

1 & 2 Thessalonians Study Workbook

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Introduction to 1 & 2 Thessalonians

On their second missionary journey (Acts 15:40 – 18:22), Paul and Silas sailed across the Aegean Sea from Troas to Neapolis, then traveled by land to Philippi in Macedonia. After having been illegally arrested and imprisoned in Philippi (Acts 16:22-40), they traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia on the infamous Egnatian Way (*Via Egnatia*), and then arrived at the city of Thessalonica (Acts 17:1ff)—a one-hundred-mile journey from Philippi. Thessalonica was a prominent city of the Macedonians, boasting a population possibly as high as 200,000 people.¹ It was allegedly named by the Macedonian king Cassander (ca. 315 BC) after Thessalonica, the half-sister of Alexander the Great. However, some maintain that it was named after Philip of Macedon himself in honor of his victory over the armies of Thessaly. (Formerly it had been known as Therme.)² When Rome incorporated Macedonia as one of its official provinces in 146 BC, Thessalonica became Macedonia's capital city. In 42 BC, it was made a "free city," which means that it could maintain its own government and appointed political leaders, as long as it did not violate the laws of Rome.

Thessalonica was a significant commercial city strategically situated at the head of the Thermaic Gulf, a western arm of the Aegean Sea. Paul arrived there around AD 49 or 50 and sought out a synagogue of the Jews. By this time, he and Silas were joined by Timothy (Acts 16:1-3); after passing through Troas, they would also be joined by Luke (Acts 16:8ff), but Luke apparently remained in Philippi while the others continued down the Egnatian Way to Thessalonica. "And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ [Messiah]'" (Acts 17:2-3). Linking the historical person of Jesus with the Messiah of prophecy was the cornerstone of Paul's preaching. This link was essential in demonstrating the fulfillment of God's covenant with Israel as well as the establishment of a new covenant of salvation for all people (cf. Isaiah 49:5-6, 55:3-5, et al).

Some of the Thessalonian Jews were persuaded by his reasoning, as well as a number of God-fearing Greeks [likely, Jewish proselytes] "and a number of the leading women" (17:4). But other Jews resisted Paul, largely out of jealousy, and hired some of the wicked men of the city to form a mob and make a great uproar against Paul and Silas. "The Jews were interested in making accusations against the Christians that would stand in a pagan civil court."³ As a result of this, Paul and Silas (and Timothy) determined to leave the city so as not to endanger the young church they had just established there, and they left under the cover of darkness and headed south to Berea.

¹ Roy E. Cogdill, *The New Testament: Book by Book* (Marion, IN: Cogdill Foundation Publications, 1975), 91.

² Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes*, vol. 12, ed. Robert Frew (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, no date), iii. However, P. J. Gloag in *The Pulpit Commentary*, vol. XXI (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, no date) calls this second account "less trustworthy" than the first ("Introduction," I:iii).

³ David P. Brown, "The Thessalonian Letters and Philemon—an Introduction," *Studies in 1 & 2 Thessalonians, Philemon*, ed. Dub McClish (Denton, TX: Valid Publications, 1988), 20.

F. F. Bruce points out that “a militant messianism was spreading among the Jewish communities throughout the Roman Empire.” Emperor Claudius had expelled the Jews from Rome (see Acts 18:2) because some of these were followers of a certain “Chrestus” (presumably, a corruption of “Christ”). These followers—quite possibly Christians—were allegedly the source of rioting and unrest in that city. This trouble in Rome had come from the East, and so had Paul—“carriers of what the emperor himself had described a few years earlier as ‘a general plague which infests the whole world.’” The fact that the rival emperor whom Paul and the others were accused of proclaiming [cf. Acts 17:7] had been sentenced to death by a Roman judge on a charge of sedition—as anyone could ascertain who took the trouble to inquire—spoke for itself.” Paul’s preaching of Jesus, which included His ultimate return as a universal Judge of all the earth, could have easily been interpreted by some as a rival Emperor or King. In light of all this, not to mention the jealousy and opposition of the unbelieving Jews themselves, it is not hard to see how the Thessalonian city officials interpreted the situation as being something that had to be suppressed immediately.⁴ The tenacity of these Jewish opponents of the gospel, however, is evidenced in the fact that they followed Paul into Berea in order to drive him out of Macedonia altogether (Acts 17:13-15).

Purpose and Theme

When Paul finally arrived in Athens, he had Timothy sent back to Thessalonica to see how they were holding up under the strain of the aforementioned persecution (1 Thessalonians 3:1-5). Paul had moved on to Corinth by the time Timothy returned to him, bearing good news about the Thessalonian Christians’ faithfulness and determination. Yet Timothy also brought reports of concern over their misunderstandings concerning the Second Coming and the physical resurrection. It was apparent to Paul that an epistle was in order so as to provide them with encouragement as well as some corrected teaching on these subjects. First Thessalonians is possibly the first (surviving) epistle that Paul wrote; 2 Thessalonians is possibly the second (surviving) epistle.⁵ Both epistles appear to have been written close together in time, perhaps within a few months of each other; both appear to have been written from Corinth.⁶ Most scholars agree that the date of writing is ca. AD 51 – 52, during Paul’s eighteen-month-long stay in Corinth. There is virtually no dispute that Paul is the author of both epistles. This conclusion has also been attested by Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Gaius, and Origen—early church “fathers” who all quoted from these letters and attributed them to Paul.⁷

⁴ F. F. Bruce, *Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 45: 1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1982), “Introduction,” xxiii-xxiv.

⁵ “We cannot say that this is Paul’s first letter to a church, for in II Thess. 2:2 he speaks of some as palming off letters as his and in II Thess. 3:17 he says that he appends his own signature to every letter after dictating it to an amanuensis [secretary—MY WORD] (Rom. 16:22). We know of one lost letter (1 Cor. 5:11) and perhaps another (II Cor. 2:3). But this is the earliest one that has come down to us and it may even be the earliest New Testament book, unless the Epistle of James antedates it or even Mark’s Gospel” (A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. IV [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, no date; © 1931 by SBC], 3).

⁶ An old subscription appended to the epistle in the KJV read, “The First Epistle to the Thessalonians was written from Athens.” This has since been proved to be a mistake, and cannot be taken seriously. “These subscriptions at the end of the Epistles have no authority; and although in general correct, yet occasionally, as in the present instance, they are erroneous” (Gloag, “Introduction,” I:viii).

⁷ Robert Jamieson, Andrew Fausset, and David Brown [JFB], *New Commentary on the Whole Bible: New Testament Volume*, electronic edition (© 2012 WORDsearch Corp.), “Introduction”; Brown, “An Introduction,” 26.

The church at Thessalonica was one of the jewels of Paul's ministry. This group of believers listened to the message of salvation, followed it with great enthusiasm, and weathered great difficulty in defense of it. Paul speaks glowingly of these people; he boasts about their "work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope" (1 Thessalonians 1:3). While Thessalonica was a city full of idols and idolaters, the Christians there had turned from that vain lifestyle to "a living and true God" (1 Thessalonians 1:9); this gave Paul great reason to rejoice over them. In the first epistle, he reminds them of how tenderly and patiently he worked with them. This provides an example of how they also are to deal with those who initially resist their sharing of the gospel with others. Just as Paul remained humble and compassionate in his ministry to them, so they must exercise these same virtues toward others. He informs them that it has been his earnest desire to return to them, but he has been hindered by his own work and Satan's interference (1 Thessalonians 2:17-20). Thus, he sent Timothy as his personal ambassador—a man to whom Paul refers elsewhere as his "kindred spirit" (Philippians 2:20). In the fourth chapter of his first epistle, Paul begins giving instructions and teachings rather than mere exhortations and explanations of his situation. He emphasizes holiness of conduct, especially sexual purity (since immorality was commonplace in pagan cities of the ancient world). Then he provides some of the most important (albeit brief) teaching on the Second Coming and the resurrection of the righteous that has been revealed to us in the New Testament. Since the *when* of Christ's coming cannot be determined at all—only the *suddenness* of it—Paul strongly admonishes these people to live in readiness for that great event. He then provides a series of brief but potent exhortations that are consistent with a people preparing themselves to greet the Lord upon His return.

Second Thessalonians seems to have been written shortly after the first epistle. It does not appear at all that Paul (or any of his fellow ministers) visited Thessalonica between the writing of the first and second epistles to the church there.⁸ Nonetheless, Paul must have received reports of serious misunderstandings concerning his original teaching on the Second Coming; or, there were some who were providing false information on this subject, disturbing the minds of some believers (2 Thessalonians 2:1-2). Apparently, some of the Thessalonians assumed that Jesus would be returning at any moment, and had quit their jobs and made themselves dependent upon fellow believers while they awaited this event. Paul strongly rebukes such actions, and orders these people to get back to work and stop imposing upon others: "If anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either" (3:10). Paul "commands" that the Thessalonians obey his instruction on this matter; those that refuse are to be removed from the fellowship of that church (3:14). Thus, even though Paul thinks so highly of this group of believers, he has also admonished them with some of the strongest language that is found in any of his epistles.

In this second epistle, however, Paul also provides two valuable—and intriguing—teachings on Christ's return. In the first, he explains that He "will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do

See also William Hendriksen's involved analysis on the authorship of these epistles (*New Testament Commentary: Thessalonians, the Pastorals and Hebrews* [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995], 18 – 30).

⁸ It is not even conclusive, in the minds of some Bible scholars, that 2 Thessalonians was the *second* epistle to this church and not the first. The arguments in support of this appear to be unconvincing, but F. F. Bruce (for one) does spend some time in his commentary providing the details of this question ("Introduction," xl – xliv). Personally, I am convinced that the order in which they appear in the New Testament is also the order in which they were written.

not obey the gospel” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-8). This provides information not given in the first epistle concerning the circumstances of that future event. The second teaching concerns the mysterious “man of lawlessness” (or, “son of destruction”) and the deceptions with which he will usher in a great apostasy (or, falling away) (2:3-12). The Second Coming of Christ will not take place until this “man of lawlessness” comes first and runs his full course. This provides more contextual information than we had before; unfortunately for us, the Thessalonians were told more about this in person than what has been specifically revealed to us.

General Outline of 1 Thessalonians

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- Lesson Three: The “Man of Lawlessness”—continued (2:9-12)
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The First Epistle to the Thessalonians

Lesson One: Salutation and Opening Remarks (1:1-10)

This salutation (1:1) is quite typical of Paul's other epistles. "Paul" is Christ's hand-picked spokesman (Acts 9:15-16), "called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God" (Romans 1:1), and a "bondservant" of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:1). "Silvanus" is the Romanized (or, Latin) name for Silas, one of Paul's trusted traveling companions (Acts 15:36-41) and fellow prisoner in Philippi (Acts 16:16ff). "Timothy" is the young protégé of Paul's who had joined him in the middle of Paul's second missionary journey (Acts 16:1-3). He is the same (relatively) young man to whom the epistles of 1 & 2 Timothy are addressed. By including Silvanus and Timothy in the salutation, Paul does not imply that these men share his authority as an apostle, but that they are both familiar to and very concerned for the church at Thessalonica. The letter itself is clearly written by Paul, and carries the weight of his apostolic authority in all matters for which this is necessary. "To the church...in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"—usually, Paul says, "church of God" rather than "in God." Yet, this expression "designates God and Christ as the sphere in which the church exists," and is thus parallel to the many forms of "in Christ" that Paul uses in his epistles.⁹ In any case, while the Father and Christ remain distinctly different Personages, they are both "God," and therefore are equally exalted by the apostle and are both the object of every believer's faith.¹⁰

Paul prays constantly for the Thessalonians (1:2-4), no doubt asking for the same things that he asked on behalf of the Colossians: knowledge, spiritual wisdom, the ability to please God and bear fruit for Him, strength, perseverance, patience, and joy in their inheritance (Colossians 1:9-10).¹¹ Instead of mentioning *what* he prays for in this case, he refers instead to *why* he prays: these people are hardworking Christians who are nonetheless facing a very difficult situation (to be discussed shortly). Three things capture Paul's attention: their work of faith, labor of love, and steadfastness (or, cheerful endurance) of hope in God.

- ❑ **"Work of faith"** does not separate work *from* faith, as some do in error ("faith plus works"), but unites the two concepts into one. Whatever a person does for God *in* faith is a work of faith. In reality, *everything* a Christian does for God is a work of faith, inasmuch as such service is offered to a God whom he has never seen, a Christ he has never met, and for a reward he cannot even comprehend. "Although Paul never substituted *works* for *faith*, the passage here shows that the two go together; and it may

⁹ Bruce, 7.

¹⁰ Both the Father and the Son (Christ) are Divine Personages; they, along with the Holy Spirit, comprise the Godhead, or simply "God." This triune God is all-powerful, all-knowing, eternal in nature, and self-existent; by contrast, all other life—whether in heaven or on earth—has been created and is upheld only by the power and sovereign authority that God alone possesses. For more detail on this, I recommend my exposition on Colossians 1:15-18 in *Philippians, Colossians and Philemon Study Workbook* (Summitville, IN: Spiritbuilding Publishing, 2013); go to www.booksbychad.com.

¹¹ "It would seem that the missionaries [i.e., Paul, Silas, and Timothy—MY WORDS] prayed *unitedly* (in addition, of course, to praying individually). They may have taken turns in leading the devotions. These prayers were not marked by any vagueness. On the contrary, the needs of the various churches were mentioned one by one, as the occasion demanded. The thought is not excluded that individual members may have been mentioned by name" (Hendriksen, 46).

therefore be accepted as gospel that when Paul mentions *faith* in the NT, it never means anything other than an obedient, working faith.”¹²

- ❑ **“Labor of love”** accurately (but uncommonly) illustrates the true nature of one’s love (*agape*) for the Lord. Such love is neither carefree nor toil-free; it is not always enjoyable or comfortable; and it always demands self-sacrifice to one degree or another. Christian love, when rightly practiced, is *hard work*, and these Thessalonians are obviously not afraid of such work. Paul is deeply impressed by this, and freely praises them for it.
- ❑ **“Steadfastness of hope”** indicates a hope in God *and* a concurrent hope in one’s future with God that is not wavering, vacillating, or filled with doubt. It is easy to “hope” in something in times of peace and comfort; it is far more difficult to keep one’s hope alive in the midst of struggle, conflict, and persecution. Yet, when this hope is real and firmly grounded, it will carry a believer through the most difficult of situations (Romans 5:3-5). The Thessalonians’ hope is “in our Lord Jesus Christ”: it is based upon His willingness and ability to fulfill it. Those without God are also without hope (Ephesians 2:12).

“In the presence of our God and Father” refers primarily to Christ’s proximity (for lack of a better word) to the Father, being at His right hand (Acts 2:33, Colossians 3:1, et al). Yet, Paul seems to be saying also that the faith, love, and steadfastness of the Thessalonians have the Father’s attention.

“Knowing, brethren beloved of God, His choice of you” (1:4) is one of those phrases that Calvinists love to cite in support of their Doctrine of Predestination. This doctrine states that God alone chooses the salvation (or, by default, the condemnation) of every person before he is even born; no one can fall from his “election” or protest his “reprobation” because God’s sovereign decision cannot be questioned. Yet, Paul says nothing in *any* of his epistles to support such ideas. Whenever the words “choice,” “choosing,” or “elect” are used with reference to Christians, they are used in a *collective* context, not a singular one. In other words, such passages speak of the “choice” of a group of Christians—and often, the entire body of Christ (as in Ephesians 1:3-5)—rather than the predestination of one person’s eternal destiny.

Predestination does not mean in Scripture what Calvinism claims that it means. It is true that God predestined the establishment of the Thessalonian church; or, we could say that God predestined the church of Christ, and these Thessalonian Christians have become members of that church. It is not true to claim that God had already decided the eternal future of each Christian at Thessalonica before he or she was even born. This latter view is not only a seriously flawed assumption, but entirely violates the purpose of Christ’s preaching, the apostolic ministry, the need for the gospel and its proclamation, and the free will of every person. It is God’s will that *all* men be saved (1 Timothy 2:4); Jesus came to “seek and save the lost” (Luke 19:10), not the already-saved. God’s gospel is proclaimed to all people, and every person who hears it decides independently whether or not he will obey it. “All who of their own volition believe and obey the Gospel of Jesus Christ are elected of God simply because they have complied with the terms He instituted in His own mind before the world began, and which, by His Gospel, have been made known unto man.”¹³

¹² James B. Coffman, *Commentary on 1 & 2 Thessalonians*, etc. (Austin, TX: Firm Foundation, 1978), 11-12; emphases are his.

¹³ Oran Rhodes, “Paul’s Salutation and Thanksgiving,” *Studies*, 55.

The authenticity of the gospel message that Paul preached to the Thessalonians was validated by the “power of the Holy Spirit” (1:5). This likely has a dual meaning. On the one hand, it most certainly refers to the demonstration of miracles which Paul performed in order to prove that his message was indeed from God (2 Corinthians 12:12, Hebrews 2:3-4). On the other hand, it can also refer to Jesus’ fulfillment of the Old Testament scriptures in order to prove that He was indeed the Messiah (Christ) of prophecy (Acts 17:1-4). Both the prophecies *and* the earthly ministry of Christ were the work of the Holy Spirit. Such was God’s part in confirming the message to these people. “With full conviction” refers to Paul’s part in the matter: he did not come to them as a charlatan seeking a gullible audience, but with sincerity and integrity, and without an ulterior motive. Paul and company did not only preach the gospel of Christ, but they lived it; they did not only speak the truth, but they walked according to that same truth (as in 3 John 3-4). Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy “proved” what kind of men they were by their own conduct, not just by the words they spoke. “For the tree is known by its fruit,” not only by what it professes itself to be (Matthew 12:33). “For your sake” indicates the selfless motive of this sincere preaching: it was not to trumpet Paul’s personal humility or his speaking abilities (see 1 Corinthians 2:1-5), but to provide the Thessalonians with God’s truth which leads to salvation.

“You also became imitators of us and of the Lord” (1:6)—inasmuch as Paul’s conduct imitated Christ, so he also was worth imitating (1 Corinthians 11:1, Philippians 3:17, 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9, et al). Not only *should* mature Christians be worth imitating, but those who are new to the gospel *ought* to imitate them (Hebrews 13:7). Christ (“the Lord”) is the standard by which all exemplary behavior is measured, however. Anyone who offers himself as an *example* of the Lord must also live in a manner consistent with His own conduct (1 John 2:4-6). If he does not do this, then neither should he be followed. The emphasis in the present passage, however, does not emphasize Paul’s good conduct, but that of the Thessalonians themselves. Paul is not on trial; it is the Thessalonian Christians who are being examined. Thankfully, they have exhibited a Christ-like attitude and behavior with all sincerity and genuineness.

The Thessalonians did not receive the Word of God in a vacuum of zero opposition, however; instead, they have “received the word in much tribulation” (1:6). From the very beginning, Paul’s preaching incited a great deal of resistance (Acts 17:4-9); it is obvious that this continued even after his departure. This refers to those Jews who saw the gospel of Christ as a threat to the Law of Moses and their own prestige within the city. Nonetheless, the Christians saw past this “tribulation” [lit., distress, persecution, or trouble] and embraced instead “the joy of the Holy Spirit”—or, that joy which is derived from living in harmony with God’s Spirit. For this reason, they “became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia” (1:7)—i.e., throughout the entire region of ancient Greece. (These Grecian provinces had been recognized separately since 142 BC.) In other words, the church at Thessalonica serves as a model church for the rest of the brotherhood.¹⁴ This does not imply that they are without fault or error in understanding, but that they strove to achieve the ideal standard of what Christ intended.

¹⁴ “A joyfully suffering church in Thessalonica meant exceedingly much for believers elsewhere, who in most cases also had to face vicious opposition. We see the broadness of Paul’s view. The steadfast joy of one church means so much for others. When we suffer, let us think not only of ourselves but also of all the others whom our joy in endurance may aid” (R. C. H. Lenski, *Commentary on the New Testament: Colossians, 1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998], 230).

“For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you...in every place your faith toward God has gone forth” (1:8)—i.e., wherever people talk about your faith, they also talk about that which your faith is based upon: “the word of the Lord.” Thus, the godly faith of this church serves as a kind of preaching of the gospel unto itself. “They had not actually gone out themselves, but their story and reputation were repeated by Christian merchants of Thessalonica who traveled widely.”¹⁵ “So that we have no need to say anything”—i.e., Paul does not have to convince others of the genuineness or faithful obedience of the Thessalonian church, but their reputation has already preceded them (and his own testimony). This did not mean that Paul says nothing at all about them. He is very proud of this congregation, and likely takes every opportunity to boast about them (as he did with others—see 2 Corinthians 9:1-2, for example). It does mean, however, that whether or not Paul says anything, people know who the Thessalonian Christians are and what they stand for.

In particular, what is known of the Thessalonians is that they “turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God” (1:9). This indicates not a superficial change or a simple transition, but a complete transformation of beliefs, character, and moral responsibility. Previously, these people were pagans who worshiped false gods, partook of immoral practices, and behaved as heathens. Yet, in doing so, they had no real virtues, no atonement for sins, and no hope for a (happy) afterlife. Their spiritual beliefs were predicated upon gods that could not speak, save, or prove anything. Non-living gods cannot impart life to anyone, no matter how passionately or devoutly one believes in them.¹⁶ In sharp contrast, God is the “living and true God”:

- ❑ He is self-existent and self-sufficient. His power or existence does not depend upon the adoration of those who follow Him; likewise, it is not compromised by those who do not.
- ❑ He is “living” *and* is able to impart life to others. He is the source of life; no one lives apart from His power; no one operates outside of His authority (Isaiah 44:8, 1 Corinthians 8:4-6).
- ❑ He is “true”—there is no lie (Titus 1:2), “shifting shadow” (James 1:17), or darkness in Him (1 John 1:5).
- ❑ He is dependable—this is the implication of both *living* and *true*. God will not disappoint those who believe in Him (Romans 10:11), even if such belief brings about tribulation or persecution. This God—and no other—is *worth* believing in, no matter what the cost. This is what the Thessalonians proclaim through their own actions. They do not have to preach the actual message; their actions speak loudly enough.

“And to wait for His Son...” (1:10)—this is nothing other than the actual return of Christ, or Second Coming (often referred to by commentators as the *Parousia* [“Coming” or “Advent”]).¹⁷ The Thessalonians are preoccupied with this subject, which Paul himself mentions several times throughout both epistles to them, but they also misunderstand some of the details of this event. Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection and His Second Coming serve as the two bookends of the believer’s faith. In faith, the believer looks back to what *has* happened; in faith, he also looks forward to what *will* happen. The Lord’s Supper memorial serves to link these two events: in it,

¹⁵ JFB, on 1:8.

¹⁶ Paul’s words are made even more remarkable when we remember that Thessalonica was a pagan city filled with idolatry, and that Mount Olympus, the alleged home of the pantheon of Greek gods, was a mere 50 miles to the south of this city.

¹⁷ “This is the only place in the Thessalonian letters where Jesus is called the Son of God” (Bruce, 19).

all believers “proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26). Thus, we “wait” with anticipation, but we cannot determine how long this wait will be.

Christ will come “from heaven” [or, “from the heavens”], to which He ascended when He left this world (Acts 1:9-11) and in which He presently dwells (see Colossians 3:1). “Whom He raised from the dead”—there is no mistaking who will return: it will be the same One who resurrected from the grave. Christ overcame death, took His seat “in the heavens” (Hebrews 8:1-2), and promises to return for His saints (Hebrews 9:27-28). Thus, Paul unites the three events—Christ’s resurrection, His ascension, and His return—as being the grand triad of the Christian faith.¹⁸ “Who rescues us from the wrath to come”—the Christian’s salvation is not a promotion based upon personal merit, nor an entitlement based upon status or favor. Instead, it is a *rescue mission* led by Christ Himself, and we who are rescued are helpless to *save* ourselves except by His own power (Colossians 1:13-14). Contrary to modern attempts to diminish it, or dismiss it altogether, God’s “wrath”—His settled anger toward the disobedient (John 3:36, Romans 1:18)—is very real and will be demonstrated against His enemies in due time. When we talk about “salvation,” God’s *wrath* is what we are saved *from* (Romans 5:8-9).

Questions:

- 1.) In 1:3, Paul mentioned “work of faith,” “labor of love,” and “steadfastness of hope.” Are these three things mutually dependent—in other words, do they all need each other to exist? If so, why (or how)? If not, why not?
- 2.) Paul brought the gospel to the Thessalonians in: “word” (as a spoken message); “in power”; “in the Holy Spirit”; and “with full conviction” (1:5). Are we able to reproduce this method of the presentation of the gospel today? Please explain.
- 3.) “You [Thessalonians] became imitators of us and of the Lord” (1:6). Do these “imitations” of two different parties lead to a singular conclusion, or two different ones? What can we learn from this concerning our own Christian influence and example? (Consider 1 Corinthians 11:1 and Philipians 3:16-17 in your answer.)
- 4.) When someone obeys the gospel today, does he also “[turn] to God from idols to serve a living and true God” (1:9), or does this only apply to a pagan and polytheistic culture like Thessalonica? (Implied: Is our world today *also* a pagan and polytheistic culture?)

¹⁸ “The hope of the second coming of Christ was real and powerful with Paul as it should be with us. It was subject to abuse then as now as Paul will have to show in this very letter. ...He is [also] certain that God’s wrath in due time will punish sin. Surely this is a needed lesson for our day. It was coming then and it is coming now” (Robertson, 14; bracketed word is mine).

Lesson Two: Paul's Care for the Thessalonians (2:1-12)

This chapter opens with Paul's return to his earlier comments about his personal conduct among the Thessalonians (2:1). This noble conduct on his part indicates the sincerity and integrity of his preaching: it was earnest, productive, and true. "Was not in vain"—according to the Greek tense of "was," this indicates an ongoing action, as in, "it continues to not be vain." What Paul had begun with the Thessalonians continues to produce beneficial results and is personally rewarding to him. The brotherly nature of Paul's relationship with these people is expressed in the frequent use of the term "brethren" throughout this epistle.

The suffering and mistreatment in Philippi (2:2) refers to Paul and Silas' unlawful beating and imprisonment in that city (Acts 16:22-40). Immediately after having left Philippi, Paul and Silas had gone to Thessalonica, so the Thessalonian Christians became familiar with the news of that situation, in part because of Paul's personal testimony of it. (It is likely, too, that his body still showed the actual scars and effects of that beating.) No doubt he reminds them of this in order to give perspective to their own suffering and mistreatment. In effect, he says, "I know you are going through a serious ordeal for your faith—remember how I also had suffered for this same reason" (see 2 Timothy 1:8, 12, and 3:12). Yet, despite the suffering, Paul showed boldness in his faith by continuing to preach the gospel in Thessalonica, even though he suffered there as well. "Opposition" means conflict, struggle, or striving. In other words, the gospel is a message of *contention* with those who resist it, yet a message of *salvation* to those who receive it (similar to 1 Corinthians 1:18).