



The introduction of the Gospel to the Macedonian city of Thessalonica had a very successful beginning as seen in Acts 17:1-10 where, after teaching in the local synagogue for three weeks, Paul was able to demonstrate how Jesus was the promised Messiah. Along with some of the Jews, a large number of “God-fearing Greeks and influential women” were persuaded. This caused jealousy, which prompted some of the Jews to form a band of thugs to capture Paul and Silas. Instead, they dragged one of the converts to the city authorities with accusations of “turning the world upside down” (disruption). Paul and Silas had to leave the city by night. The same Jews followed after Paul into Berea when they heard he was sharing the Gospel there (Acts 17:11-15)

While in Corinth, Paul had been concerned for the welfare of these new converts, and had sent Timothy to encourage them in their own troubles and to encourage them as well not to be “disturbed” by how they had seen the crowds react to the Gospel, and Paul and Silas (since “...we have been destined for this.” (I Thes. 3:3) Paul feared for them, that they would be influenced away from the Truth by the “tempter”. Instead he hears of their ongoing growth and a reputation of faith, that was influential to others that heard of it (1:8). They would need encouragement in recounting where they had come from, how they had grown, exhortations in avoiding common and publicly acceptable practices (sexual immorality), and to have an unshakable hope in the future (particularly the coming again of Christ, and the assured hope of those that had already died in Christ).

As we walk our way through this precious letter, from a compassionate and loving Apostle, we will be challenged in our faith, love, and hope in the examples referenced in the Thessalonian congregation; by Paul and his team and by the challenges to faithful living to the end of life. These had seen a very difficult beginning with a hateful response to the Truth of God’s Word, and had lost their teacher in a timing that would have seemed premature. Yet their consistency was another “proof of the genuine reception they had to the Gospel and that it was truly “in power and in the Holy Spirit” (1:5). Such “full conviction” is desperately needed in our churches today, in the midst of an age where spiritual complacency is encouraged and even defended.

I. An Exemplary, Genuine Impact of the Gospel - 1:1-10

A. Reading in Acts 18:1-11, Paul was trying to teach the Gospel in Corinth, and received updates from Silas and Timothy of the news from Macedonia (where Thessalonica was) - it was then he “...began devoting himself completely to the Word” testifying that Jesus was the Christ (the value this investment being clear)

1. The news (as we read in our text) was encouraging to Paul, who had concerns as to whether or not the truth had truly taken root

The results were a further evidence of the value in the message of the entire Gospel truth above all other concepts one might be tempted to propagate above it

- a. As Paul will point out, it is dependent on the work of the Holy Spirit and not on circumstances being favorable - such faith with any of us is difficult to live by
- b. Paul would again face extreme opposition in Corinth after receiving this positive news - the timing of God is impeccable !
- c. Works of true faith, laboring out of genuine love, and consistent, unwavering hope are qualities of genuine Christianity and the results of His “choosing” (1:3-4)

2. The testimony of these new believers is one of **full conversion** from “idols” as evidenced in their serving “the living and true God”

These were “bright spots” in the midst of hardships for the Apostle - it’s not the reality of temptation that is disheartening; it’s the surrender to it completely that is one of the most painful things to behold in those who were supposed to be “brothers”

- a. This is in stark contrast to the nominal expectations in churches today - “God” as presented in popular Christianity, is by many standards, blended without conflict with “idolatry”
- b. The church today needs such examples, even in their facing the temptations “of the age” and fears of the future (all of which we will deal with)
- c. Paul will end this letter with a focus on the return of Christ, which such a truth should affect how we look at life and prioritize our goals and efforts - being those “saved from the wrath to come” we have no reason to live like those destined for wrath

B. A church causing thanksgiving to God, recognizing His work in them- vs. 1-3

1. United together under God and Jesus Christ as Lord - vs. 1

Paul does not use his title of "Apostle" probably because his authority was not questioned in this church - he was freed to focus on content more, though he would defend his character against apparent accusations

Paul clarifies "ἐκκλησίᾳ" which was the general term for an assembly - these, in contrast, were assembled and united for an entirely different purpose/cause

This being one of many examples of Paul's "Christology" (the deity of Christ)

"Christianity took these everyday words of greeting and transformed them into vehicles able to convey the distinctive truths of the gospel." Hiebert

- a. Though Paul was the writer, he (as he does elsewhere) include those with him as further witnesses and authority to all that would be written - he is united with Silvanus (who is first seen at the Jerusalem council in Acts 15:22, and who is next with Paul in Phillipii where both were beaten and imprisoned (and where the jailer came to Christ)), and also Timothy, who was a younger protégé of Paul's
- b. Paul also uses the unique phrase "...to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ..." - the idea is that they are united together in the common recognition of God as Father and Jesus Christ as Lord - so they were distinct "called-out ones" (ἐκκλησίᾳ) in having God as "Father" and Jesus (the promised Messiah) as "Lord" (the term being "Κυρίῳ" which was supposed to have been exclusive to the Roman leader, and was also as to the reference to "Jehovah" by the Jews (as it was used in the Old Testament), and by pagans to their "gods")
- c. "It is easy to forget that here is a Jew who in his younger years would not have dared breath the name of YHWH but who now as a matter of course puts θεος and Jesus together as the compound object in a single prepositional phrase." Gordon Fee
- d. Paul's reoccurring phrase "grace and peace to you" naturally follows as a result of their being "in" God the father and Christ the Lord, and as a result, to them is (they are to realize they have) "grace" (as in a greeting where you say to another "condescending favor to you"), which to a non-believer would sound offensive, yet to a believer, it is a precious reminder of their reality before God, and as a result, they truly have "peace" (an inner calmness even in troubles, knowing one's "state")
- e. At the very start, in the greeting, Paul is setting the scene as to who and what they are and what they have been blessed with (perspective is crucial!)

2. Paul directs his gratefulness to God for the faithfulness of these Believers - vs. 2-3

Putting the account in Acts 17 with this expression of thankfulness, it stresses the genuineness of what is being written

He does go on to point out three key qualities he attributes as theirs, after first identifying God as the source of such grace, and then book-ending it with God's "choosing" them and His love of them

While in prayer, thanking God for those that are faithful (that He has placed around us), is a very healthy practice

The best expression of thankfulness include details, not just "I'm so thankful for you..."

So they "work" because they truly believe, as those that don't actually believe, don't actually work (they are "unfaithful")

With the use of this word for "love", it becomes obvious why Paul and his team were so grateful - this "love" is selflessness, the sacrifice of one's self without required reimbursement

- a. As referenced earlier, when Paul heard of how well they were doing in their growth, he devoted himself totally to the Word (seeming to indicate he left off doing his vocational work (leather-working, likely for tents))
- b. Paul does not thank them, but lets them know he thanks God for them - John Gill wrote on this, "... the apostle ascribes nothing to their free will, previous dispositions and qualifications, diligence and industry; nor does he attribute anything to himself and to his companions, who were only ministers by whom these believed; but he refers all to God, to his grace and goodness: and he returned thanks to him for it..."
- c. Just open expressions of gratefulness help those hearing to also realize where such results find their source/means
- d. Paul and his team always thank God for these co-laborers every time they think of them, and as a result, "make mention" of them in their prayers
- e. Stressing the impact they had on him, Paul mentions not only are they always thankful for them, but they also constantly remember the particulars of God's work in them - he gives them the **details of his gratefulness**
- f. They are thankful for their "work of faith" (could also be "work of faithfulness/faithful work") as in the outworking of their actual faith (versus the "dead faith of James 2:17)
- g. "That is he gives thanks for their work that flows from, and embodies, their believing allegiance or total commitment to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Andy Johnson
- h. This is particularly encouraging because it proves their actual belief (that they had not just superficially agreed)
- i. Because they truly believed, they truly loved (the Lord primarily), which produced (as a byproduct) loving "labor" - the words for "work" and "labor" are close in their meaning, but the usage of "κόπος" (labor) carries the idea of not just the effort, but the cost of the effort - as faith requires by its very existence, "work", so true love produces self-sacrifice demonstrated to/for the object of their love
- j. This is clearly the idea because of the very specific word for love used here (ἀγάπη), which was one the early Christians took up as their word for love since it was used by Christ of the Father

"Hope relates to anticipations or the future, but biblical hope is always something that is completely certain. It is not a mere personal aspiration or yearning for something to come; it is something certain because it is based on what God has said He will yet do." Hiebert

This is the advantage of having Him "before the Father"

- k. So they did what they did because they believed (had genuine faith), and what they did, cost them much because they truly loved (as they had come to know they were loved by what Christ had done for them)
- l. In all this they were consistent (not faltering) because of their "hope" (ἐλπίδος, expectation, anticipation) they were steadfast (ὑπομονῆς, enduring) - this was significant because they were still facing opposition/persecution, yet with a focus and hope placed in the future (and not the present), they had plenty of incentive to press on
 - m. "It is not the resignation of the passive sufferer, so much as the fortitude of the stout-hearted **soldier**, which carries him in the hope of victory through the long day's march and conflict." Cambridge Bible Notes
 - n. This hope is steadfast because its focus is "our Lord Jesus Christ," and He is our advocate and intercessor **always** "before our God and Father" (see Heb. 7:25 for His intercessory work and I John 2:1 for His advocacy work)
 - o. All that is done is done before Him, nothing is missed (even evils done to them and their submissive, trusting posture before Him) - see also II Thes. 1:5-10

C. "Election" evidenced in its results - vs. 4-10

1. This is still a part of what Paul was giving thanks to God for - he was encouraged to "know" that they were his "brothers" (family) because of the evidence of the message of the Gospel being received (in all that it was **producing**... none of it counterfeit) - vs. 4

As it is with our love... we choose to do it and to whom we will love in particular - it is a positive expression (and truth) though many would paint it as the opposite

We see both concepts, election and brotherhood (because of adoption) in Eph. 1:4-5

This is referenced again in I Thes. 5:23-24 and other texts such as Eph. 2:10, I Pet. 5:10 and II Tim. 1:8-9

"Faith directs us upward to the Heavenly Father and to His son, at His right hand. Love directs us outward to those about us in society, both saints and sinners, who need our help. Hope directs us onward in time to the day of His sure return." John Stott

- a. The phrase is "εἰδότες, ἀδελφοὶ ἠγαπημένοι" "Knowing (because of observation (from εἶδω meaning "to see") brethren beloved (always loved (perfect tense)) and this "ὑπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ" by the God - which is expressed/proven in His choice
- b. It was the obvious sign to Paul of "τὴν ἐκλογὴν ὑμῶν" (the choosing of you), their immediate and consistent growth and resolve in it (the opposite demonstrating one not chosen by their lack of resolve and **returning** to what they had left) - God knows those that are His, but we often must wait for solid "proofs," and when seeing them, we also are thrilled! (for we are seeing the "supernatural" at work)
- c. This is a significant point in light of the "evidences" Paul has already listed, but these are **results** and not the "**means**" - these new believers have progressed so much and so well BECAUSE they are "elect," and were not "elected" because they did these things (or because they would) - this is also key because it shows the **source** of these qualities and actions, so **they will continue to persist because it is His work**
- d. This is encouraging because of so many "pretend" Christians, who when they become significant in number in churches, alter the idea of what a "Christian" actually is, does, and "looks like" - true Christians are grown in/by God's grace, while impostors are influenced and controlled by **culture**
- e. "Election protects us from thinking of salvation as dependent on human whims, and roots it squarely in the will of God. Left to ourselves, we do not wish to leave our state of untroubled sinfulness." Leon Morris

2. The "practical tool" that was used to bring this about was the presentation of the Gospel - vs. 5

The Gospel is not mere rhetoric!

People are not "talked into" Christ, they are radically changed from within (by hearing the Word of Truth, but that mixed with the "power" which comes only by means of the Holy Spirit)

It was presented to them "in full assurance" and received "in full assurance"

We cannot make ourselves believe, let alone others - this is a work of the Holy Spirit

- a. Paul and his team had presented "our Gospel" (the "good news" they were associated with and personally defined by), but it was not "in word only" (it was made-up of words, words were definitely used, but it had to be more than that)
- b. "Mere words" is often the content of many other "pseudo-gospels" and philosophies, but the True Gospel came with impact (the power that affected change - the understanding was enlightened, the heart made new, thought processes changed and behavior and character naturally followed) - this "power" was the **result** of God's grace, thus it was "the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16)
- c. The evidences of the actual working of the Holy Spirit (faith, love and hope) were results of His working in them, and all of this "with full conviction" in that it all came with absolute confidence (they were sure of it)
- d. The order of this is significant - "assurance" (confidence) is a work of the Holy Spirit in us (we are sure because of His working, not because we have accumulated enough learning and intellectual evidences to overthrow our skepticism)

"Assurance" was needed for many reasons - compare to Col. 2:1-8

This was a topic Paul addressed elsewhere when making a case for their genuineness (contrast to the false-teachers)- II Cor. 4:1-2; II Cor. 6:3-10

This is natural when others are convinced of the value of something and they admire what they see - we need to be aware that others will possibly mimic us (our behavior, attitudes and "lived-out" priorities)

We do not want to reproduce/multiply our character flaws (under the banner of "Christlikeness")

These pressures are typically deliberate but could also be results of living in accordance with the "Word"

Even many believers resist the thought of God's part in their suffering - yet it is clearly one of His choicest tools in placing (as it were) an exclamation mark on a message

Professed faith is given greater impact when it is demonstrated faith - too many end up discrediting the "faith" they proclaim because it makes no difference in their lives

Reputations of the impact of the Gospel are often the forerunner to the Gospel as it comes to others - it is not in place of the Gospel, but it is used to stir interest and questions

The Lord of the Bible is typically resisted because He cannot be completely understood, nor is He manipulatable and cannot be controlled (dictated to by man)

- e. Their certainty was evidenced in their willingness to suffer for it and in association with it - their's was no "convenience based living"!
- f. The final "proof" and "practical tool" used of God was the proven character of the Apostle and those that were with him in this ministry - this is addressed at length in chapter 2:1-10 - it was genuine and demonstrated as such in their lives (while living and serving among them), that they were serious about the responsibility of handling the Gospel as well as their not being driven to serve themselves, but those God sent them to
- g. As those representing all aspects of the Gospel, we should sense the obligation to "prove" our character as good, honest and humble, not allowing ourselves to cause any obstacle to the Truth

3. Another evidence of their Election was what seen in what they imitated - vs. 6-7

- a. The word is "μιμηταὶ" (where we get "mimic"), emulating what is admired and what is considered to be the proper example to follow - everyone is influenced by something, and will eventually imitate it (even (often) without knowing they are doing it)
- b. They began to pattern their lives after how they had seen Paul and his associates live
- c. The order of this is correct also; there was a following of their teachers followed by (as it always should be) a following of the Lord (as they learn more of Him) - this should impress upon us to be alert to the type of example we are setting - we do not want to teach what is right but then demonstrate (by example) what is not in harmony with this
- d. Still following the examples of their teachers and then of Christ, these "received the Word in much affliction" - the phrase is "ἐν θλίψει πολλῇ" in pressures numerous - these "pressures" were with the intent to crush them and the "Word" - yet, the response was with "joy" which would not have made much sense without the clarifier "of the Holy Spirit" (such a response is evidence to self and others of His working)
- e. There is an odd realization to discover that there often comes a discouragement when not suffering for something right (as though there is an inner sense of our need to be contradicted by a sinful age)
- f. The result of all this was their becoming an "example" to all the other believers in the surrounding area of Macedonia, even into Achaia (where Corinth was) - the word for example is "τύπον," picturing something that receives an imprint of something else (usually by means of pressure or a "blow") - they were literally an "impact"
- g. As illustrated here, God will often use our suffering for what is right, to emphasize His Truth and the true quality of the Gospel

4. The power of a testimony of full obedience from genuine faith - vs. 8-10

- a. Paul builds on the fact that their response to the Gospel was so dramatic, and had left such an impact on their surrounding areas, that it had even "sounded forth" ("ἐξήχηται" - reverberate, echo-out as in the message being repeated many times with just this one aspect of their testimony) - each obedience is important
- b. Their "faith" (that they believe/trust and the "what" of what they believe/trust) had traveled on ahead of them (as a church) to all areas, to the degree that where ever Paul and his team went, they need not try to bring it up since it was so widely known
- c. Their faith (in contrast to what it had been before) was "God-ward," making it distinct from the faith they had had in idols and that which "normal society" trusted
- d. Those impacted by this account, "They themselves" are "reporting" how well Paul, his team (and therefore the message of the Gospel they were bringing) were all so profoundly received
- e. The precise point of this testimony was "how" they turned away from idolatry (the worship and service of the tangible, the man-made deities) to "serve the living and true God..." - this would have been along the lines of "what would have made them so drastically change?"
- f. The word for "idol" ("εἰδώλων") has as its root the idea of "what can be seen" and so came to represent an image - but it provides an initial clue as to one of the concepts that made them appealing; they could be seen, touched and (to some degree) fully understood (and controlled/manipulated)

This was the actual transformation Paul mentioned in Rom. 12:2 (thinking was changed permanently)

Many experience conversions of all types in their lives, but very few convert to the right "thing" or, if they seek to follow God, they resist the idea of true "servant-hood" (slavery)

This would lead to the comfort and hope of this Church as they wrestled with the reality of those they loved that had died

Jesus is the one "delivering" (present tense) from the wrath "coming" (present tense; it is coming now and will continue to come till it arrives at the judgment) - it is an imminent anger!!

Rom. 1:18 begins a section that also demonstrates the wrath of God directed at "determined disobedience"

- g. Therefore, one of the strongest "proofs" of their message and integrity (Paul and his associates), was the impact on the Thessalonians (not just that they were changed, but how they were changed, and to what they were changed into)
- h. They turned away from something (idols) and to something (the living and true God)- conversion is not just evidenced in what is left behind, but more-so in what is pursued
- i. Their turn (conversion) was to "δουλεύειν Θεῷ ζῶντι καὶ ἀληθινῷ" (to serve (to be the slave of) God (who is) alive/active and genuine (real, true)) - many serve a "god" that is not real, but is "how they see it" and live their lives are based upon fiction - this can also be the result of societal "gods" that are followed simply because so many others are following them
- j. This being the case, it is natural then that they are also waiting for Jesus "from Heaven"
- k. This same "living and true" God, raised His son from the dead (now bringing in the concept of the resurrection of not only Christ, but as will soon be dealt with, the resurrection of those that are His)
- l. This return of "His Son" will include the resurrection of those in Christ - this steady hope (expectation) serves as a mainstay through life and all its pressures, discouragements, fears and disappointments
- m. The hope is also fixed upon what should be the true point of fear and that facing the "wrath to come" (God's judgment of sin, standing condemned before His throne) - it is not a **possible** judgment, it is **certain**, and the only rescue from it is through Jesus!
- n. With such a hope/expectation, all other "wraths" are not controlling - the "fear of man lays a trap" (Pro. 29:25) but safety is had by those that "trust in the Lord."
- o. Some connect this phrase to the "Great Tribulation" referenced in the book of Revelation, but there is nothing in the context to narrow it to that point (as though that is the ultimate wrath of God) - Romans 5:9 makes it clear what the "wrath of God" references and our deliverance from it through Christ
- p. All of those who are not in Christ (regardless of the time in which they live), have an unavoidable rendezvous with the Wrath of God!

II. Walking In A Manner Worthy of God - 2:1-16

A. Coming with Truth and integrity - vs. 1-12

- 1. In the first century, it was common to come across religious and philosophical impostors and swindlers, so it is not surprising to think that Paul would have been associated (by his opponents) with such groups (impostors associate opponents with other impostors)

Motive would need to be proven in actions, and the consistency of them with the message proclaimed - this is at the core of "integrity"

- a. Typically, the best evidence to present when integrity and motive are challenged is eye-witnesses (it's very difficult to prove motive when it is questioned)
- b. Paul appeals to the Thessalonians themselves and not to the critics - **avoid "professional arguers" and keep a focus on those being ministered to**
- c. It is also a reminder that people can be talked out of what they have witnessed for themselves (so Paul appeals to their memory/witness in 2:1, 5, 9, 10 and 11)

- 2. Their "coming to you" was not a visit without genuine impact - vs. 1

The Gospel and all that was taught as a result of it was not useless (as likely the enemies were claiming)

- a. It was not "in vain" (οὐ κενὴ, not hollow/empty) - much of what was purported to be teaching (in their day) and "truth" was empty of lasting, beneficial affect
- b. Many handle the concept of "not in vain" as being "fruitful", which is accurate, but how "fruitful" is defined is also key - if the opposition were looking for emotional responses, popular acceptance, and lives made easier as "fruit," then they would have naturally deemed the true Gospel as "useless" (since it clearly brought trouble with it from the general public)

Paul will demonstrate some of the better "evidences" of its value in its content, the integrity of the messengers and the integrity of the message

- 3. Their genuineness was demonstrated in their boldness in the face of suffering - vs. 2

They faced not just the pain of being beaten, but the suffering that comes with being publicly shamed (treated as criminals)

- a. Even though Paul and Silas had suffered and been "mistreated" (treated shamefully) they were "bold to declare the Gospel"
- b. They were treated with disdain and contempt in Philippi, all of which was designed to silence them - yet they had "boldness in our God" (they knew His control and purpose, even in the beatings and in allowing the opposition to go so-far)

God allows opposition and suffering to prove His validation (as if suffering being needed in His plan) - compare to Heb. 2:9-10

- c. This was in stark contrast to those who propagated a message that would lend to their own comfort and personal profit - such seek to avoid all conflict
- d. God quite often validates His people and His message by bringing both through oppositions of all sorts, demonstrating genuineness - some "Gospel" forgeries can be identified by the lack of opposition and popular acceptance - even early in Acts, it did not take long for the true Gospel message to be attacked
- e. The words used to describe this "πολλῶ ἄγωνι" describe many, various oppositions, competitors (a word used to describe an athletic contest) - ease and convenience will not be the "proving ground" of God's message and messengers - instead, He will use this to embolden those that are truly His, and expose impostors

4. Three qualities of a true "appeal" (exhortation) - vs. 3

Such an "appeal" was intending to radically change them by changing how they saw everything, and so changed their values system

Where we get our word "planet"

Paul warned Timothy of these in II Tim. 4:3, but more so from the side of the listeners accumulating teachers who appeal to what they already desire

It was very common for traveling teachers to be sexually motivated, or for the aim to get public praise and notoriety

There can be many motivations to misrepresent the truth, and the hardest to find are often the ones with seemingly good intentions

- a. The "παράκλησις" was their open challenge and the comforting motivation in it (knowing the Truth and thus the value of following after it even in the face of opposition) - its intent was one of full conversion ("full conviction" in 1:5)
- b. Such a challenge did not find its roots in error of any type of "straying off the set course" (πλάνης - to roam aimlessly, wandering off track)
- c. This is an interesting word to describe the idea of "error" (not necessarily as we might think of it as being mistaken, but more with the active idea of either wandering around from thought to thought, philosophy to philosophy to deceive the hearers; or to wander about piecing together interesting and new ideas, with a message ever "in flux")
- d. Their motive in bringing the message was not out of "impurity" - the underlying word (ἀκαθαρσίας) indicating sexual impurity or it could be "adulterated" content (mixing some truth into error to provide a perceived level of legitimacy)
- e. Yet, at the core of the Gospel was the reality of a moral change (from ungodliness and immorality), as the true Gospel does not bring with it impurities of any type (such impurities are introduced by charlatans (falsely claiming a skill))
- f. Paul's team were not "tricksters" - they had not motive to deceive (their objective was to present the truth clearly, so as to represent the Lord's message accurately)
- g. So the three qualities of a "true appeal" are (1). It is accurate (2). It is unadulterated (nothing added) and (3). It is honest (presented as intended)

5. "Entrusted with the Gospel" - vs. 4

There can be a multitude of reasons one would not speak the truth (as knowing themselves to be seen of God) - it is often outcome-based (or at least how one believes they can cause an outcome based upon the person, putting the hearer before the One who sent them to share His message)

Mankind has always had their own "gospels" to compete and stand in the stead of God's - man's gospel finds its hope and glory in the goodness and wisdom of mankind

There's a difference between sharing the actual "good news" of God and sharing what is intended to be good news AS someone else would want to hear it (on their terms)

- a. As servants of the Lord, we are all obligated to treat what the Lord has given us (and given us to do) with the highest of reverence - there is an aspect of the "fear of the Lord" that is missing in popular Christianity which makes allowances for error
- b. On this verse Albert Barnes wrote, "An effectual restrainer from mere management and trick will always be found in a deep conviction of the truth and importance of religion. Artifice and cunning are the usual accompaniments of a bad cause... If an object cannot be secured by sincerity and straight-forward dealing, it is not desirable that it should be secured at all."
- c. Paul makes a bold statement (bold because of its truth), that "we have been approved by God" (δεδοκιμάσμεθα, tested and so approved from here on out to be genuine/reliable) so as to be entrusted with His "τὸ εὐαγγέλιον" (the good message/news, in contrast to mankind's alternative "good newses")
- d. Having such a limiter of what they can say, he concludes "so we speak" - this is at the core of why they declare what they must declare, in contrast to the others that teach what they teach "to please men" (after all, how can you keep an audience if they don't like what they are hearing?)
- e. They, as so also we should, realized they were entrusted (πιστευθῆναι, trust/confidence was placed upon them to share the message, and so to share it correctly)
- f. The actual "Gospel" is not good news to the unregenerate - they do not seek to be at peace with God, and most certainly do not truly love Him
- g. A true teacher is driven to please God (and Paul sets this over against pleasing man) - people can be deceived as to motive, and so can be tricked into being pleased with a lie, but **God knows (without limits) the "heart"**

And He "puts it to the test" to allow what is really in it to be seen

As Paul mentioned in Gal. 1:10, if he were trying to please men, he would not be the servant of Christ - **the two are not compatible!**

Flattery is an odd thing; we like to hear it, but are unfulfilled without an ongoing stream of it - yet "wounded" by a faithful friend with the truth, we dislike it at first, but are truly made the better because of it

"... we did not pander to your feelings; we did not soften the demands of the gospel." Pulpit Commentary

Seeking to prove genuineness before people will have some benefit, but **living** to be genuine before God will be the best motivator, since it is before Him we all will give an account anyway

They were not looking to impress those they served nor those that may have been onlookers - both can be motivators for those with "self" as their main purpose

Clearly Paul was purposed to remain as humble as he possibly could with these believers - as the letter began, so he still recognized the profound work **God** was already doing amongst them (even when Paul was not there)

False teachers and bad influences are the opposite; they are not out for the best of others and see others as a means to their own happiness and fulfillment - even as some would have children to fulfill themselves rather than to properly invest themselves in their children

see I John 3:16-18

see Acts 20:18-27 - life was not precious "to self" because it was "precious" in the Lord's work

h. The issue of pleasing men more or rather than God, was and still is a constant concern and challenge - it was to be treated as serious and not as something that could be politely **overlooked** (because if fundamentally affects the message) - see also I Cor. 2:4-5. Gal. 1:10, II Cor. 5:11 (because of the "fear of the Lord we PERSUADE" not compromise of conform to "men")

6. Outward conduct dictated by inward integrity - vs. 5-8

- a. Paul and his team had a genuine affection for the Thessalonian Christians, which dictated why they did what they did - others had selfish, self-serving motives which also explained why they did what they did (and how they went about it)
- b. For instance, Paul did not use a "flattering discourse" (from a word that meant to "fawn", as we would say "fawning over someone", to gush with compliments in order to gain favor) - they were honest with them, for any other approach might bring about self-esteem, but that grounded in what is not **real**
- c. Flattery is always a warning sign of some level of deceit! It is an addictive poison!
- d. Paul also did not come to them and serve them under a "cloak of covetousness" - there was no hidden agenda of profit (either for money or in the building of personal pride)
- e. Their teaching and discipling of them was not an "act" of any sort - they did not use the Gospel as a pretext (disguise) to use to get to their "resources" - the Word of God is not a tool to be used to **cater** to self (especially at the expense of others!)
- f. He then calls, as it were, God as witness to his purity in motive - these might be easy words for some to say, but only those who are absolutely sure would dare invoke God - it is also an acknowledgment that God knows the heart (of all), so **lying or putting on a false-front would be futile anyway**
- g. It is interesting to consider that even the "pseudo-prophets" felt the need to disguise/conceal their covetousness, realizing its bad appearance; though they were still motivated/controlled by it
- h. They (in their integrity) were not pursuing "from people" or "of people" - they did not seek to do what they were to do to get recognition (glory) from those around them, nor did they go about what they were assigned to do with the idea of "man's glory" (what mankind **sees** glory to be) - see John 5:43-44
- i. Paul makes note that he and those with him could have "asserted authority," being "apostles of Christ" - they had a position that could have rightfully carried with it the option to make demands upon the Thessalonians - they could have demanded some form of honor for their position (which could have also included financial support, though the term is more general)
- j. Instead, they were "gentle," and the comparison is made to a mother nursing her child (in compassionate, need-meeting gentleness) - see II Cor. 12:14-15
- k. Such a picture could not allow then a demanding, cold-hearted, self-centered egotist domineering over them! It was a loving mother (picture), sensitive to the needs of her child, she is not bothered by the crying out of need, nor does she put her own needs before that of the child she loves (and would give herself for)
- l. This is supported by the use of the word $\delta\mu\epsilon\iota\rho\acute{\upsilon}\mu\epsilon\nu\omicron\iota$ (fond affection, yearning compassion) for them, so genuine as it was, they were poised to not only share with them the Gospel but **themselves** as well, in the process
- m. The affectionate bond that is formed between those who are truly in Christ, and the compassion that grows as each sees the other suffer and sacrifice for all aspects of association with the Gospel, it more intense than any other earthly affection... it is more than emotional; it is spiritual!
- n. These phrases and word pictures demonstrate the heart we are all to have in doing the Lord's work with and for each other - the focus is to be on the needs of the other, their feelings and struggles, far before and above our own
- o. The best way to have consistent "outward conduct" is to have consistent inner thinking that properly evaluates others in light of our responsibilities to them before the Lord (we give account to Him, not them)

7. Walking “worthy of God” in His kingdom and glory - vs. 9-12

Giving them the Truth of the Good News was the priority above all other concerns (even that of their safety and comfort) - the Gospel came with (for them) persecution and all sorts of new conflicts

They would have had to work around the daily “job” responsibilities of each day - this would also serve as an example of how all ought to do - work, and so eat - II Thes. 3:10

Conduct is controlled by who/what we are internally (before God) and how it demonstrates itself outwardly before others - we must remember that we are on constant “display” before those around us

These three words ought to be used with ourselves in determining genuine integrity - a constant awareness of separation to God, living in light of it in how we behave with others (focused on a genuinely righteous example) so that no one can rightfully accuse us of excused “bad behavior”

“To excel others in the example of a godly life.” Geneva Bible Notes

It was common to look on the father as the one who would “push” the children in their growth (for their good) - the absence of fathers or of “manly” fathers has led to undisciplined, lazy and purposeless children

Fathers love to see their children succeed and continue to grow into more successes - so they often will apply pressure and correction to help them along to it

The Revised Version translates the word as “testifying” (bearing witness) - the opposite being those who “live it” a little, and then testify that it is unworthy of them and their time

- a. To “walk worthy of God” is a phrase that captures the moral drive for why any would live sacrificially in this world - we all instinctively need to live for something of value, but if this is **misdirected**, so will the values we pursue and the value of what we do
- b. Sincere love (as following God’s demonstration of true love) is seen in action, and self-sacrifice for the object of love - so Paul points them back to the time when he and his co-laborers served them, working very hard so as not to be a “burden” to them, and to have as much as possible, a distraction-free presentation of the Gospel
- c. They “labored and toiled” “night and day” and were still able to then proclaim the Gospel - this is another vivid demonstration that with all the necessary responsibilities of life, none of them usurp the primary purpose (remaining focused on God’s Word through (and in) it all)
- d. Verse 10 is more in setting an example than it is contrasting themselves to false teachers (as in II Corinthians) - still building on the concept of **integrity**, Paul emphasizes their being first-hand witnesses (and even God) of how the ministering team conducted themselves - this was not for self-exaltation, but to serve as an example that they should continue to follow (mimic)
- e. In particular, toward these “believers” (which was the focus here and not before unbelievers) - they acted “holy”, “righteous” and so were found “blameless” - this is quite a list! - “Holy” is their living as being separated for/to God and His purposes above all else, while “righteous” pictures the living out (proactively) holiness in, that what was done, was not tainted or influenced by sinful purposes and intentions - this produced behavior that could not be **rightfully** condemned (blamed for demonstrating or inducing unrighteous behavior in others)
- f. None of us has ever lived truly “blamelessly” in all areas of our lives (especially with others) - blamelessness also includes the idea of “making right” wrongs (or at least the humble, sincere attempts)
- g. Again, this is all “toward believes” - too often we sense the freedom to behave badly with other believers (as one might in their biological family feel it is acceptable) - but we must not lose focus on the vital importance of living as righteously as possible with each other
- h. Not only was Paul gentle as a nursing mother with her child, but he was as a Father to them, in his “exhorting”, “encouraging” and “charging” (imploring) them - they (as also we) were not to rest in past successes, but continue on to **more** faithful disciplines, service, and ministry
- i. The fatherly “push” of encouragement and instruction was that they “walk in a manner worthy of God,” which is no cliché, but one directed at the best life direction!
- j. There was “exhortation” to this - the word being παρακαλοῦντες, describing one who calls another to themselves to press them urgently toward something - this does not describe a pseudo-encouragement of making one feel content in their **inactivity** for the Lord or lack of growth
- k. There was also “encouragement” to this - the word being παραμυθούμενοι, picturing one along side another, giving comforting words or instruction - they not only give words of comfort, **they are with them in the challenges of life** (cheering them on as they grow) - it also includes the idea of persuasion
- l. There was also “imploring” to this “walk” - the word being μαρτυρόμενοι, which has the basic idea to call as a witness, and here with the idea of not only Paul challenging them and acting as a witness to its rightness, but charging them also to serve as witnesses - we need to demonstrate such a “worthy walk” and prod one another to do the same (because **it is** a “worthy walk”)
- m. The word for “walk” (περιπατεῖν) does mean to “walk,” but as in picturing living out of life - as you “progress step-by-step” through life, this should be what describes your “walk” (life) - and it is to be describable as “worthy of God” - the word “ἄξιως” finding its origin in a word used to describe “weight” - it “measures-up”

B. Accepting the Word of God as the Word of God - vs. 13-16

1. The Bible is typically referenced as “the Word of God” yet the glib response of not acting on it with all seriousness, demonstrates lip-service without faith in action - vs. 13

We need to fully consider our own seriousness in whether or not we actually treat it as God’s Word - if so, what could we possibly take more seriously!?

And this “constantly” - it is ALWAYS something to be grateful for and not take for granted - it is evidence of God at work in a life

see also I John 5:1-5

a. Paul commends the Thessalonian believers for accepting what was taught/shared, not as the “words of men” (just another group opinion, limited by all the same constraints of the limitedness of the rest of mankind)

b. He was thankful that they did not just “receive” it (as one sees themselves as having options to do with what was received however they desired), but uses a stronger word (ἐδέξασθε) to describe it as being “accepted” (welcomed)

c. For **it truly was God’s Word that was at work in them** (it was the source of their change and growth versus the rhetoric/philosophy of men) - it is interesting to also notice Paul was grateful to God for this, and not the Thessalonians

d. Its working was “performed” (it was set at work, like a medicine consumed has “active ingredients”) in those believing - this last identifier (“believing”) demonstrates why God’s Word seems ineffective with so many - they don’t truly trust/believe it, because they do not truly take it as God’s Word

2. The proof of their acceptance of God’s Word was seen in their suffering - vs. 14-16

a. They “became imitators” of the Judean Christians (not necessarily consciously imitating them), but received like treatment because of their full assurance of the Gospel - the reaction to it (the true Gospel) is similar around the world

b. Paul’s terminology is significant (especially if this is one of the earliest letters) - he references the “Churches of God in Christ Jesus” - the term for “churches” was a common word (ἐκκλησιῶν) meaning a general assembly (called out (distinguished) from other groups - this “assembly” was unique, in that it was God’s (in contrast to all other of mankind’s “churches” (clubs/groups))

c. They were (physically) located **in** Judea, but their greater significance was their being **“in Christ Jesus”** which is where all of those that are His are more defined in their “location” - so, though they were located geographically from each other, the Thessalonians were treated the same in their own country, by their own “countrymen” because of their genuine association with God’s Word

d. Their “neighbors” rejected them (just as those faced in Judea) - such treatment is to be expected when one is serious about **following God’s Word as God’s Word** - they will soon come to be looked upon as strangers and dangerous invaders by those who were once their “countrymen”

e. In Judea, this persecution came from the “Jews”, essentially religious people who put to death their promised Messiah and even those who preceded Him, who were foretelling of His coming (the prophets)

f. These “persecutors” were “displeasing to God” in particular, in their direct opposition to His word and their work to stop it wherever it appeared - their method was to not only kill (when they were able), but to drive out any association with God’s Gospel Truth - in so doing they are “hostile to all men” (contrary/opposing all men)

g. It was their religious effort to stop the Gospel (to hold back the proclamation and acceptance of the “good news” (literally working to stop them from being saved))

h. This they did “as always” (it was as their forefathers, and so now they also did) - see also Mat. 23:1-36 where the Lord details this obstructionist process - the use of the phrase “... fill up the measure of their sins...” indicates that there is a limit to the amount of sins that such a group (or person) can make, until they are finally called to account for it (face the judgment) - nothing is missed!

i. Still speaking of the Jews in Judea, Paul writes that “... wrath has come upon them to the utmost.” - This is an expression of great judgment (one to be dreaded), showing the extreme severity of what is being done by these enemies of God

j. So, concluding this point, as the Thessalonians suffered for taking God at His Word, so these others will suffer to the ultimate extreme for not only opposing it, but refusing its propagation to even the Gentiles

God’s churches are distinguished as such because of their loyalty to His Word (even to their own hurt)

Those “of this world/age” will all react to God’s Word in the same way (seeing it as a threat to the priority of living for the “now” and all its priorities)

This is illustrative of humanity in general - they have a way that seem right to them, and when the true Truth comes, they must snuff it out so that it not spread (and this under the guise of a form of righteousness, one of their own creation)

This may sound extreme, but when justified in their own reasoning, it became a moral/justified effort - much of the opposition to the truth is seen as righteous (in their own eyes)

There is an end to sin coming, and with each group or person, it will end in the “wrath coming” upon them

This may have been in reference to the coming Fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

In their self-righteousness, they could not even tolerate its presence, let alone counter it with their arguments

III. Deep Comfort From The Proven Faith in Others - 2:17-3:13

A. This next section is easily seen as an expression of affection for the Thessalonian Christians, but more is revealed than just this - Paul's life objective is shown - vs. 17-20

1. Separated in person, but not in heart - vs. 17

To try to better capture the essence of this the ESV translated it, "torn away from you"

Other competing affections ultimately reveal "the heart" - one of the unavoidable results of the Gospel, is the undying, growing affection and care that is produced in those assimilated by it

Paul was not giving "lip service" to his attempts to come to them - he was genuine in it (as we ought to be with each other)

- a. Paul's use of the word "ἀπορφανίζω" in this phrase demonstrates something more than just separation - the second half of the word is where we get our word for "**orphaned**" (being left alone and deprived of fellowship/relationship)
- b. Being "torn apart" did separate them "in person" but not "in spirit" (in their thoughts and affections) - they had not known them long, but as the reception of the Gospel does in any group, it binds them stronger than any other "binding agent"
- c. The separation only enhanced their desire to see them in person (which may not come, but would still be realized at the Lord's return)
- d. Such descriptions reveal the lack of such a bond in most of professing Christianity in our day - this is not the result of naturally affectionate people, as much as it is the uniting around the Lord and His work for us, and all this in the midst of an age that rejects Him (and so us as well) - sadly, many who claim to be in Christ can live life apart from genuine Christians indefinitely, not finding the world to be an **enemy**

2. The hindering efforts of Satan - vs. 18

It would do us well to look on our daily desires to do what we are called to do (with and for the Lord and for each other) and be looking for hindrances placed in our path to stop us

- a. Because of his desire to be with them (for mutual comfort, challenge, and encouragement) he attempted more than once to actually come to them
- b. This relationship (this meeting) was apparently high on the "radar" of Satan himself, so much so that he actively worked to thwart it (the word being "ἐνέκοψεν" picturing a cutting into something, so here, it pictures a breaking-up of a possible path/road that could be taken)
- c. If we realized the spiritual activity and agendas around us (by the enemy), we would not be so inclined to quickly yield to roadblocks to our Godly desires (and using them as "**excuses**" to put off or give-up altogether our responsibilities)
- d. Satan (adversary) is our enemy, and we would be naive to think he or his associates are not at work to divert us to another direction (and away from each other)

3. Paul's "boasting" before the Lord - vs. 19-20

His goal was not just people, but the work of faith in them, which "glory" is then shared with each other at the Lord's return, glorying in Him

Such terminology does not allude to his own pride, but more along the lines of how proud of them he will be at the Lord's return

- a. These verses reveal Paul's "aim in life" - we are all striving for something that is our goal (often a moving target throughout life), but Paul was focused on the return of the Lord and what he (personally) desired to be associated with (as his life's work)
- b. These faithful, growing believers were called Paul's "hope" (expectation, confidence) as in their being visual evidence of the promise to come (our faith is not built upon the number of those around us agreeing with us, but our hope is **built-up** in such fellowship!)
- c. These were also his "joy" in contrast to all other types of joys that most in this world live for - their living faith was the greatest encouragement - these are not to be looked upon as though we are "glad for Paul", but should be an example of where our hope and joy should be **focused** (when dealing with others)
- d. And so he calls them his "ἡ στέφανος καυχήσεως" (the crown (of victory) of glorying/boasting) - as we are able to consider any sense of achievement it will be along these lines (not careers, temporal achievements, possessions or awards, but more the being **used** by God's grace to build-up the lives of others for/toward the Lord)

B. "Destined for tribulation" - realizing God's plan in/for "pressures" - 3:1-8

1. One of the reasons some that profess Christ do not "stand firm" is because of their failure to see God's working even in the pressures/persecutions of life

At the core of what our motive should be is not that God is wrong in whatever He does, but that others might respond wrongly and become overcome in their ability to cope (and yield to discouragement, being "driven" by doubts and bitterness)

- a. There is an undying comfort and mainstay found in the realization that God truly is in control over all things, and is not unaware or unfeeling to whatever tribulations of life we will face (uninformed **expectations** trip us into a fall)
- b. But there is an added stress as we grow concerned for our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ who (we fear) may not be focused on such purpose in trials
- c. This is at the heart of where Paul is headed in the next several sentences - his confidence was steady regarding God, but worrisome with the Thessalonians

2. An overwhelming burden for his suffering friends in Thessalonica - vs. 1-2

This ought to be an example to all of us as to the driving desire for the spiritual welfare of our "brethren" rather than a surrendered acceptance that it (doubting) just happens

The description could also be "fellow minister with God" - it is not just a work for Him, but with Him!

The opposite is sadly seen quite often when others are tripped-up by other "believers" and are discouraged from being consistent in the Christian walk

"Men who could not be moved by threats have been swayed by the sincere but misguided entreaties of well-meaning friends" Hiebert

It is "κέιμεθα" indicating something set in a particular place or way for a preset purpose

There may not be enough difference for the world to see that would provoke an antagonistic response - we may not be perceived to be a threat

After all, what would compromise bring us? We might have momentary "peace and safety" but with the wrong ones

There is much unnecessary discouragement in Christianity because so many are untaught the Scripture... the Truth

Paul truly wanted their best- John expressed something similar in III John 1:2-4 - bodily health was a concern, but the most important was how it was "with their soul"

The Tempter seeks to use us as proof of the illegitimacy of our professed faith, so as to cast doubt on God altogether

- a. The wording used by Paul here ("μηκέτι στέγοντες" no longer containable) describing his need to know of their welfare is very strong - there was a desperate desire to be sure they were not swayed away from the faith (this was his primary concern, even above their physical welfare)
- b. Paul sacrificed his own encouragement for theirs - he was willing to be left alone in Athens so that Timothy could come to them (and Silas was likely sent to another location as well) - he would be "alone" as far as having his ministry companions with him in the work
- c. Timothy's credentials were (1). he was "our brother" (not an underling) and, most importantly (2). he was a fellow minister in God's work in (3). the Gospel of Christ which work and life focus usurps all other credentials
- d. The objective was not one (as one might expect) of comfort, but more of challenge and preparation in the "battle" - these did not need consolation and escape, **they needed shoring-up and assistance in remaining focused**
- e. Timothy was sent to "strengthen" (στηρίζαι - fasten or ground into place) and "exhort" (παρακαλέσαι - call someone along side (and so to stand with them))

3. The reason was to ensure no one was "moved" by the persecutions/pressures - vs. 3-4

- a. The word for "moved" or "disturbed" is an interesting word (σαίνεσθαι) which literally means to "wag" or "shake", and included the idea of one being swayed by flattery - Paul did not want to see these Christians swayed (shaken) by the pressures to conform (either by inflicting some type of pain or by offering acceptance if there was an acceptable compromise)
- b. This paints an odd situation - we do not want others wrongly converted by being hurt/injured, but neither do we desire to see them befriended by the Godless and so converted by the friendship of the world to the world
- c. They should **not be shaken from the faith as much as they should be driven more toward it**, for such persecutions and oppositions are "destined" (they are a determined "lot in life" for those that are God's in an age that looks on Him as their enemy)
- d. Yet, why might we think so many of our churches are not so affected? J.W. Clarke wrote of this "The only answer which we can give - a sad a solemn one - is that the cross is no longer central; we have lost the vision of the kingdom of God, and have no intention of being the suffering servants of humanity. Ichabod!"
- e. This is not a rare concept in the Bible - see Acts 14:19-23 where it was part of their Gospel message declaring, "through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." - see also John 16:1-4, Rom. 8:35-37, I Pet. 2:19-21; 4:12-16
- f. Realizing then that this is not abnormal, but to be expected, such opposition would be an ongoing "push" for them more toward the faith in God's Word - so Timothy was sent to reinforce them in these truths and so should we, on an ongoing basis
- g. This was what Paul told them, before it happened, that they (all of them) would suffer affliction - they continued to suffer and **suffered resolutely** - see II Thes. 1:3-10 - they were forewarned and so were forearmed - they were not surprised because they expected it
- h. These pressures, which were intended to "move them" (intended by the adversaries) were ineffective in diverting them off course - they stood firm

4. The unbearable suspense of Paul in his concern for the welfare of their faith - vs. 5

- a. Paul's motive was two-fold; (1). to encourage/challenge them in their faith and (2). to end the agony of not knowing if they had withstood the tribulation they were to face
- b. It was so important to him he could no longer bear to wait, so Timothy was sent to learn and then report of how they were faring - his affectionate concerns for them were of the best sort - too many have as their top concerns for themselves and others, temporal issues or achievements
- c. "Faith" was the essential part he needed to know of because it was the target of the "tempter" (ὁ πειράζων being one who puts to the test, only in this case, to prove something false or faulty)

Such concern (humanly speaking) was warranted, since it is common to see those who once professed faith in Christ who then falter when facing oppositions of all sorts from all around

Enduring these “tests” was particularly encouraging because it demonstrated the reality of their faith (which would hold them steady (immovable) from here on out)- so they were “set for life”

Focused faith in God and His controlling purposes makes us truly loving people, able to bear the burdens of others in love because of the ever-present awareness of God’s grace

The “longing to see” and kind thoughts are what ought to characterize the Church - suffering for the Faith typically draws believers closer together and makes fellowship sweeter

This nervousness is not doubting God, but concern for others (not being sure of them, and dreading the thought of these “brethren” turning from the faith)

Determined apathy/complacency with others can be fostered as if a protective shield - true love realizes the potential pain that may come when the heart is exposed

This was no tactic of false piety; he was sincerely grateful to God for His work in them

It is normal for any of us to focus on areas that are pointed out as admirable - so be careful how compliments are handed out!

Young people are often steered wrongly by praise and admiration over temporal things

Here was a genuine affection based on the right cause/motive (versus self-serving “love”)

d. Paul was nervous that his labor had been “in vain” (fruitless) - not just as some feeling of accomplishment, but for their actual good - he worried for their spiritual fortitude in the tests the tester was putting them through, with the intent to “move” them (off their foundation of faith in the Gospel of Christ)

e. Paul’s desire for them was not that they avoid these trials, but that their faith be **proven** true in and through them - even the tempter learns those who are real threats, and those that are not (in such tests)

f. Paul would be greatly encouraged with the news of their firm faith, but would later be discouraged with other churches yielding to all sorts of temptations

g. And such **assurance** any spiritual leader desires to have with those they are responsible for (church leaders, parents, teachers, disciplers)

5. Comfort found in seeing others strong in the faith - vs. 6-8

a. Paul had “distress and affliction” all around, and yet in the middle of it all, he was encouraged by the good news of their steady faith and love

b. “Faith and love” were key (as stressed at the beginning in 1:3) since faith (focused on God would keep them trusting the right source), and love (focused on others and their **actual well-being in the faith**) were key to withstanding the tests of the tempter

c. And, to top it all off, these persecuted believers longed to see Paul and his associates- this is often a key sign of where others stand with God, when they either love to see those God used to teach them (and even used to lead them into tribulations) and yet, knowing the purposes of them, love these “**instruments**” of God

d. Their “love” could also be in reference to their particular love of Paul and his team (“us”) - it can be tense to reconnect with someone who has gone through suffering and then to wait to see if they are bitter or loving

e. “For now we *really* live...”- there is a mutual encouragement had between them (Paul in hearing of their faithfulness in suffering and his suffering also (both for the same reason/cause)) **reinforcing** all their faith

f. This reminds us of the necessity of living-out our faith (especially in troubling times), because others (even as Paul here) wait with a sense of nervousness to see if we will lose faith and so yield to discouraging defeat

g. Paul could live (with joy) knowing they “stand fast” (stand firm, persevere) in the Lord

h. One of the reasons some are apprehensive to truly love others, is the fear of being so vulnerable with the possibility of the pain that comes when those we love err badly - it is the worst of pains!

i. “True living” is found in finding joy in lives lived for Christ’s sake and not the world’s

C. Thankfulness to God as the source of actual joy - vs. 9-13

1. Overflowing gratitude to God for the strongest **bond** of commonality in Christ - vs. 9

a. Notice the caution of Paul in how he expresses deep gratitude for what he has heard regarding the Thessalonian Christians, and yet (again) directs his thanks to God

b. We must be careful not to ascribe to someone “naturally” good character, in living out a life of faith (trust) in God through very difficult circumstances - this can lead to prompting pride in the one being commended; they also need to see their “progress” as a **result** of God’s grace at work in them

c. His thanksgiving was in response to the joy it brought him - it was a dose of tremendous encouragement at a very needful time - as we mature in the faith, we begin to see more clearly what aspects of life are actually the “best,” and worthy of our time and attention (**and what should rightly excite us**)

2. “Begging” to see them again and be **allowed** to be the ones building them up - vs. 10

a. The word for “pray” here is not the typical word; it is δεόμενοι which is more of a pleading/begging for something (out of an overwhelming desire) - it was an unceasing desire (it was not fleeting) that he desired to see them and encourage them in person

b. Their faith was based upon “**the Faith**” which they still had much to learn about, and Paul desired to be the one allowed to get to meet this need (what was still “lacking” and needed to be learned) with this group

Christian growth involves a great deal of learning (being taught) and so being equipped to face what is coming - otherwise we would not know "what to think" of situations that we were not expecting

Satan had been active in thwarting these attempts, but if the Lord willed it, Satan could not stop it - there will never be a situation where it would be wise to seek to "negotiate" with him or his servants!

The wish is that their love increase and then overflow - this quality (true love) is one that cannot be overdone

It is too normal to love those loving to us - but they would need to demonstrate true love even to those who were unloving

A "fixed heart" is essential in a world of competing loves/affections - it needs to be settled so as to be stable

It is false love (with self as the focus and objective) that makes us vulnerable to being led off the proper course of life/priorities

And it was this life focus that made Paul and his associates thankful - even with all the ill-treatment these were facing, what was most important was being grown into them even with all this opposition

We live in a time when what Paul warns against in this chapter can be seen infiltrating the "church" and it being defended and even institutionalized

- c. As we see in the oncoming chapters 4 and 5, they would need to be challenged and taught regarding avoiding and dealing with distractions and sinful opportunities in the present, as well as keeping a focus on the future and the Lord's return (so as to keep "the present" in proper focus as well)
- d. This is a good example of the reality that "strong faith" now cannot be caused to "ease-up" in our learning and Christian walk (growth) - there will always be more "building" and "mending" to be done

3. A "prayer" for growth in preparation of the Lord's return - vs. 11-13

- a. Paul, clearly understanding the chain of authority over himself, openly appeals to God the Father (Himself), and "the Lord Jesus" to allow him to come to the Thessalonian believers - this, even in a type of prayer form, demonstrates Paul as acknowledging whose hands this all really rested
- b. "It is a remarkable proof of the unity of the Father and Son, that in the Greek here, and in 2Th_2:16, 2Th_2:17, the verb is singular, implying that the subject, the Father and Son, are but one in essential Being, not in mere unity of will." JFB
- c. Paul addresses God as "our Father" - He was not only sovereign Lord, He was what they had in common - God as "Father" while also addressing Jesus as "Lord"
- d. His prayer for them also continues with the wish that their love "increase and abound" but it is to be directed at "one another", then to "all" - the point was not necessarily so they would be mutually loving and so find encouragement in it (love being reciprocated), but simply that they be loving... period
- e. In light of all the persecution they had and would still face, keeping their focus off themselves and more on others would be important - and this love would be "for all" which is to set their focus on how they were to expect to apply it (and to recognize its source being "and the Lord make you..." - this will not be "natural" emotion)
- f. The immediate example Paul uses is "just as we also did for you" - so "love as we loved" (not just to the extent, but in how to actually love) - giving of self
- g. The wish for them (the objective) is that their "hearts be unblamable in holiness" which would require their hearts (their true inner self) be "established" (στηρίζω - to fix/secure something into place so that it not be moved)
- h. "It is easy enough for people to become prey to fears and alarms, to take up every new doctrine, to accept the unreasoning hope that leads inevitably to irresolution, disillusionment, and disaster... If God gives them this gift [of true love of God and others] he will establish their whole personality." Leon Morris
- i. To love what is right is a gift from God (it is not of ourselves (natural))
- j. So putting these all together, we have a prayerful wish/desire that they grow to overflowing in true love for others, in order that their true self (their heart) be anchored securely in what they ought to properly love (and so pursue in life), so they are without blame when the Lord returns (because they lived their lives, separated for His uses and purposes (holiness)) - they were to be unique and not "common" to societal norms (regarding life priorities) and practices
- k. This "holiness" makes sense when realizing, when the Lord returns (to establish His kingdom), He comes with "saints" (set-apart (holy) ones)

IV. Living to Please God Throughout Life - 4:1-12

A. The "call" to holiness (holy living/behavior) versus "impurity" (mixed with uncleanness) - vs. 1-7

1. We live in an age (as did these first century believers) when true holiness is vilified and sinfulness (impurities) are justified, excused, normalized and even "Christianized"
- a. If we have been "called" to "holiness" then all other pursuits of "unholiness" (which could even be "commonness" (with the age), "worldly") are against our "calling"
- b. The focus of these next verses is more on what to avoid (what not to do), how not to think, and how not to be "driven" in life (by lusts/passions) by ungodliness
- c. "Holiness" is by its definition "exceptionalism" (in a Christ-like way), so what we see in our day (blending in with the "gods" of the age) is not to be considered acceptable

2. An encouraging challenge to continue on and not ease-up - vs. 1-2

It is far too common for believers to integrate instruction as rote (mechanical) obedience and not "of the heart" (the "inner-man")

Too much has been made of "individual soul liberty" to the point where some come to see their own feelings and perspectives as authoritative (mostly because they agree with it)

It is not "just as I think I should walk to please God" for what I "think" might be incorrect and actually be displeasing to Him

Good behavior is difficult to sustain and requires consistent focus, resolve, and ongoing reminders/warnings (exhortations)

So, push for more in the walking to please the Lord - our lives should be filled with the pursuits of fine-tuning our "walk" to be pleasing to Him

The authority is never in the Lord's servants, but in the Lord alone - those in authority should "lead" by following Christ themselves and pointing clearly to His word and instruction

- a. In addition to all that has been stated so far ("Finally"), Paul asks/requests and urges/challenges them - he (interestingly) does not take an authoritative tone with them - it is more humble, gracious, and as a brother would state (in contrast to a commanding officer) - what is about to be put forward for them to do ought to be done as part of who/what they really are and not out of **just** "duty"
- b. His "request" (as in appealing to the will) and his urging (exhorting, as in appealing to the sense of responsibility) are to be taken as "in the Lord", which is at the core of why we are to do/act as we should/do - it is to the Lord we **answer** and are to genuinely seek to follow Him above all others (especially self!)
- c. We ought not see the sacrificial payment of Christ on our behalf as the "freedom to be me" but more as "owing all to Him" for what He has done, and submitting to His **infinite** perspective (after all, He does know everything!)
- d. They are challenged to "περιπατεῖν καὶ ἀρέσκειν Θεῷ" (walk and please God), but this was not subjective, for it was "just as you received from us"
- e. "Walking" is an interesting word picture since walking is made up of a series of steps, usually with a direction/focus - it's not aimless nor is it instinctive, it's on a prescribed path laid out in the instructions/direction of His revealed Word
- f. But these were already doing this ("just as you actually do walk") - so the urgent challenge is for them to stay consistent in it, and not veer off course (the prescribed path) as is the tendency with a life surrounded by **competing** distractions
- g. This last part of verse 1 illustrates the Christian walk - it is learning, growing, continuing (sustaining) and then pursuing it more in consistency and in greater detail - we do not want a life direction full of general direction, not when so much is at stake, and not when we consider who we are following and serving
- h. It is not as though they did not have plenty to follow, for they knew "what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus" - these are "commands" and **it is His authority that lends them weight**
- i. "It is not enough that we abide in the faith of the gospel, but we must abound in the work of faith. We must not only persevere to the end, but we should grow better, and walk more evenly and closely with God." MH

3. In this text, the focus for "a more pleasing walk" is in the area of sexual purity - vs. 3-6

- a. The definitive start to this statement of fact is "this is the Will of God" (the One we are to be "walking" to please throughout life)
- b. His will is "your sanctification" (ἀγιασμός - set aside/apart, consecrated (for His purposes, His ways))
- c. "The basic idea of sanctification is that God has monopolized the Christian and all of his input resources for His own service. He has planned "the good works... that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10) and they are sufficient to require all of our resources. For the Christian to devote inputs of time, talent, strength or money into the affairs of the world is spiritual embezzlement and fraud (1 Cor. 6:19,20; 10:31)" Yeager
- d. In particular, the will of God in our being separated from the age, is in regards to abstaining from sexual immorality - this was a significant problem in the first century just as it is in our time - so much focus is placed upon sexual pursuits and priorities that even so-called believers are "playing-along" either out of inner desire (and popular acceptance) or because it defines their "**real** self"
- e. The will of God in regarding their separation is that they "abstain" (ἀπέχεσθαι - to hold one's self away from something) from "sexual immorality" (πορνείας - "illicit sexual intercourse in general", all types including those of the thoughts) - the term comes from a root that means to "sell-off" as in surrendering self to sexual impurities
- f. Paul does not instruct to abstain from "sexuality", just immoral sexuality, for sexuality has a God ordained place and purpose that is "holy" in his sight (see Heb. 13:4) - but it is in accordance with His revealed purposes and not by a "free for all" approach to living life to fulfill physical desires/inclinations

We are not to see ourselves as partially set aside (some of the time and part of our lives) for His use, but as wholly set aside, apart from the priorities and purposes of the age in which we live

This particular sin area is given significant emphasis in being clarified as the particular area of separation these Christians were to have characterizing their living/walking

This was common in Paul's day and was justified in pagan religions and sanctioned as a basic **need** to be catered to by popular society

This is a key way to phrase the issue for many are "owned" (mastered) by their bodies and are controlled by physical impulses

This does not describe a theoretical "knowing" but a knowing that is first hand (known by experience) - we don't just identify it as "right", we are to live it

It would seem inconsistent to refer to the wife more along the lines as a means to sexual gratification for the man as if she is the means to his controlling it - all should control it, not just married men!

This describes a surrender; a letting go to impure thinking/desires - it is surrender

Such may not be physically yielded to, but may be surrendered to in the mind, which must not be seen as acceptable

As regarding how we are to be described, see Gal. 5:16-26

For instance, a woman can dress immodestly and in so doing defraud others of their mental purity and become a dangerous distraction, though nothing more outwardly may seem to come of it

This is serious and must not be treated lightly!

This does not imply that there is no forgiveness of this sin, but illustrates the absurdity of thinking we can harmonize a life of sin/impurity with who we are and with our "call"

In our pursuits of individuality and personal opinions, we must be very careful that our disagreements are not actually with God

- g. The wording is "σκεῦος κτᾶσθαι" ("vessel" as in what one has, his "stuff" and commonly taken as "body" (it is was holds/contains himself) which is to be "mastered" and controlled (possessed/owned and so not "owned/mastered" by the body and its passions)
- h. This is a personal battle for each, as each is to "know" for himself/herself how to control the body "in holiness and honor" - sexual immorality in all its forms is "unholy" (not only in opposition to God, but "common" (the opposite of "holy")) and is also dishonoring to the body which was created to honor God (and not to be used for dishonorable purposes) - **sexual immorality dishonors the body**
- i. The disagreements on the meaning of "vessel" as to whether it means the body or it references the "wife," seem best answered by taking it as the "body" - the wife is not referenced (before her husband) as a "vessel" (and I Pet. 3:7 describes the wife as the "weaker vessel" before God (as created/placed as such, but not as the man's "vessel"))
- j. Each has been given a body and are to look to master it for God's purposes over our own, and "hold ourselves back" from such immoral tendencies that come with the infection/influence of sin - see I Cor. 6:15-20
- k. We are to be "possessing our own vessel" and not in "lustful passion" (πάθει ἐπιθυμίας describing unrestrained lusts/passions, as in a yielding one's self over to such lusts without restraint/control)
- l. This text assumes the reality/presence of such inclinations/desires - it does not demand the absence of "the struggle" (as if it could be done away with altogether), just that it be fought at every turn, in every way and not surrendered to!
- m. The comparison is with/against "the Gentiles" (ἔθνη, people in general), and in this case it is in contrast with Christians (not Jews), and such "Gentiles" are the way they are because they "do not know God" - the gods they knew of were immoral, and as such then, it was "normal" (and acceptable) - see also Eph. 4:17-24
- n. There is a stern warning for those that would "overreach" ("transgress") and in so doing, exploit and take from another something because they covet it (lust after it) - this can be the "defrauding" of another by harming/wronging them, and in so doing, taking something from them - it has commonly been looked on as a man taking another man's wife, though there is much more included in this "defrauding"
- o. The Lord is the "avenger" of such who are so used and mistreated - the idea of "consenting" adults is not an escape from such judgment from God - exploitation of all sorts accompanies sexual sins (e.g. pornography, participants and viewers)
- p. Knowing this was a common inclination, Paul "told" them and "solemnly warned" them (that this particularly received God's special negative attention/action)

B. Realize, if there is disagreement, who is being disagreed with - vs. 7-8

1. The core point being made is God's "call" on us, what it is and what it is not

Sadly, there are varying levels of impurities that are being portrayed as permissible in a Christian "walk"

- a. His call for us was not "for the purpose of impurity" - this is not our purpose in Him and for Him in any capacity, so to attempt to make a case for acceptable "impurity" is absolutely false
- b. We have **for sure** been called into "sanctification" (holiness/set-apartedness) - the use of "ἐν" demonstrates that this is the sphere of living to which we have been called to live - "The believer cannot escape the fact that whatever he does, however he sins, to whatever unholy use he puts his body and mind, he does this in the personal presence of the Holy Spirit, Whom the Father has given to him and Who lives in his body and uses it as His temple." Yeager

2. So, if there is rejection of the concept that we are called to "holiness" and away from sin/impurity, there is a rejection of God and not of a person (personal opinion)

- a. The word for "rejects" (ἀθετῶν) describes a setting aside of something, making it void, annulling it, so as to disregard it - yet such a disregard is not that of disagreeing with something a person came up with, but a disregard of what God Himself has given
- b. This is all realized in what He gave us; His **Holy** Spirit - so whatever is not "holy" is not of God's spirit, so is not who and what we truly are (or are to be)

C. Pleasing God in the continuation and increasing of “brotherly love” - vs. 9-12

1. The concept of “brotherly love” (φιλαδελφίας) was uniquely Christian in its usage, since in the first century it described the actual affection of brothers and sisters - vs. 9-10

This also indicates that there are some concepts that are innate to true Christianity

This love is evidenced in consistent, unending care for each other - it supersedes all other earthly affections, for not only are these relationships eternal, but reflect the same unending care we receive from the Lord

Texts such as these are often bypassed either for a more intellectually stimulating pursuit, or by the various instituted reasons designed to excuse us from this responsibility and the living it out - or there is the tendency to live off of past accomplishments and excuse ourselves as if having finished the job

It is good to be “driven” in life, but is typically human to be driven for self-promotion - self-esteem is sought for in others’ perceived estimates of us or in our own estimate

It is along the lines of not making life about yourself

- a. Paul was able to commend them in indicating he did not have to write to instruct them in this area since they were already doing it, demonstrating that they were “taught of God to love one another”
- b. They were proving their genuine care for the “brothers” in how they selflessly lived it out with all the “brothers in Macedonia” - and such a “brotherhood” is formulated in Christ and is the actual standing/state with one another in Christ
- c. This genuine affection/concern/care for others that are truly in Christ, is often replaced with counterfeits of superficial “love” which is **not embedded in the heart** (which is where it is placed by God when we are newly created creations)
- d. To excuse neglect in this area is to disregard the significance of being “taught by God” - this cannot and must not be faked, for it is evidential of our conversion - its absence is cause for concern, yet its presence and practice is widely rejected by pseudo-Christianity, because it deals with the actual needs of others and not the “needs” that society defines to cater to personal vanity
- e. Yet, there is no resting in “accomplishments” in this area of love/care, for we can never retire from this “job” (responsibility) - thus the exhortation/urging to “excel still more” (“περισσεύειν” - to exceed, go beyond the ordinary, and here it has the meaning of exceeding what has already been done in time and in quantity (doing it even more))

2. Strive eagerly (ambitiously) to not strive (with others) - vs. 11

- a. This first phrase “Make it your ambition to live a quiet life” is also translated “aspire to be quiet” and pictures one whose ambition/drive is in the pursuit of a humble, unpretentious, selfless pursuit of the life God would have us live versus the ambitious pursuits of self-greatness and popular significance and recognition
- b. “φιλοτιμεῖσθαι ἡσυχάζειν” is a very interesting phrase - literally it reads “love honor” yet it is the love of the honor of “living quietly”, not pursuing attention to ourselves - it is an ambition to not be self-ambitious, yet ambitious to live for and before God - value is sought and found outside ourselves and in God’s purposes
- c. Strife (with others) will unavoidably come, but we are not pursuing it - our ego and pride often become more the priority than God’s designs in a situation, and this is to be considered unacceptable for ourselves

3. Take care of your own responsibilities so as not to be an unnecessary burden to others - vs.11-12

Paul demonstrated this with the Corinthians when he labored with his hands, with the intent to not be a burden - there will be times when we will be tempted to presume upon others

Hard work is good for us, and there can be a depression that sets in when we are continuously idle and unproductive

This is not the endorsement of criticizing a Godless society in their failures in these areas, just that we mind our own behavior in these areas

- a. “Tend to your own business” is how the NASB puts it - it does not have the idea of ignoring the needs of others (as that would be unloving), but now takes on the other side of the concept, doing what can be done to assist others when needed, and not neglecting responsibility (and in so doing, become one others must care for)
- b. This does not teach that we never take help, just that we are mindful to manage our lives so as not to have others have to care for us because we have neglected work - we will have times when God will call us to be served and have our needs met, but we never want those to be times brought about because we were lazy or irresponsible
- c. “Work with your own hands” pictures manual labor, and even hard work - laziness is a tendency we all will struggle with in life but must not yield to it - we were designed for the need to work (in some capacity) - see Eph. 4:28; II Thes. 3:7-12
- d. It is commonly believed that this instruction was needed because there may have been those so taken with the concept of the return of Christ, that they began to neglect their daily responsibilities because they were expecting the return of the Lord any day
- e. “...no one has a right to live in such a relation as to be wholly dependent on others, if he can support himself; and no one has a right to compel others to labor for him, and to exact their unrequited toil, in order that he may be supported in indolence and ease.” Barnes
- f. Another objective is proper “behavior toward outsiders” (those outside the Church) in all the qualities just mentioned - not boisterous in our proud behavior, and not looking to society to support us in our lazy neglect or irresponsibility

V. The “Dead in Christ” Will Not Miss-Out on the Return of the Lord - 4:13-18

A. Don't grieve in the way the “hopeless” grieve - vs. 13-14

1. There is an **unnecessary** grief that comes from being “uninformed” - vs. 13

It is the “sleep” of the body as it waits its re-awakening at the resurrection - they are asleep to the world but not to Christ

a. In the context, it is clear that there was discouragement (or potential discouragement) regarding what those that died, who were “in Christ” would miss

b. Paul was desirous that they not be uninformed regarding those “asleep” (a term used of Christians, in contrast to the standard term “dead”)

c. Lest this seem like a rebuke, he uses the term “brothers” when countering their ignorance on this particular subject (he lovingly corrects)

It should not surprise us that the topic of death is either avoided by such, or they borrow Christian ideas while avoiding the actual “faith” of it

d. There is legitimate grief at the death of a fellow believer, but it is not one without hope - those that face the death of a friend who were not in Christ, **truly** have a hopeless outlook - there is no reuniting, and is an agonizing realization!

Note also, those that hope in what is false are truly hopeless also

e. This is in stark contrast to what **we** actually have - see Eph. 2:12-17 - the reason for separation (the reason being our sin) (each purchased by Him, and the hostility removed)

2. Jesus Himself was the proof, and therefore, the focus/substance of our hope - vs. 14

The Greek is “διὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ” more literally “through Jesus”, so because of Him (through Him) God will bring those with Him when He returns

a. For if we truly are of those that believe (trust) that “Jesus” (using just His human name as being our representative (the “first fruits”) of us) Himself “died” and then rose again from the dead, **those who have “fallen asleep” in Him will be brought with Him**

b. This not only indicates the “how” but also the “who” (as in it will not include those that are not “in Him” and who have been (and will always be) without hope) else why make these **distinctions** throughout Scripture? (if universalism is true)

compare with II Cor. 5:1-10

c. It is interesting to consider that He “brings” them because they are not here (on Earth) and they are not in a type of non-existent state (nor in “soul-sleep”)

d. Christ not only demonstrated victory over sin and death, but demonstrated what our future will be, **even with death as a part of it**

B. The encouragement of the “Coming of the Lord” - vs. 15-18

1. When the Lord returns, what will happen with those that have already died? - vs. 15-16

The events of life that we hold dear cannot be compared to what those who have died (in Christ) are experiencing!

a. It is not uncommon to some across even believers, who grieve over the thoughts of what those who have died in Christ will miss - such grief is unnecessary! - their labors are complete and they will return with the Lord at the end of the age

b. This was not speculation on Paul’s part, but was received from the Lord - when it comes to our own end (the end of the world and all that follows), we dare not look to others’ opinions and feelings, but desire to focus on what the Lord has revealed and hope in that as the actual **authority**

A parallel text to this is in I Cor. 15:51-58 (ending with “Therefore” to always be “abounding in the work of the Lord” in the meantime)

c. There will be those alive at the Lord’s return that are His - Paul included himself in the “we” not knowing if it would or would not happen in his lifetime

d. Those alive, those who have been “left” (versus taken beforehand in death) will not have an advantage over them when the Lord comes, for we will not “precede” them (even physically), for their bodily resurrection will happen first before we are “caught-up” (often referenced as the “rapture”)

The phrase being “οὐ μὴ φθάσωμεν” containing a double negative, as in saying “absolutely not” arrive before them

e. For “the Lord Himself” will come down from heaven, and that with a great deal of fanfare - He will arrive with “a shout” (a word of command, often used in military situations, translated as “cry of command” in ESV)

compare this also with the description in Mt. 24:30-31

f. His coming also includes “the voice of an archangel” and this with the “sound of the trumpet” picture a powerful event (the trumpet also in Mt. 24:31 and I Cor. 15:52) - it is suggested that the “shout” could be the command of the Lord Himself; the archangel calling the angels to action, and then the trumpet sound to **raise** the dead

These are fortunate, though it be a fraction of time, they are a bit before the “we who are alive and remain” - so do not grieve over their situation!

g. And when all this happens, the “dead in Christ rise first” - these are the same “God will bring with Him” that are then also “rising” - I Thes. 4:14

2. The “rapture”! - vs. 17-18

a. The “living”, the “remaining” (in Christ) will be “caught up” together **with them** - here will be our reunion with those that have gone on before us!

This is the same as I Cor. 15:51-52, were “we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed”

b. The “dead in Christ” will rise, and then, we will go with them to meet the Lord in the air - the Lord having “descended from heaven” unites all with Him

The comfort being directed at the Thessalonians was not deliverance from the "tribulation", but the comfort regarding the dead in Christ

Wherever He is, we will be with Him - in the air, in Heaven, in His kingdom!

They and we need not become discouraged because of death, knowing it will not stop/deter any of God's work and our part in it

There are solid Bible exegetes on both sides, so arguments supporting either position are understandable

The "wrath of God" being poured out on the Earth in Revelation is clearly seen - but to attribute all references to His wrath and even the core meaning of it (as applied to unbelievers versus believers) is unnecessarily limiting

One counter point that is argued is that this will take away "immanency" (that He can come at anytime) - this will be addressed more in our discussion in chapter 5

This position is closest to the pre tribulation view in that it sees the "Church" raptured to escape the wrath of God, but here, before the events described in Revelation that deal mostly with the 3 1/2 year period

- c. There is nothing in this context that identifies exactly as to when this will take place other than when the Lord comes - chapter 5 makes it clear that the "day of the Lord" will come like a "thief in the night" (suddenly) and as a woman in labor (once it begins, it will not be stopped)
- d. The greatest thrill is the realization "and thus we shall always be with the Lord" - this was the core of the encouragement to the Disciples when the Lord was preparing them for His crucifixion, and the His departure after His resurrection (John 14:1-6)
- e. And so, "encourage one another with these words" - the "dead in Christ" will not miss any of these glorious events; they will be "raised incorruptible" (I Cor. 15:42) and all those alive at His coming will be changed (literally "made different") also
- f. Comfort for us all is found in not having to dread death, for its possibility is a constant companion throughout life

3. Differing viewpoints regarding the timing of the "rapture"

- a. This discussion is a diversion from the direct context, but because of its prominence in the thoughts and questions of believers, it should be addressed - the 3 prominent views are "pre tribulation" and "post tribulation" and "mid tribulation"
- b. This text (as stated previously) does not pinpoint the time - the timing (either way) must be inferred in how other texts are considered (which is a healthy discussion)
- c. "Pre tribulationists" affix the "wrath to come" in I Thes. 1:10 and 5:9 as referring to the "wrath of God" (as seen throughout Revelation in the time called "the Great Tribulation") - the connection can be explained, but to make this the definitive meaning in this text must be assumed and is not explicitly stated
- d. The first thought regarding God's wrath is regarding unbelievers and not just their earthly standing before God, but their eternal standing
- e. The "post tribulation" view is typically landed upon by a pursuit to stay as "normal/plain" and "literal" to the texts that discuss these topics - texts such as II Thes. 2:1-9 indicate certain things happening before "...the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him" - other texts such as Mat. 24:29-32 ("gathering together the elect") take place "immediately after the tribulation of those days"
- f. There is also a group labeled "mid tribulationists" (or "Pre Wrath Rapture") that see the Lord's return half way through what is called "the Tribulation Period" based off of the 7 year covenant mentioned in Daniel 9:27 - half-way into this, the covenant is broken and the "Great Tribulation" begins, and believers are raptured out before God's wrath begins on the earth
- g. Much more could be discussed regarding these positions, but the context in I Thessalonians 4 is the comforting of believers regarding those that have died in Christ and their part (and ours) when the Lord does return - we are headed to meet the Lord no matter what (either at His return or at our death)

VI. Not Asleep But Awake and Alert, Properly Armored - 5:1-11

A. It has been common throughout Church history and is so today, for Christians to desire to know the era/date/time of the Lord's return, so as to know when to be prepared

1. "Date-setters" and self-proclaimed prophets have existed throughout the centuries, since Christ's ascension, that seek to predict and motivate believers that His return is near

We live in light of the return of Christ always, regardless if "signs" (and the perceived need for them) and live responsibly always, every day as though we will give answer any time - see Mt. 24:42-51

If there is a fear of the loss of the motivation of "immanency," if our imminent death does not motivate us, then the possible return of the Lord won't either

- a. The motive sounds noble, and has proven to motivate many, though the motivation is superficial and not "of the heart/character" (as it is supposed to be)
- b. Here and in the "Olivet Discourse" (Mat. 24-25) the motivation was that the return of the Lord (our "Master") will come at a time we do not anticipate, so the solution/answer is to be diligent in our service always, and not because we expect Him a certain day
- c. So, we are not to be motivated that the Lord might return today, since we do not know when He comes, but that we are to be on the alert/sober in what we do every day (and living in light of our joyful responsibility more than just accountability) - our goal is to "live" who we are and why we are actually here, more than just doing what we do so as not to be "in trouble"

2. The “Day of the Lord” comes like a “thief in the night” and as a woman going into labor - vs. 1-3

Note: if there was no literal kingdom for Israel, this would have been the time it would have been revealed - Israel still has a future! In the meantime, these were to get on in the Lord's work (also His kingdom)

The Lord used this analogy in Mt. 24:42-47; Lu. 12:39-40; also to the unexpected Church of Sardis in Rev. 3:1-2

The “Day of the Lord” not only involves His actual return to the earth, but all that comes with His return (the good and the bad, depending if one is “of the light” or “of the darkness”)

Yet there can be no true, lasting peace without God - peace with God is true “peace and security”!

As “in the days of Noah”, life seemed to continue on without interruption, and then the destruction came (that they were warned of, but disregarded - Mt. 24:37-39)

- a. Paul, in referencing the “times and the seasons”, makes it clear that they already know what they need to know regarding the Day of the Lord - so more detail was coming
- b. This is the same phrase (“times and seasons”) used by the Lord in Acts 1:17 when asked by the disciples/Apostles if it was the time to “restore the kingdom to Israel” - it was not for them to know these times
- c. He addresses them again as “brothers,” for he will soon make a distinction between them and those “of the night and darkness”
- d. Because of what they had already been taught they knew “full well” of “the day” coming as a thief (and Paul adds “in the night” as he will soon use to distinguish between the “children of light”) - there will be an element of surprise to many
- e. Peter also uses this idea of the day coming as a “thief” (II Peter 3:10) when the “Day of the Lord” comes in judgment, “... and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.” - this day is also described as with “Armageddon” in Revelation 16:12-16 - the Day of the Lord is the end of this age, for some a dreaded event and all that comes with it, while others, a day of joy, for they are not “destined for wrath” as the others
- f. The perspective of the world (the Godless society), believing they have achieved the ultimate of goals “peace and security”, will then face “sudden destruction” and such destruction will come (as this Day of the Lord) like the labor pains on a woman, pains which begin without warning, suddenly, and will not stop till the event is finished
- g. There will either be the belief that “peace and security” have been achieved and secured, or that “peace and safety” are what mankind is striving to get, unable to ever fully achieve it, but still striving to reach without God
- h. There will be a sense of normalcy (even though we may see it as unwarranted in the last days) that those alive at that time, that are against God - possibly they come to the conclusion that they have or will outlast the judgments of God, and achieve ultimate victory against Him
- i. Yet, as the labor pains begin and cannot be stopped, so will their destruction come and “they will not escape” - it will be intense pain and what it “gives birth to” will be horrific to them (it will be the offspring of their sinfulness and rebellion) - these in opposition to God will absolutely not escape - see II Thes. 1:5-10

B. As “sons of light/day”, the day of the Lord will not “overtake/surprise you like a thief” - vs. 5-8

1. The word “υιολι” (sons) is a term for family - it is one's nature or identifying relationship - vs. 5
 - a. Being “sons” of light, “sons” of day, is what we are (it is what defines us)
 - b. The “day of the Lord” will not surprise us since we do not live in darkness, and so we are aware of not only our ultimate destiny, but also that we do not live for/in the darkness that this age lives for/in
 - c. Being sons of day we live for “that day”, either at our death or at His return and this is not a periodic event/quality, it is how we live and what we live for

“Darkness” not only being blindness, but evil/sinful

2. Since this is the case (it is reality), don't “sleep” - vs. 6-7

- a. To “sleep” is to be unconscious or unaware of what is happening around you - to “sleep” is to live in a “dream world” and so, not living in light of reality
- b. Being “sons” we do not expect (and must not) to live “as other do” - since all others sleep, we must be “awake” (alert, conscious at all times of where everything is heading)
- c. And, while “awake” (alert) also be “sober” (not influenced by that which clouds the senses (in this case, the spiritual senses) - when the “fleshly” is the controlling factor, there is a loss of sobriety, because of the endless intoxications around us that ***dull the sense of eternity and accountability***

These are present tense verbs- do not be sleeping, because you are staying awake because you are watching - we are not to see times of life as acceptable times to “drift off” into a slumber that loses track of time and reality

see also Rom, 13:11-14 and Eph. 5:6-21

- d. It is normal for sleeping when it is night (for those at/in night and those in darkness), and for those who have a semblance of alertness during the night, they deal with life by getting drunk while it is dark (they do not desire to face the “day” (light))

3. “Having put on the armor” - once having put it on (aorist middle) - vs. 8

- a. Putting on “spiritual armor” is not to be seen as something done periodically when facing opposition - since opposition will always be present, it is always worn

Armor was worn because the wearer was in war and expected attack - here, the attack would be designed to divert/distract them from their spiritual sense"

The "vitals" are guarded by proper faith and love, for faith in the wrong thing and love of the wrong thing, leaves our heart (our core person) open and vulnerable to wounding

- b. Since we "are of the day" (belong to the day), we keep our wits (spiritual wits), being free from illusion (sober) - such sobriety is possessed/protected by means of a breastplate (guarding the "vitals") and a helmet ("keeping" one's head)
- c. The breastplate being "faith and love", two essential, foundational words in Scripture - faith being a trusting focus, footing "dug-in" on the revealed truth of God's Word over against the "realities" of the philosophies and priorities of the world around us - and love being a deliberate preference of God and so being selfless in our lives as He has been with us - focus on "self" leads to living for self - see I John 3:1-3
- d. Our heads are guarded by the "hope of salvation" (hope being the assurance of the expectation) - the opposite being the hopelessness that comes as a result when our standing with God (and so the our future also) is unknown or doubted - but "sure salvation" protects the mind at all times, directing the eyes/thinking toward our "rescue" (which is essentially what "salvation" means)

C. The encouraging hope of salvation, not the dread of oncoming wrath - vs. 9-11

- 1. The anticipation of the Lord's return, for those not "saved" (not expecting it), is a dreadful, fearful, depressing idea to consider - for those who are "in Christ", it is a thrill to consider and makes our focus on His return thrilling - vs. 9-10

We (in Christ) do not fear the wrath of God, even when facing the consequences of sin in death, but we may face (as those throughout history) the wrath of man (or the Antichrist and his worshipers)- the promise of not facing the wrath of man is not where our encouragement is founded

- a. It is not the circumstances/situation of things on earth that would dictate our level of encouragement - in spite of how bad it will get, the Lord's return and all that comes with it, enables us to "keep our head" (with such a "helmet")
- b. Some have taken the reference to "wrath" in this verse to be the "Great Tribulation" of Mt. 24, yet the context is dealing "salvation" (rescue) from sin, and our (now) anticipation of living with Him
- c. We have been "destined" (set/established, and this being in the aorist tense, it has already been set/established regarding us) for salvation and not for wrath
- d. The "Lord Jesus Christ" (His full title and name - authority) died for us - dealing with the revealing of God's "determination", Leon Morris wrote "In one way or another this great truth is always coming out, for it is central to the gospel. All other religion in the last analysis present people with something that they must do if they would be saved. Christianity alone tells us that all has been done."
- e. God destined us for salvation, in order that we "might live together with Him" - either way (living or "asleep"), so death does not hinder this in the least (and the being together with Him is the key) - the idea of "together" also includes the idea of those "asleep" and those alive being together (as in 4:17), and so, as one, they are with Him)

The core of the Gospel focuses on what God has determined and done in the outworking of His salvation (not the intentions or strivings of mankind to save or be saved)

Christ died and rose again; the living and the dead in Christ will live together again - death has been soundly beaten!

- 2. Because of all of what has been shared, encourage and edify each other - vs. 11

- a. To encourage (παρακαλεῖτε - exhort) is active and has a foundation from which to build (οικοδομεῖτε - construct) and solid "construction materials" with which to build- this encouragement is not a term used to just make others "feel better", but to truly build them (assist in making them solid against fears and harmful speculations)
- b. This was also something they were already doing (as he acknowledges here) - this also demonstrates that, though there has already been encouragements and edifying, they will be needed to continue as new challenges and discouragements come on the scene

Encouragement/exhortation is needed in the moment of discouragements, and edifying (building) is needed to ground and solidify each other for the future challenges

VII. Final Instructions - 5:12-28

A. Recognize/appreciate, respect your leadership - vs. 12-13

- 1. The first word of this sentence (Ἐρωτῶμεν) is an urgent request (versus a suggestion)
 - a. The "beseeching" to "brothers" is that they appreciate (the word is "εἰδέναι" from a word meaning to see and so to know, but with the idea of "considering" them in a special way, and so it was used also of appreciating) their spiritual leadership
 - b. It is easy to become an "entity to self" and so to disregard the unique instruments God has placed in our lives to guide us
 - c. These were identified by three terms - they "labor among you", they are "have charge over you in the Lord" and they "give you instruction" (admonish)
 - d. These persons were their "ministers", serving the Lord (doing the Lord's service)

So much of the dealing with "ignorance" and the discouragements would be handled by church leadership - if such are disregarded in this, ignorance and distracting discouragements would flourish

2. The urgent request is for them to “esteem” these leaders in the work of the Lord, and since it is in the Lord’s work, this esteem is to be “exceeding abundant” (excessive, especially in comparison to all other “leaders” we would have in the “secular” areas we would be led/influenced)

This another reason to seek out spiritual leadership that are focused on admonishing “in the Lord” and not in accordance with another standard/priority

- a. This word for “esteem” is “ἠγεῖσθαι” which pictures something leading (going before), and so in this case is “in the lead” when it comes to priorities
- b. This highest of estimates is “in love because of their work” - selflessly love them because of the nature of what they labor for; what they work for/on is of the highest value
- c. These “labor among you” and so this “work among you” is to be ranked highest, because there was a tendency to value so many other things higher (and the areas needing to be “admonished” and strengthened, weaken while temporal priorities come to dominate) - those who push/challenge our focus toward the eternal are to be cherished above all others for their top value
- d. And so, having such a priority, “be at peace among yourselves” (as in “keep the peace” with one another) - it is a deliberate, conscious discipline, for its opposite would be in-fightings, bickering, stirring-up strife/anger/bitterness needing constant attention (as in putting out “fires” and unable to build/progress toward maturity) - see Col. 3:12-15

compare to Heb. 13:17

If this is not an overriding objective, there will be no end to the skirmishes!

B. Deal appropriately with differing types of people, patient with all - vs. 14

1. “Admonish” (instruct/warn) those that are “out of order” - this entire command (with dealing with all these types) is urgent, so they are “urged” (called/told to do)

- a. Not all people and situations are alike and discernment is required in dealing with each appropriately - some, if dealt with too harshly react or give-up, while others if not dealt with firmly, dominate the “atmosphere” and the “agenda” of their local body of believers

These take on themselves to get involved with dictating what others should do (or be doing) at the neglect of their own duty, and this can be the case if they are an authority to themselves

- b. The word for “unruly” is ἀτάκτους (literally “not arranged”), and so they do not (as in a military usage) fall into line properly or at all - they are either unruly in the unmanageable sense or in the irresponsible sense (not taking up the spiritual responsibility they ought, and so become “busybodies” as in II Thes. 3:11-12)

- c. This need not be limited to just physical labor, but all “disciplines” that ought to be had and practiced by them - such (again, if in a military setting) are insubordinate

2. “Encourage the fainthearted” - this described a “soothing speaking” up-close to someone, and in this case, it is for those “little-souled” (ὀλιγοψύχους)

These lack fortitude because of their underdeveloped (or improperly identified) “soul” (who/what they really are and what they really have)

- a. It pictures someone consoling one who has “lost heart” (as in they are, as it were, left with very little life because of some great loss or difficulty)
- b. This also describes the encouraging (seeking to infuse courage) into one who is fearful, given to worry (and so timid) as to what is important that they face/do
- c. The goal of such would be to embolden others in what is right, versus yielding to the intimidation of life in general and a society/age without a reverence of God

3. “Hold on to” (as in holding up) those without strength - it looks to deal with helping those physically feeble, but in the context (and Paul’s other uses of the word for “weak”) it would be dealing with those spiritually weak

Help these by bearing their burdens with them, and coming along side and bearing up against the weight of their weakness in order to sustain

- a. Support those needing to be sustained against temptations or doubts
- b. There is also the idea of being “devoted to” these - these are not ones held-up periodically, but those needed to be constantly maintained/strengthened
- c. It is a general sense of “weak” also, so as not to foster an atmosphere that beats down and rejects those that are truly weak

4. With all three grouping, the command is to be patient with them all

For instance, the “unruly” are comforted (if one is resistant to admonish, looking to avoid trouble); or the feeble-minded is sustained in their doubts rather than strengthening out of them; or the “weak” are encouraged verbally but not sustained (held-up)

- a. The word for “patient” is from μακροθυμέω often translated “long-suffering” - it is a word that pictures having anger that is far away, and so would take a long time to actually reach it
- b. The opposite would be “short-tempered” (quick to get angry or “snap” at those who are “out of order”, fainthearted or those weak)
- c. Patience is needed also in correctly “reading” discerning between the types of people just described so as to properly respond to each
- d. Such is characteristic (worthy) of our calling - see Eph. 4:1-3

C. The “code of conduct” to be followed carefully - vs. 15

1. “See to it” (as in make sure) that there is no retaliatory pursuit of vengeance
 - a. To “repay evil for evil” is typical and human - even the “eye for an eye” laws of the Old Testament were designed to reign-in responses of anyone who had been wronged
 - b. The tendency is to strive to make some hurt more than we have been hurt (and even when trying to exact precise retaliation, we are more apt to overdo it because of anger)
 - c. This response is core to being like Christ (see Mt. 5:38-42)
 - d. The first word “Ὁραῖτε” describes a perceiving (actively looking to discern) when “bad” is done to us to respond correctly - such a concept is given much lip-service and its importance is acknowledged when we have wronged others and fear retaliation
 - e. “Charity ought not to be overcome by any injuries.” Geneva Bible Notes
2. Instead “always the good pursue” to each other and to everyone

The same is stressed in even greater detail in Rom. 12:16-21

So be on the lookout because such inclinations will come and be provoked, but are dangerous and counterproductive to the growth/edification of the “body”

This is another good text to remind us that we cannot live by instinct and “feelings” if we are to do what is right

- a. Don’t just seek to practice the restraint of retaliation; instead be responsive (with its opposite, counter it) with what is truly “good” - this doesn’t describe concessions to appease an “enemy” but a calculated (preplanned, strategized) response for the well-being/improvement/ correction of the unkind person
- b. The root for the word for “seek after” is “διώκω” which is also translated “persecute” in pursuing to overtake, and doing so with a **great amount of diligence** - it is a strenuous, dedicated, relentless pursuit of something - this is how seeking out the good for others (all others) is described for us to do

D. “Do’s and don’ts” of a focused (not to be distracted) believer - vs. 16-22

1. “Rejoice always” - not a simple command to rejoice (at the moment), but always - vs. 16
 - a. To live by such a command, it is quickly realized that what causes one to “rejoice” (be glad, happy) cannot be founded on circumstances and/or moods, since these fluctuate and can only produce bouts of joy - it has to be based upon something solidly consistent
 - b. In I Thes. 1:6 Paul references the joy they had “of the Holy Spirit” and that having “received the word in much affliction” and Paul expressed his particular joy in knowing they “stand fast in the Lord” (3:8-9)
 - c. Since this is to be “always” it must not be strictly seen as emotional and will involve more a focused faith than a feeling - when there is no steady joy (inward, deep-seated contentment) it reveals a misdirected focus - it is a certain expectation in Who is really in control and where everything is actually heading because of His control
 - d. To “rejoice” is more volitional than it is to be reactionary - as in Rom. 12:12, we are instructed to “rejoice in hope” - we ARE to do it based upon our expectation; it is the true, effective overcomer of sorrow (which will come also)
2. “Unceasingly pray” - as in “without intermission” be praying - vs. 17

Joy was had in the working of God, by His Spirit and grace - to “always rejoice” would involve a focus on God’s working and not apparent circumstances

Though they seem contradictory, sorrow and joy (at the same time) are described in II Cor. 6:10 (see also II Cor. 7:4)

Just as love is, so also joy is of the will (and so is the refusal to do it also)

It can be similar to the idea of a phone conversation being left open, realizing the other person is always on the other end of the line - God is always there and our constant awareness is core to the foundational idea of what prayer is and entails

There are times of verbalized speaking with God, and even during these times the Lord directed this to be in private (Mt. 6:6), though there were times of those gathered together praying (as in Acts 12:12)

So many issues arise when communication is hindered and assumptions rule the day

- a. Some will be quick to make a point that this is not meant “literally” yet should we not look to take it this way first? Possibly our idea of prayer is not what it ought to be if we cannot see it (practically) as always “being” done/doable
- b. In trying to accommodate a broader idea of prayer, Earnest Best wrote in this verse, “Prayer is an attitude towards God which while often expressed in set forms does not need these but may be unuttered and only come spasmodically to conscious expression”
- c. To be best understood for what prayer actually is (and is to be), its underlying word “προσεύχομαι” needs to be seen for what it means, “to direct a wish toward” - at its core prayer is our directing our desires to God (in open, unhindered communication)
- d. To apply this command as best as possible, we must not see prayer limited to a time or place - it is what we do and is a state which we are in at all times
- e. Prayer is not to be only seen as times where we openly talk to God with others, though if we are in a steady, ongoing dialog with Him throughout life, then it is expected there will be times where we do so with others
- f. This command is seen also in Rom. 12:12, Eph. 6:18 and in Col. 4:2 and these also including other ongoing practices and mental postures were are to be doing/living
- g. Prayer is communication (communion) with God and should be something that we should always desire to do (it being the **highest privilege**)

3. "In everything give thanks..." - vs. 18a

Notice also Php. 4:6 and the inclusion of prayer with thanksgiving (being tied together)

It is often stated that "perception equals reality" when dealing with people - this has truth in it (though reality is reality regardless of how it is perceived), but often it is perceived wrongly and so some live life without seeing what it is really all about, and without knowing what is really happening

An excellent illustration of this concept is seen in Job 1:20-22- Job responded to the worst news of his life with "Blessed be the name of the Lord" and did not "charge God with wrong" in what he thought or said

This is commanded because we will not naturally respond this way, but we actually should

- a. It is often emphasized that here we are instructed to give thanks **IN** everything and not necessarily **FOR** everything; yet compared to Eph. 5:20, we must also include the idea of "for everything" - so our **focus** will need to be precise and steady
- b. In all circumstances we are to be grateful (and this focus is inward and not just an outward expression of duty), and so **it is genuine** - this is only done as we see God's absolute control over ALL things (ἐν παντί)
- c. To follow this instruction/command will involve the disciplined focus of the thoughts, governed by the realization of God's omniscience; emotions that are dictated by the faith in God's benevolent and **flawless** omnipotence, and a hope (expectation) focused on seeing God's will in action in all things (grateful for His purpose in "all things" and His usage of them for the true "good" (Rom. 8:28-29))
- d. This has no basis in optimistic thinking just to be optimistic - it is founded upon the Truth, and that **all things are actually for our good** (those in Christ, called according to His purpose), and so **we ought to be thankful in and for them for this reason!**
- e. This all will also involve **patience** to wait on God with anticipation in all things of His grace to meet them - this response of "thankfulness" will need to include an ongoing awareness of how much God has already done, since a good memory of God's graciousness to us (and the particulars) is a powerful defense/offense against the temptation to despair (mentally/emotionally turning on God) - see Rom. 1:18-23 when the opposite of this command occurs (the result)
- f. It is natural to be thankful for what we find agreeable to our own goals/objectives, but it is God's will that we be grateful for even that which we do not find agreeable to what we are seeking or **expecting** at any time

4. For all this is God's will for us that are "in Christ" - vs. 18b

And being God's will for us, this should be all the authority we need to obey - He not only determines all things, but would have us look at all things under and by His will - else we look on things as "by chance" and then there would be times that could merit despair

Regardless what takes place in this life, we are "in Christ" and that cannot be taken away- our destination is sure and so is our "lot in this life" no matter the plans of the "powers that be" of this age

- a. This last phrase of verse 18 looks to be inclusive of the previous commands as well (always rejoice, always pray, always give thanks) - these all are interdependent anyway, for to truly "give thanks" will involve rejoicing and prayer
- b. The absence of the proper article in the Greek with the word "will" (θέλημα) makes it clear this is God's will (but not the entirety of His will, since that will involve many other areas of life) - in these areas, these responses to life, God's will is that we do rejoice always, praying through it all while being thankful and expressing gratefulness
- c. It can also be seen that not only is it God's will we respond this way, but that **all things are by His will anyway**, and to resist or rebel against it is to oppose His will - there is never a justified reason to **doubt** His goodness in anything!
- d. It is God's will for us "in Christ Jesus" - we being in Him (versus "of this world/age" and so "secular" only) are now unique (set apart in all defining aspects) - "...that is, with respect to you who are in Christ secretly by election, and openly by the effectual calling; and who, of all men in the world, have reason to be thankful for everything, and in every circumstance." John Gill

5. "Do not extinguish the Spirit" - vs. 19

These verses are not designed to defend miraculous gifts as much as they are to remain alert and reverent to the working of the Spirit in us individually as well as a group/church

This "quenching" can be internal (personal) as well as external (in the lives of others in Christ)

- a. The verb "σβέννυτε" is a present imperative (as in "stop doing this", and "do not do it again") pictures the putting out of a fire/flame - there are endless presumptions on this little phrase that narrow this down to "ecstatic" expressions of the Spirit (as in the more visible, miraculous gifts of the Spirit), though it would be reasonable to assume more explanation would be given if it was written for this specific (as in I Cor. 14)
- b. The Spirit at work in those in Christ is varied, and this command should encompass the entirety of the Spirit's work in us all, in all ways
- c. In John 16:8, the Spirit was sent to "convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment" and to believers He is the giver of gifts (ministerial/motivational) as in Rom. 12 and I Cor. 12) and He is the one guiding us into "all truth" - and in all this, He is not to be "quenched" (though He cannot be overpowered by us, His working can be **stifled** (silenced to some degree))
- d. We do not want to be those fighting the genuine work of the Spirit of God!

For instance, true faith/trust in God and His word will often be discouraged by older believers who "know better" (simply by experience or a "dug-in" opinion), and who downplay the motivating, convicting work of the Spirit in the life of a younger believer, who is simply looking to take God at His word

In ourselves and in the lives of others this is a very wrong thing to do!

Again, there are many who seek to limit this to only the miraculous gifts, but this is not narrowed to just that in this text - it most certainly can and does include the "forth-telling" of God's word as much as it does foretelling the future (which would also need to be from God)

What God tells us will often not be to our liking, and in our natural responses, we will look for a way to justify our disregard of it

We live in an era where there is an emphasis on two extremes - those that would have all that claim to speak God's Word be accepted as instantly authentic and authoritative, and then those that are so weary of "heresies" and bad doctrine that they become untrusting of all outlets of God's Word being communicated and so place the bulk of their focus and trust on creeds, doctrinal statements, and traditions

The need to discern these differences is very important - for we cannot calculate the detriment of holding-to what is wrong and what is missed when the "good" is discarded

There is a deliberate sense of urgency in not allowing what is "good" to go away (be let go) because the alternative is unacceptable

- e. Extinguishing the Spirit can come in the form of disqualifying His work (in a variety of ways, by our lack of support or denying it as His to begin with) either by the creation and emphasis on counterfeit works, or by so formalizing true Christianity into a formalism, that tradition and ritual become the sole "orthodoxy", and so boxing-in the Spirit to **our controllable** rules and structures
- f. The Spirit's working can also be quenched by picking "favorites" as to given responsibilities, relying more on personal comfort (what we are naturally comfortable doing) versus reliance upon His gifting to do what He has given us to do (and where we have been placed to do it)
- e. And, also, the Spirit can be "put out" when **we reason against faith and hope**, focusing on the impracticalities of what God's Word directs us to do/believe/think

6. "Do not treat with contempt prophetic utterances" - vs. 20

- a. The word for "despise" is ἐξουθενεῖτε, and is a very strong word for disregarding, belittling, and so treating as of no value (or even as **offensive**)
- b. In defining "prophecies," Thayer's Greek lexicon narrows it down to "...discourse emanating from divine inspiration and declaring the purposes of God" - in the New Testament as well as in the Old Testament, it directly referred to those given direct revelation from God, with the purpose to communicate His Word and will to others
- c. I Cor. 14 demonstrates the priority to be given to "prophesying" over that of "tongues" since it is what is designed to edify the Church - at its core, to "prophecy" is to say/communicate what God has said - there is a tendency to react and warn that there were and still are many who say they speak for God and are not actually doing so - this is reigned-in in the following verses
- d. So, generally speaking (and this a general statement), do not, in any way at any time **belittle** what God as truly said (even if He has communicated it to us in a way/manner/method we do not like or think highly of) - compare this to I Thes. 4:8
- e. It is possible also that some might have "despised" these messages from God because they preferred the more "glamorous" and miraculous works of God that seemed more dynamic

7. In all of this, "Test everything" (discerning the "good" from the "evil") - vs. 21-22

- a. Since there was to be an openness to the differing ways God would work in them, it was also understood that there would be those who claim to speak for God (or that they are speaking His Word), and yet are not - so this and "everything" needs to be tested as to its quality and content for rightness and wrongness
- b. The word for "examine" is "δοκιμάζετε" clearly indicating a required scrutinizing (by comparing the thought/idea/teaching to the "light" (the true authority that reveals **inconsistencies**), which authority we have in the Bible)
- c. Even if this is challenged and we are asked to consider "newly revealed revelations," we would still need to compare it to the Word of God as has already been given to us and validated, and to see its consistency with the Scriptures - if it is in harmony with it, then the Scripture is still the authority, and if in disagreement with the Bible, the teaching/insight is to be rejected
- d. In our obligatory examinations of "everything," the goal is to separate it all into two categories; "good" and "evil" (and if there is question, when determining "evil," we are to abstain from "every form of evil" ("form" being εἶδος, meaning not only what looks to be evil but even every "**kind**" (type) of evil, for it comes in a variety of "flavors" to appeal to all ideas and persuasions)
- e. The responsibility given is to reveal what is "good" (as God's Word defines it, so we must have the objective to come to know what this is), and once confirming it (it passes the test), we "hold fast" (embrace) it (literally, to detain/retain it) - this concept is repulsive/offensive to an age that embraces the idea of "no absolutes" and so sees the determination of anything into the category of "good and evil" as to be considered judgmental, discriminatory, intolerant and too narrow minded - see also I John 4:1-6
- f. The word for "good" in the Greek has the proper article, so it is not just "good" it is "the good" (it is definitive), and is to be "held on to" and accumulated

One of the carnal "draws" to evil is its variety of offerings and venues - "good" is made to look unappealing because of its apparent lack of much variety

The "testing standard" (tool) must be truly good, else if we use the wrong standard we will conclude good as evil and evil good (as in Isa. 5:20)

- g. It is interesting to consider that "good" is described as singular ("the good") while evil is described as being as it were, plural (there is only one true good, but evil has multiple (seemingly endless) variations and lures)
- h. The term for "abstain" is the same as used in I Thes. 4:4 "abstaining from sexual immorality", holding one's self away from, avoiding it altogether, so keeping your distance - this is an active discipline that is the result of first scrutinizing everything (examining because it is realized that the appearance of "good" may be deceitful, so even it needs to be tested, since evil is often disguised as good)

E. The prayer to the "God of peace" as the means to complete sanctification - vs. 23-24

1. With such preceding commands, Paul now appeals to God for what must happen - vs. 23

John Gill

- a. "The apostle follows his exhortations with prayer to God, knowing the weakness and impotency of the saints to receive them, and act according to them, and his own insufficiency to impress their minds with them; and that unless the Lord opened their ears to discipline, and sealed instruction to them, they would be useless and in vain..."
- b. It must first be realized to whom this prayer is directed, the "God of peace," He being first of all, the singular picture of true harmony in the universe (being the "three in one" and so at perfect peace), and in so being, He is also the singular source of genuine "tranquility" and a calmness of soul that is permanent
- c. This phrase in Greek demonstrates the emphasis and flow of thought - "Αὐτὸς δὲ ὁ Θεὸς τῆς εἰρήνης ἀγιαῖσαι ὑμᾶς ὀλοτελεῖς" (literally, "**Himself**, now the God of the peace, sanctify/consecrate you completely") - God Himself (as emphasized clearly the One doing/fulfilling this) - there is not a dread that the end might not be a good one (at least for those who truly are in Christ and looking to Him for His work to be done in them by Him) - compare to Php. 2:12-16

And this peace is not simple a feeling, but a state of being, grounded in what we have been given and who we are in Christ

This directs the focus of this prayer toward God, not just as the hearer, but as the doer

This is an essential truth to grasp, else our focus fixes on ourselves for faithfulness in all this and not on God, Who alone is completely faithful

This "making holy" work of God was not expected to be partial but thorough (the entirety of the person)

Though there is debate on whether this is also intended to describe us as made up of three parts, it can be seen as the soul being the part of us that receives its input from the spiritual and physical realms, and whichever is strongest (spirit or body) controls us

Knowing how that this is done by God, we do not fear the word "blameless" since this is won for us by Christ, and once applied, is preserved by God in our entire being (nothing left out to be blamed... even the body!)

- d. There was actual peace to be had since the work of sanctification would be on God and not on the Thessalonian Christians (as is the same for us)
- e. This sanctifying (set-apartness for God's purposes, and set apart morally, ethically (and so behaviorally) from the rest of the world/age) work (here, the prayer/wish for it directed toward God), was that it be "ὀλοτελεῖς" (from two words meaning the "whole" and "end/goal") and so completely to its **full purpose**
- f. Building by reiterating the thought another way, he continues by encompassing the "whole person" pointing out each part (spirit, the non-material part of us that is the core of the "inner man", the "soul" which is our "livingness", our personality, character and emotional characteristics, all packaged in the "body", the material part of us that interfaces with this world)
- g. So each part that makes up the whole of us is included in this wish/prayer to God, that it **all** be qualified as "blameless" (actually, "preserved" as such) until the Lord's return - if ever a text stressed the security of the believer in Christ, it is this one (realizing the focus for consistency and blamelessness is not on self but on God Himself, and that being lasting ("kept") also by Him)
- h. Once more, including the Lord's return, Paul makes it a desirable event to anticipate, since, being preserved blameless, there is no dread of seeing Him, but only the thrill of reaching the end of this sanctifying work (by His grace)!

2. He who has called you is faithful - vs. 24

It is unquestionable that we are to strive to obey all the commands of God, but the assurance of genuine growth/maturity and the needed outcome of our lives was never meant to depend on us (true Christians) - for there will be those who do not grow (but decline) demonstrating who/what they actually are

- a. This verse is pivotal, not just in the end of this epistle, but in the area of "sanctification" altogether - in light of the numerous commands throughout Scripture, it can become apparent that we could never live up to them all, and none completely - something else would be needed
- b. It is a guarantee that those in Christ will be preserved blameless by His faithfulness - even our faithfulness finds its source/enablement in His - see Php. 1:6; I Cor. 1:4-9
- c. This is core to the point in Eph. 2:1-10, revealing that not only are we "saved" by God's grace, but being His "workmanship created in Christ Jesus," we will also see the result of "good works" by His grace - such were prepared ahead of time to be our "walk"
- d. He who calls us to do what must be done is also faithful, trustworthy, reliable

- Pulpit Commentary
- e. "He who calls you to the Christian faith is faithful to fulfill his promises. God's calling is the commencement of a series which terminates in glorification (Rom_8:30)"
 - f. Paul will also deal with this concept in a more specific context in II Thes. 3:1-5 - Paul's confidence in the Lord's faithfulness to establish, guard, and direct their "hearts" to the "steadfastness of Christ"

For those concerned that these verses secure one flaunting their sin, the reality of the practical results of sanctification need to be realized

- g. So, this sanctifying and preserving will assuredly happen! To those truly "in Christ" this is a calming, encouraging assurance and an anchor for hope; to those who are pseudo-Christians, this is annoying in that they, in their heart, do not want to be free from sin, but free to sin

F. Concluding instructions and a request - vs. 25-28

1. "Pray for us" - vs. 25

We ought to pray for our spiritual leaders to be kept from temptations, discouragements and fears and to be directed steadily

- a. Just as he had prayed for them (in the preceding verses), now he requests the same - prayer is never to be seen as focused solely on self, but is to be inclusive of others, their needs, their growth and overall life focus
- b. If an Apostle asked for prayer, so we should expect to be in need of it also - Paul does not detail what they should pray regarding he and his team, just that they pray for them, but in II Thes. he does ask for deliverance from "evil and wicked men"

2. Be welcoming to "all the brothers" - vs. 26

With the quality of "holiness" attached, even the greeting was to be treated carefully and sincerely

- a. To "greet" was an expected acknowledging of another person (for to ignore someone was ungracious), and this was to be done to "all the brethren" (as one would normally expect to do with any family member)
- b. This greeting was a "kiss" (common in their day), but not just a standard greeting (of respect and friendliness) but it was to be "holy" (different in the realization of who you were greeting... a brother in Christ)
- c. Mutual encouragement will begin with some type of greeting - start well with an expectation to encourage those we are brought to and who are brought to us

3. Make sure everyone has this letter read - make sure! - vs. 27

Even in our day, though the Scripture is accessible, it is often not communicated or not communicated thoroughly

- a. The word for "adjure" is 'Ενορκίζω, used of making an oath - clearly it was a must that this letter be communicated to all the church in Thessalonica - not just to a select few, but to everyone! Not just parts of it (the letter), but all of it!
- b. This verse is used to counter the previous versions of Christianity that attempted to conceal the Bible from the common person - yet in our day, we see variations of this (not in the forbidding of it, but in the distracting away from it or in the neglect of it)
- c. Our brothers/sisters in Christ need to hear more of these truths than they do our opinions and our own points of wisdom

4. The best words of comfort and motivation - the "grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" - vs. 28

The idea of "be" with you is supplied, but simply put, it IS with us - other comforts do not compare

- a. It is common to offer some closing statement of encouragement or challenge, yet they are often without much substance or value
- b. Here, it is not an expression of personal favor to the reader, but the favor of Christ (and the favor He earned/purchased for us) is with you
- c. Also consider that it is His favor we desire more than all others! And knowing we have it, the life we still have ahead of us is one of hope, security, confidence and thrilling to consider, knowing our destiny (and path to it) is set!