορκίζω; ἔξορκίζω:** to demand that a person take an oath as to the truth of what is said or as to the certainty that one will carry out the request or command—‘to put under oath, to insist that one take an oath, to require that one swear.’⁷⁷ ὀρκίζω: ὀρκίζω σε τὸν θεόν, μή με βασανίσῃς ‘I ask you to swear by the name of God that you will not punish me’ Mk 5:7.

“ἔνορκίζω: ἔνορκίζω ὑμᾶς τὸν κύριον ἀναγνωσθῆναι τὴν ἐπιστολὴν πᾶσιν τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς ‘I ask you to swear by the name of the Lord to read this letter to all the Christian brothers’ 1 Th 5:27.

“ἔξορκίζω: ἔξορκίζω σε κατὰ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος ἵνα ἡμῖν εἴπῃς εἰ σὺ εἶ ‘I charge you to swear in the name of the living God to tell us who you are’ Mt 26:63.

“It is extremely difficult to translate ὀρκίζω, ἔνορκίζω, and ἔξορκίζω in a literal manner, though in some contexts one can say ‘I put you under oath,’ but in a number of passages the person speaking is imploring and not necessarily in a position to command or insist. Therefore, in a passage such as Mk 5:7, one may render the meaning idiomatically as ‘for God’s sake, I ask you, do

here ignoring Jesus’ teaching on oath making, just the modern misunderstanding of that teaching.³⁵

What lies behind this solemn expression is not known beyond the simple implication of a fear that it would not be read to everyone in the Christian community. But as one might expect, commentator speculation at this point runs rampant with wild, baseless guesses.³⁶ The indirect object τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς, **to the brothers**, simply means the entire community that was composed of all of the house church groups. The infinitive phrase ἀναγνωσθῆναι τὴν ἐπιστολὴν, **this letter be read**, underscores the responsibility of the local leaders

not punish me.’ In 1 Th 5:27 one may translate ‘in the name of the Lord, I ask you to read this letter to all the Christian brothers,’ and in Mt 26:63 one may translate ‘in the name of the living God, I charge you, Tell us who you are.’

“In most languages one may translate ὀρκίζω, ἔνορκίζω, and ἔξορκίζω by simply adding a causative component to terms meaning ‘to swear’ or ‘to take an oath.’ In other words, ὀρκίζω, ἔνορκίζω, and ἔξορκίζω may be rendered as ‘to cause a person to say under oath’.”

[Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 1:440–441.]

³⁵Paul’s use of the adjuration need not imply that he was unaware of Jesus’ ban on the use of oaths by his followers (μὴ ὁμόσαι ὄλωσ, Matt 5:34); this is not a strengthening of a statement of his own by the invocation of the divine name (for which cf. 2:5; Gal 1:20; Rom 9:1; Phil 1:8) but an appeal to those addressed to act in this matter as responsible to the Lord himself.

“But why should he insist so solemnly that ‘the letter’ (i.e. the letter now being concluded) should be read to ‘all the brothers’? It sounds very much as though he feared that some Thessalonian Christians might not have it communicated to them.” [F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 135.=

³⁶“It is difficult to accept Harnack’s theory that the Gentile and Jewish Christians of Thessalonica met separately and that, while the letter was sent to the Gentile group, Paul wished to make sure that the Jewish group should read it too (see Introduction). Ellis (“Paul and his Co-Workers,” 451 n. 1) suggests that the ‘brothers’ here may be Paul’s co-workers, ‘especially those evangelizing a neighbouring area,’ who ‘might not hear a letter sent to the congregation and yet might have need of its teachings for their own work.’ It is more likely that such ‘co-workers’ would be the first to receive the letter and that it would be their responsibility to make sure that it was read to ‘all the brothers’ (cf. Masson, ad loc., for the view that the primary recipients were the προϊστάμενοι). It is best, on the whole, to conclude that Paul wished to make sure that the ἄτακτοι heard the letter. There was much in it that would be especially beneficial for them, but if their ἀταξία included a tendency to absent themselves from meetings of the church (cf. Heb 10:25), they might not be present when the letter was read; the responsible leaders of the church should therefore see to it that they were made acquainted with its contents. For a direction about the reading of other Pauline letters cf. Col 4:16. The ‘reading’ implied is public reading at a meeting of the whole church.” [F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 135.

of the various house church groups to make arrangements for those who brought the letter to Thessalonica, most likely Timothy and Silas, to have opportunity to meet with each of these groups in order to not just read the letter to them, but also to answer questions about it from members of each group.

The closest expression to this admonition in v. 27 comes in the *Conclusio* of a letter of Paul well over a decade later in Col. 4:16, καὶ ὅταν ἀναγνωσθῆ παρ' ὑμῶν ἢ ἐπιστολή, ποιήσατε ἵνα καὶ ἐν τῇ Λαοδικεῶν ἐκκλησίᾳ ἀναγνωσθῆ, καὶ τὴν ἐκ Λαοδικείας ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀναγνώτε. *And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea.*³⁷ The letter to the Colossians is to be read not just to the house church groups in Colossae, but also in nearby Laodicea as well. Likewise an unknown letter to the Laodiceans is to be read at Colossae as well.

What does emerge from this admonition of Paul at the end of his letter is a picture of how he desires his letters to be treated upon arrival at their designation. No leader or particular house church group is to hoard the document as though it pertained only to them. Instead, the leaders are solemnly charged to make arrangements among all of the house church groups in the city for a gathering of each group so that the one bringing the letter to the city can both read it and be available to answer any questions that may arise from the contents of the letter. Only in communicating the contents of the letter in this manner can Timothy and Silas gain first hand awareness of the individual situation of each of these groups, which will form the basis of their report back to Paul once they return to Achaia. In this instance, they will catch up with Paul in Corinth and report some issues to him that emerged in the reading of the letter to the different groups. This then forms the basis for the composition of the second letter to the church in Thessalonica. Only after this task is completed can any thought be given to making copies

³⁷Somewhat related but also very different in thrust is the warning in the *Conclusio* of **Rev. 22:18-19**. This warning follows a relatively common warning found in many of the Jewish apocalypses, and thus is significantly different that the admonition in 1 Thess. 5:27.

18 Μαρτυρῶ ἐγὼ παντὶ τῷ ἀκούοντι τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου· ἐάν τις ἐπιθῆ ἐπ' αὐτά, ἐπιθήσει ὁ θεὸς ἐπ' αὐτὸν τὰς πληγὰς τὰς γεγραμμένας ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τούτῳ, 19 καὶ ἐάν τις ἀφέλῃ ἀπὸ τῶν λόγων τοῦ βιβλίου τῆς προφητείας ταύτης, ἀφελεῖ ὁ θεὸς τὸ μέρος αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ ξύλου τῆς ζωῆς καὶ ἐκ τῆς πόλεως τῆς ἁγίας τῶν γεγραμμένων ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τούτῳ.

18 I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book; 19 if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away that person's share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

of the document so that each group can have an individual copy for their own use.

Benedictio, v. 28. Ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ μεθ' ὑμῶν. *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.* Numerous manuscripts add the liturgical ἀμήν, *amen*, after the prayer: αμην κ A D¹ Ψ 1739^c M lat sy bo. But the weight of manuscript evidence favors omitting it: B D* F G 0278. 6. 33. 1739*. 1881 pc it vg^{ms} sa; Ambst.³⁸

Just as χάρις helped set the tone for the letter in the *Salutatio* in 1:1, it becomes the final prayer tone at the end of the letter with this prayer of benediction. Additionally, the letter opens with the Proem Prayer of Thanksgiving in 1:2-10 and then closes with the Prayer of Benediction at the end. These structures were not accidental, but rather planned out by Paul. And they served as a model for virtually all of [his letters](#) over the next twelve to fourteen years of writing letters.

This particular benedictory prayer of Paul's is among the shortest, as the listing below of all of his letters illustrates.

- Gal. 6:18,** Ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ μετὰ τοῦ πνεύματος ὑμῶν, ἀδελφοί-ἀμήν.
May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen.
- 1 Thess. 5:28,** Ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ μεθ' ὑμῶν.
The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you
- 2 Thess. 3:18,** Ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ μετὰ πάντων ὑμῶν.
The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you.
- 1 Cor. 16:23-24,** 23 ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ μεθ' ὑμῶν. 24 ἡ ἀγάπη μου μετὰ πάντων ὑμῶν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.
23 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. 24 My love be with all of you in Christ Jesus.
- 2 Cor. 13:13,** Ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἡ κοινωνία τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος μετὰ πάντων ὑμῶν.
The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.
- Rom. 16:25-27,** 25 Τῷ δὲ δυναμένῳ ὑμᾶς στηρίξει κατὰ τὸ εὐαγγέλιόν μου καὶ τὸ κήρυγμα Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, κατὰ ἀποκάλυψιν μυστηρίου χρόνοις αἰωνίοις σεσηγημένου, 26

³⁸Eberhard Nestle et al., Universität Münster. Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 538.

φανερωθέντος δὲ νῦν διὰ τε γραφῶν προφητικῶν κατ' ἐπιταγὴν τοῦ αἰωνίου θεοῦ εἰς ὑπακοὴν πίστεως εἰς πάντα τὰ ἔθνη γνωρισθέντος, 27 μόνω σοφῷ θεῷ, διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ᾧ ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, ἀμήν.

25 Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages 26 but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith — 27 to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen.

Philm. 25, Ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ μετὰ τοῦ πνεύματος ὑμῶν.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Col. 4:18, ἡ χάρις μεθ' ὑμῶν.

Grace be with you.

Eph. 6:24, ἡ χάρις μετὰ πάντων τῶν ἀγαπῶντων τὸν κύριον ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν ἀφθαρσίᾳ.

Grace be with all who have an undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ.

Phil. 4:23, Ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ μετὰ τοῦ πνεύματος ὑμῶν.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

1 Tim. 6:21, Ἡ χάρις μεθ' ὑμῶν.

Grace be with you.

2 Tim. 4:22, Ὁ κύριος μετὰ τοῦ πνεύματός σου. ἡ χάρις μεθ' ὑμῶν.

The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.

Titus 3:15, Ἡ χάρις μετὰ πάντων ὑμῶν.

Grace be with all of you.

In modelling the pattern followed in the Christian gatherings in the house church meetings, his letter opens with a prayer and closes with a prayer. Both prayers have formal, liturgical tones that reflect the pattern of worship in these gatherings. The *Benedictio* of early Christian use reflected the *Benedictio* usage in the Jewish synagogue gatherings on Friday evenings.³⁹

What we therefore can see from the *Conclusio* is the further development of a formula for a letter closing that, while including some elements standard in the

usual *Conclusio* of ancient letters, will become uniquely Pauline by the writing of the final letter in the mid 60s. The apostle had learned out of his schooling both in Tarsus and Jerusalem how to communicate with a readership, and how to do it both within existing frameworks and at the same time while being distinctly creative.



CONCLUSION

In summary, First Thessalonians comes as one of the earliest expressions of Paul as an author of written materials. After the challenging task of writing a strong criticism of the Christians in the churches of Galatian, the joy of writing to a congregation with virtually no issues and problems must have been substantial to him. Even though his time in the city on the second missionary journey had been difficult with the vicious opposition of the Jewish synagogue leadership, the Christian congregation born out of that tough experience became a real delight and pleasure for him. The repeated expressions of gratitude to God for this congregation reflect this posture of joy and thanksgiving first expressed in the Proem of the letter.

³⁹For a helpful discussion of these prayers prior to 70 AD see David Instone Brewer, “The Eighteen Benedictions and the Minim before 70 CE,” Tyndale House, Cambridge University. This is a downloadable pdf file.