

# ***Out of Macedonia: Philippians and Thessalonians***

## Commentary and Notes



Perhaps, the Ruins of the Jail at Philippi

By Jim Wilsford

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# 1. The Establishment of the Church in Macedonia

## History and Background

Acts 15 closed with Paul and Barnabas leaving on their second missionary journey, with the intent to revisit the brothers in all the towns where they preached on the first journey. Paul, with Silas as his cohort, launches his second missionary journey, after the elders and apostles in Jerusalem wrote a letter to the Gentile churches instructing them on what matters of the Law of Moses that they should keep. With such a pointed letter in hand, Paul and Silas determined to go church by church through the provinces of Asia Minor. The letter named only four items of the Law to be observed by Gentile Christians. An abbreviated text of the letter as recorded in Acts 15:23-29 follows:

To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia:

Greetings.

. . . 25 So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul . . . 28 It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: 29 You are to **abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality.** You will do well to avoid these things.

Farewell.

## Timothy Joins Paul

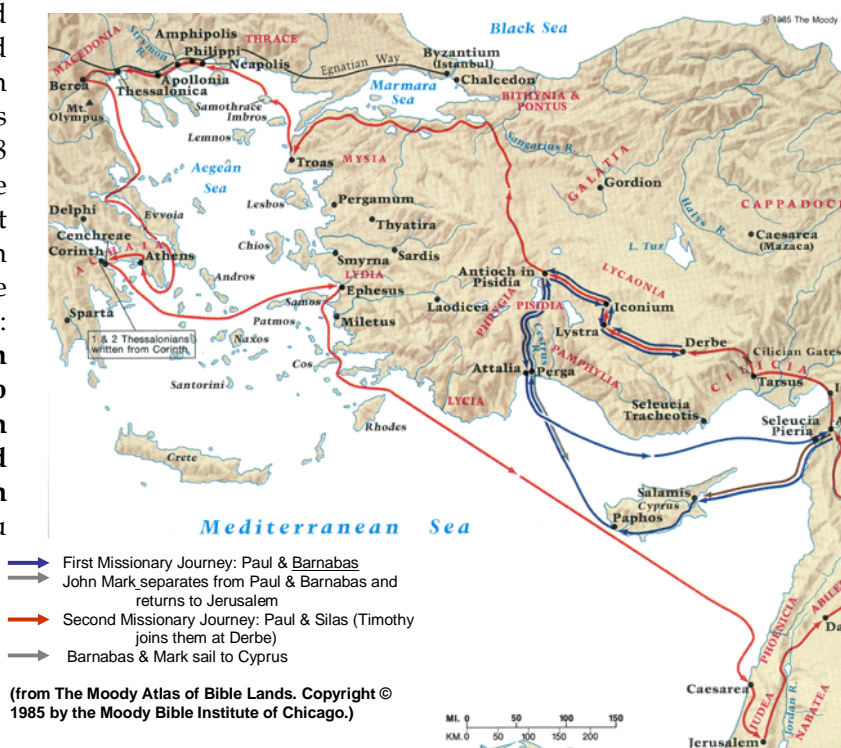
Acts 16:1-2

16 He came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek. 2 The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him.

Derbe and Lystra were the last two churches Paul and Barnabas visited on the first journey. A huge event, because of its future benefits to the work of the Lord, was when Paul selected Timothy to accompany him.

Acts 16:3-5

3 Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. 4 As they traveled from town to town, they



*delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. 5 So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.*

As a free will matter and not as an obligation of faith, Paul circumcised Timothy, making him more effective in working with Jews. There are times when Paul, by act or teaching, accommodated Jews and Gentiles when no principles of the law of Christ were at risk. Acts 18:18 records that Paul took what may have been a Jewish vow: "Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchrea because of a vow he had taken." This vow, with its cutting of hair, is most likely the Nazirite vow of Numbers 6:3ff. Paul knew that in Jerusalem his credentials as a practicing Jew would come into question

### ***The Macedonian Call***

Acts 16:6-10

*6 Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. 7 When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. 8 So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. 9 During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." 10 After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.*

The second journey turned north allowing them to preach in regions of Phrygia and Galatia. The Holy Spirit kept them out of Asia and out of Mysia and Bithynia. This took them on a straight course to Troas on the Aegean Sea. Here, Paul had what commonly is called the Macedonian Call. Paul and his companions responded immediately and left to preach the gospel to those in Macedonia, which was the Roman province north of Greece and Achaia. Had they traveled north, the outcomes for the gospel would have been severely limited.

Acts 16:11-12

*11 From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day on to Neapolis. 12 From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.*

Samothrace was an island in the Aegean Sea on the way to Neapolis. Philippi was the main city of the Macedonia, named after Philip of Macedonia, the father of Alexander the Great. Although Philippi was land locked, it was on the main Roman highway, the Egnatian Way, and close to the seaport of Neapolis.

### ***The Conversion of Lydia***

Acts 16:13-14

*13 On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. 14 One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.*

As Paul's custom was, he and his companions sought out worshippers on the Sabbath. As he spoke to the women, Lydia responded to the gospel preached by Paul: "The Lord opened her heart to respond." God provides a way, but the person has to supply faith and obedience to the gospel. There are no cases of divine intervention providing salvation. The Lord taught in the parable of the sower in Luke 8:15: "15 But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop."

Acts 16:15

15 When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

Therefore, Lydia's response to Paul's teaching, defined her belief. That response was to obey the message by baptism. Only after her response to the message with baptism, did she say; "If you consider me a believer in the Lord . . ." Those who deny baptism unto the remission of sins (Acts 2:38) must answer the question: If Lydia had not responded to the message with baptism, would Paul have considered her a believer? Or how can one be a believer and not obey the message?

### **Paul and Silas Severely Flogged and Thrown in Jail**

Acts 16:16-18

16 Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. 17 This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." 18 She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her.

The older translation read "spirit of divination" in describing this girl. As a fortuneteller, the girl was a principal source of money for her owners; but when she kept saying that Paul and his companions were servants of the Most High God who are telling the way of salvation, Paul, being troubled, cast out the spirit from her.

Acts 16:19-20

19 When the owners of the slave girl realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. 20 They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar 21 by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice."

Philippi was a Roman city with few Jews or Greeks living there. Therefore, it was easy to make the charge stick that Paul and companions were Jews advocating customs unlawful for Romans.

Acts 16:22-24

22 The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. 23 After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. 24 Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

With the crowd behind them, the magistrates had them severely flogged and thrown into prison. The jailer, who was commanded to guard them carefully, doubly secured them in the inner cell with their feet in stocks. Escape under such circumstance would seem impossible.

### **Conversion of the Philippian Jailer and His House**

Acts 16:25-26

25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. 26 Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose.

Beaten and jailed, Paul and Silas responded with the bravery of men dedicated to the Lord, whatever may come. Luke had recorded in his gospel the encouraging words of Christ in Luke 21:36: "36 Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man

The earthquake, so violent that it shook the foundations of the prison reflects, God's power in response to the prayers of the saints

By God's power, the doors flew open and the chains released.

Acts 8:27-28

*27 The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"*

Immediately upon waking and seeing the doors open, the jailor sought to kill himself. The penalty in that day for letting one's prisoners escape was the giving of one's own life. Paul stopped him.

Acts 16:29-30

*29 The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"*

Perhaps, the jailer knew from the circumstances surrounding their imprisonment that Paul and Silas were teaching the way of salvation, or perhaps, the miracles of their release confirmed the word they had taught. Whatever his motivation, the jailor asked the most important question of all for an alien sinner: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" The people on the day of Pentecost asked the same question in Acts 2:37: "37 When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Paul had asked this same question prior to his conversion, recorded in Acts 22:8-10.

Acts 16:31-34

*31 They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household." 32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. 33 At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. 34 The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God – he and his whole family.*

Paul now tells the jailer the way of salvation, step by step. As with Lydia, the way of salvation starts with "believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." The answer to the question of what must we do in Acts 2:37 is in Acts 2:38: "38 Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.'" The jailer took them, washed their wounds, and was baptized. The urgency of acting on his belief is expressed in the terms—*at that hour of the night* and *immediately*. When Paul asked the question of what to do, Ananius expressed the same overwhelming sense of urgency in Acts 22:16; "16 And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name."

The joy expressed by the jailer was only evident after he had obeyed all of the commands included in the way of salvation.

Acts 16:35-40



35 When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: "Release those men." 36 The jailer told Paul, "The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace."

37 But Paul said to the officers: "They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out."

38 The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. 39 They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city. 40 After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and encouraged them. Then they left.

Paul used his status as a Roman citizen to require the magistrates to escort them out. Paul refused to go quietly. Paul's final stop was to Lydia's house where the church in Philippi got its start. These brethren will be more involved in Paul's efforts as they provide support for him in his preaching efforts.

### **On to Thessalonica, Where the Church Is Established**

Paul and Silas came out of the prison, went to Lydia's house for a while, and then left the city of Philippi. The church at Philippi followed Paul with monetary support according Phil 4:15-16:

15 Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; 16 for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need.

Acts 17 records Paul's efforts as he spread the gospel from Macedonia into Achaia, beginning in Thessalonica. Achaia was the Roman province including ancient and modern Greece.

Acts 17:1-4

1 When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. 2 As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 3 explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ," he said. 4 Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women.



When Paul arrived at Thessalonica, he went to the Jewish synagogue and reasoned with them from the scriptures. He was able to explain and prove that Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. The apostles and evangelists preached this very same gospel of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ from the day of Pentecost onward. The end of the logic is that Jesus is the Christ. Since the Gospel is the power of God (Rom 1:16), it is no wonder that Paul persuaded some of the Jews, God-fearing Greeks, and prominent women.

Acts 17:5-9

*5 But the Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd. 6 But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other brothers before the city officials, shouting: "These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, 7 and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus." 8 When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil. 9 Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go.*

These people at Thessalonica actually form a mob and start a riot. They catch Jason, a local believer, and drag him before the city official. In their eyes, Jason's crime was that he welcomed Paul and Silas into his house.

The three-fold charge against Paul and Silas will be the one that, once planted, becomes the rallying cry that the Romans use against the Christians as the kingdom (the church) spreads throughout the Roman Empire. First, they charge that Paul and Silas cause trouble all over the world. Second, they accuse Paul and Silas of defying Caesar's decrees. Third, they say that Paul and Silas teach that there is another king, one called Jesus. These charges, if proven before a Roman court, are treasonous.

### ***The Bereans Were More Noble Than Those at Thessalonica***

Acts 17:10-12

*10 As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. 11 Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. 12 Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.*

Because of the mob, the brothers sent Paul and Silas to Berea, where, as usual, they went to the Jewish synagogue. Acts 17:11 is one of the most powerful and instructive scriptures ever written:

11 Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

The eagerness of Christians to examine the scriptures to see if the one speaking is telling the truth is both protective and instructive. The scriptures and not man's word are complete and perfect.

Acts 17:13-15

*13 When the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, they went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up. 14 The brothers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea. 15 The men who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.*

The Jews who were after Paul in Thessalonica followed Paul to Berea. Then the brothers escorted to Paul to Athens. Silas and Timothy stayed in Berea with instructions to join Paul as soon as possible.

## 2. Philippians 1:1-30

One can only imagine the love that Paul felt for the church at Philippi, established from the beginning of the Gospel in Macedonia from the households of Lydia and the Jailor. Some say that Philippians is the most positive letter written by Paul. Evidently the church there had remained free from the blatant immorality and false teaching that beleaguered other congregations in Asia Minor and Greece.

### **Salutation and Prayer: Phil 1:1-11**

Phil 1:1-3

*1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,*

*To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons:*

*2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

The salutation identifies the writers—Paul and Timothy—as servants of Christ Jesus. The word used for *servant* literally means slave. The same word is used for bond servants and slaves. For all Christians it reflects the complete submission to the will of the Lord.

Paul addresses the letter to three groups: saints, overseers, and deacons. The word *saints* comes from the root word from which we get holy and refers to all believers not just those who achieve a higher or special level of holiness, nor those who are designated saints by an ecclesiastical hierarchy. Phil 4:21 refers to the church as *all the saints*: “21 Greet **all the saints** in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me send greetings.” In 2 Thess 1:10, the word is translated holy people: “10 on the day he comes to be glorified in his **holy people** and to be marveled at among all those who have believed.” Of modern denominational practices completely pervert the meaning of the word *saint*.

The word *overseers* find wide spread abuse in denominational groups. The word used means overseer in Greek, and the word bishop in many translations means exactly the same thing—overseer. However, modern religions use the term Bishop as a proper noun to designate a special office in the hierarchy of offices in denominational administration. In the New Testament, three words refer to exactly the same office: elders, bishops, and pastors. In many passages they are used interchangeably. Acts 20:17 speaks of Paul sending for the elders: “17 From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the **elders** of the church.” However, he address them as overseers and pastors in Acts 20:27-29:

28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers**. Be **shepherds** of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. 29 I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock.

While instructing Titus, Paul uses elder and overseer interchangeably in Titus 1:5-9:

5 The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint **elders** in every town, . . . 7 Since **an overseer** is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless — not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain.

Peter, likewise, used the word interchangeably in 1 Peter 5:1-4:

5 To the **elders** among you, I appeal as a fellow elder . . . 2 Be **shepherds** of God's flock that is under your care, serving as **overseers** — not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be.

Thus the earthly offices of the church begin and end in the local congregation. There is no church hierarchy beyond the congregation, which is the all-sufficient and singular unit of organization of God's church on earth. Any organization larger than the local congregation is unscriptural (synod presbyteries, dioceses, convention, conclaves, etc.); and any organization smaller than the local church is unscriptural (Sunday schools, women's auxiliaries, men's fellowships). All church activities and missions are under the auspices of the elders.

Finally, Paul addresses deacons, those who serve as their special duty within the congregation. The deacons have no oversight responsibilities; however many denominations have unscriptural boards of deacons running their affairs.

Grace (unmerited favor) and peace are from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul's usual prayer includes these spiritual blessing that only come from above. Eph 1:3 teaches: "3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ." James 1:17 adds: "17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows." Only from the Father and the son can one achieve this four-fold harmony of peace with God, with Christ, with one another, and with ourselves.

Phil 1:3-5

*3 I thank my God every time I remember you. 4 In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, 6 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*

Continuing the prayer for them, Paul focuses on their *partnership in the gospel*, which begins a recurring theme throughout the letter. Earlier version, such as the KJV and ASV, use the word *fellowship*. Today, *fellowship* has come to mean company and association, usually in a social sense such as in a church yak and snack or covered dish dinner. The literal meaning of the original word is mutual participation, a partnership. In Phil 4:14-17, Paul lays out an illustrative definition of their partnership with emphasis on sharing:

14 Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. 15 Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; 16 for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need.

Paul's expression—"will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus"—"seems a hint toward encouraging them to continue their support.

Phil 1:7-8

*7 It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. 8 God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.*

Verse 7 returns to the theme of participation by emphasizing their sharing in his chains and in his defending and confirming the gospel. Overarching the discussion of their participation is his heart felt love and affection for them.

Phil 1:7-11

*9 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10 so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of*

*Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ – to the glory and praise of God.*

Paul's prayer uses a cause and resulting effects to call for knowledge and insight with the effect being an ability to discern what is best. The effect of this discernment is that they be pure and blameless until the day of Christ. The fruit of righteousness that comes from Jesus is another effect, and finally, the ultimate effect of all our service is the *glory and praise of God*.

### **Christ Is Preached: Phil 1:12-19**

Phil 1:12-14

*12 Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. 13 As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. 14 Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.*

Paul made even his imprisonment in Rome an opportunity for the gospel of Christ. In Phil 4:22, Paul noted that converts were made even in Caesar's household: "22 All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household." The gospel spread throughout the palace guard. For too years, he was able to preach without hindrance, according to Acts 28:30-31:

30 For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. 31 Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.

His imprisonment encouraged the brethren to speak courageously and fearlessly

Phil 1:15-19

*15 It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. 16 The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. 17 The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. 18 But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, 19 for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.*

However, those, who were envious of Paul, preached Christ out of selfish ambition. Paul conclude that most important was the fact that Christ was preached. His imprisonment and those working against him would turn out to his deliverance.

### **To Live Is Christ**

Phil 1:20-26

*20 I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22 If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! 23 I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; 24 but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. 25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.*

What ever happened to Paul, even life or death, he was sure that it would exalt Christ. How many of us can say as Paul, "To die is gain." Paul harbored no lust to hold on to this life, being willing to live for Christ was an accommodation to his faith. For us, this passage shows the balance between the hope of heaven and our ability to press on for Christ in this present life, finding our joy in our faith and in the faith of our brethren.

### ***A Manner Worthy of the Gospel of Christ: Phil 1:27-30***

Phil 1:27-30

*27 Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel 28 without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved – and that by God. 29 For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, 30 since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.*

The overriding command to the Philippians in this first chapter is to "conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel." We, as they, must stand as one man contending for the faith of the gospel. Jude 3 concurs with Paul: "I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints."

We, as they, will have those who oppose us, and we are not to be frightened. They will be destroyed, and we will be saved. Paul gave similarly encouraging words to the church at Thessalonica in 2 Thess 1:5-10:

5 All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. 6 God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you 7 and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. 8 He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power 10 on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.

We must all struggle and suffer, even as Paul did, for our struggles and sufferings are blessings granted by Christ. Peter admonished those to whom he wrote 1 Peter 1:5-8:

6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

A manner of life worthy of the gospel is a life without hiding and compromise, but one that is open and brave in the face of enemies. Those who are cowards have a special place reserved, according to Rev 21:8:

8 But the **cowardly**, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

### 3. Philippians 2:1-30

During his salutation and prayers in chapter one, Paul had commended the Philippians on the fellowship (partnership) that they had with him in providing support for his living and preaching. In Phil 1:5, he wrote: "5 . . . because of your **partnership** in the gospel from the first day until now. In Phil 1:7, he repeated the theme: ". . . all of you **share** in God's grace with me." In Phil 4:15, Paul also used the word share—older version read fellowship, and in chapter 2, he will use **fellowship**:

Therefore, the theme of fellowship will continue in chapter 2, extending it to include fellowship with the Spirit of God. As we continue through the book, the theme of sharing, fellowship, partnership, and participation—useful synonyms for the some concept—will reoccur.

Paul writes some of the most poetic verses in the Bible in chapter 2, departing from his more common didactic style. The beauty of what follows cannot be denied, yet at the same time the language offers in the nature incite into and understanding of the nature of Jesus Christ.

#### ***United with Christ***

Phil 2:1-4

*2 If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

Perhaps, the most interesting aspect of this passage, is Paul departure from his usual logic based on the Greek models of logic to this *if (not) then* form of reasoning, not unlike out modern bi-polar logic, used in computers and other artificial forms of intelligence:

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ,

If any comfort from his love,

If any fellowship with the Spirit,

If any tenderness and compassion,

Then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.

The oneness of the objectives in this passage, unlocks the secret of unity in the church among fellow Christians: like-minded, the same love, one spirit, and one purpose.

*Fellowship with the Spirit* extends our sharing upward toward God, including intercourse with the Spirit that is spiritual and also social. The social nature of fellowship is inherent in the word used. Rom 8:13-17:

13 For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, 14 because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 15 For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

This is exactly the harmony that Christ prayed for in John 17:20-23:

20 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: 23 I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

### ***The Attitude of Christ***

Phil 2:5-7

*5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:*

*6 Who, being in very nature God,  
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,  
7 but made himself nothing,  
taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.*

To understand the depth of Christ's sorrow and human death, one must first consider the height from which he came. That he was in very nature, God, defines that height. Three passages explain this divine nature that was his. John 1:1-2 stated plainly the Word was God:

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.  
2 He was with God in the beginning.

Heb 1:3 states that the Son is the exact representation of God's being:

3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.

Col 1:15-18 tells us that his nature is unlimited, infinite, and without restraint in heaven and on earth:

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Finally Rev 1:12-16 offers a figurative glimpse of his glory, beauty, and might.

12 I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, 13 and among the lampstands was someone "like a son of man," dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. 14 His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. 15 His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. 16 In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

Phil 2:8

*8 And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to death –*



*even death on a cross!*

From the sublime height of all that heaven can offer, he appeared as a man—a humble man and an obedient man. His obedience include our worst fear, death! A death of pain, desertion, and suffering left him crying out in Matt 27:46

"Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"-which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Phil 2:9-11

*9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place  
and gave him the name that is above every name,  
10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.*

Once again the scriptures exalt and glorify Jesus to the highest place, above name that can be named. Premillennialists and latter day revelators take notice. The day of glory and the victory in Jesus passed at the cross and the resurrection. When he comes, **every knee** will bow and **every tongue** will confess him.

### ***Work out Your Salvation with Fear and Trembling***

Phil 2:12-13

*12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.*

The Christian walk begins with obedience to the teaching of Jesus. Paul wrote in Rom 6:17-18 of the beginning:

17 But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. 18 You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

Jesus told of the in Rev 2:10: "Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life."

To work out our salvation requires faithful obedience for our entire lives. God works in us so that we must will and act according to his good purpose. Paul wrote also in Eph 2:10:

10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

### ***Shine like the Stars of Heaven***

Phil 2: 14-18

*14 Do everything without complaining or arguing, 15 so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe 16 as you hold out the word of life – in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing. 17 But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. 18 So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.*

A church of one mind will not complain and argue; rather they are to be blameless and pure, without fault. Paul describes the world as crooked and depraved, a description that he describes in detail in Rom 1:28-31

28 Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a **depraved** mind, to do what ought not to be done. 29 They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; 31 they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

In contrast, Paul describes Christians with a beautiful metaphor: "You shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life."

Paul returns to their mutual participation; for by their gift from sacrifice and service, they enable Paul to be, figuratively, a drink offering, poured out through his hardships as he preached the gospel. Therefore, he is able to rejoice in them; and they, in him.

### **Paul to Send Timothy and Epaphroditus**

Phil 3:19-24

*19 I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. 20 I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. 21 For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. 22 But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. 23 I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. 24 And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.*

The chapter closes on a personal note about his co-workers, Timothy and Epaphroditus. Paul's intent is to send Timothy, desiring to hear back. Paul testifies that Timothy, as a son with his father, has served him in the work of the gospel. Paul also would like to visit the church soon.

Phil 2:25-30

*25 But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. 26 For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. 27 Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. 28 Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. 29 Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him, 30 because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me.*

Epaphroditus was their messengers, whom they sent to see after Paul's needs and whom Paul now wants to return. Apparently, he was homesick and distressed, for he was ill and almost died. In fact, "he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to help Paul.

## 4. Philippians 3:1-21

In Philippians 3, Paul follows up on his chapter 2 command:

12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

The follow-up in chapter 3 includes four encouragements aimed at helping the church members work out their own salvation:

Watch out for those who put confidence in the flesh.

Attain the resurrection of the dead.

Press toward the goal.

Live according to the pattern.

### ***Watch Out for Those Who Put Confidence in the Flesh***

Phil 3:1-2

1 Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.

2 Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh.

Verse one clearly states the existence of an earlier letter. The repetition of gospel lessons is essential to safeguard the saints.

Paul begins verse three with a warning, "Watch out for the dogs." *Dogs* was a common metaphor for evil people. David used the term to prophesy of those who would crucify the Lord. He wrote in Ps 22:16-18

16 Dogs have surrounded me;  
a band of evil men has encircled me,  
they have pierced my hands and my feet.

17 I can count all my bones;  
people stare and gloat over me.

18 They divide my garments among them  
and cast lots for my clothing.

One of the final statements of God in the Revelation stated the fate of *dogs*. Rev 22:14-15 states:

14 "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. 15 Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

Paul defines the word *dogs* in the context, leaving no doubt about its meaning. They are evil men and mutilators of the flesh. Mutilation of the flesh refers to the legalistic binding of circumcision. The word used in the KJV is *concision*. The original word, translated *concision*,

which is now archaic, means *a cutting up or off*. Circumcision was never brought forward from the Mosaic Law where it was a sign of the covenant that God had with Abraham and for his descendants only. Gen 17:9-12 reads:

9 Then God said to Abraham, "As for you, you must keep my covenant, **you and your descendants after you for the generations to come**. 10 This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. 11 You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you.

Phil 3:3-4a

*3 For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh – 4 though I myself have reasons for such confidence.*

For Christians, physical circumcision is a non-issue. Although if it were an issue, as some would make it, Paul, by his heritage, could have such confidence in the flesh. Yet, the only thing that counts is true faith and obedience to the Lord, according to Gal 5:5-6:

5 But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

This faith expressed is the route to the new life as a new creature in Christ, and that is a rule. Gal 6:15-16 teaches:

15 Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. 16 Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God.

Circumcision for a Christian is the putting off of the sinful nature and not a putting off of the flesh. In Col 2:11-12, Paul places the point of our spiritual circumcision in the depth of our burial with him in baptism.

11 In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, 12 having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

This spiritual circumcision, done by Christ, leaves the physical act of circumcision as merely *harsh treatment of the body*. Col 2:23 teaches:

23 Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

Phil 3:4b-6

*If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.*

However, if one were going to boast about their heritage as a Jew, including circumcision, Paul had no peer. He had all that a Jew could desire in the flesh. In the next verse, he considers all this a loss for the sake of Christ

### ***Attain the Resurrection from the Dead***

Phil 3:7-11

7 But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8 What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. 10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Having considered loss for Christ all that it meant to be a Jew, Paul attained surpassing greatness in knowing Christ his Lord. True righteousness comes from knowing Christ, knowing the power of his resurrection, becoming like him in his death, and attaining the resurrection from the dead. Once again the point of contact that Paul describes as *like him in death* is baptism, the sign of the new covenant. Rom 6:3-4 declares:

3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

### **Press toward the Goal**

Phil 3:12-14

12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

The Christian life is a work in progress, a journey, not a sudden destination; and we must press on to take hold of it. One must not let what has happened impede progress toward that goal to win the prize. Paul's statement gives new meaning to *heavenward* bound.

Phil 3:15-16

15 All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. 16 Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

That all who are mature should take this long view of things expresses how important it is not to be dragged bound by anything. Even issues that we do not understand are not to impede our effort toward the goal.

### **Live according to the Pattern**

Phil 3:17-18

17 Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. 18 For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ.

As we press forward to goal of heaven, we cannot achieve it by perseverance and commitment alone. We must follow Paul's example, taking note of those who live according to that pattern that the apostles and prophets gave us. Faith, struggle, sincerity, and commitment are not enough. We must keep the example and pattern as Paul encourage over and over. The word for pattern here is TUPOS, a word which means a pattern, form, as in concrete forms, or a

model for imitation. Paul used it to describe how the Romans were made free from sin in Rom 6:17-18:

17 But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. 18 You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

Paul wrote emphatically to Timothy in 2 Tim 1:13-14:

13 What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. 14 Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you — guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

Not every one will keep the pattern of sound words, and Paul calls them enemies of the cross of Christ. In other words, one cannot alter the pattern and be a friend to the Lord. They are mutually exclusive attitudes. [ For a detail discussion of modern day *Enemies of the Cross of Christ* see [www.gospellessons.info/enemiesofthecross.html](http://www.gospellessons.info/enemiesofthecross.html) ]

Enemies are enemies no matter how sincere they act or sweet they sound. The devil disguises his ministers, according to 2 Cor 11:13-15

13 For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. 14 And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. 15 It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.

Phil 3:19-21

*19 Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*

Paul describes the sad end to their actions:

Their destiny is destruction!

Their God is their stomach!

Their mind is on earthly things!

On the other hand, those who keep the pattern and example of the apostles and prophets receive a glorious end to their efforts to attain the goal of the prize of the high calling:

Our citizenship is in heaven!

We eagerly await a savior from there, the Lord Jesus!

Our lowly bodies will be transformed!

We will be like his glorious body!

## 5. Philippians 4:1-23

In Philippians 3, Paul discussed four points that would allow them to “*continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling*” (Phil 2:12):

Watch out for those who put confidence in the flesh.

Attain the resurrection of the dead.

Press toward the goal.

Live according to the pattern.

Chapter four begins with an affirmation these truths.

### **Stand Firm in the Lord**

Phil 4:1

*4 Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!*

The expressions “that is how” and “therefore” at the beginning of the chapter demonstrate how the steps that Paul outlined in chapter three are those that help us stand firm.

*2 I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. 3 Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.*

It is clear that Euodia and Syntyche had difficulty with one another; perhaps even provoking the admonitions of Phil 2:2-3:

2 Then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.

That these women contended at Paul’s side in the cause of the gospel illustrates the important role of women in the work of the Lord. Their names along with the rest of Paul’s fellow worker have their names written in the book of life which was first spoken in Ps 69:26-28:

26 For they persecute those you wound  
and talk about the pain of those you hurt.

27 Charge them with crime upon crime;  
do not let them share in your salvation.

28 May they be blotted out of the **book of life**  
and not be listed with the righteous.

Jesus spoke of the book of life in his letter to Sardis in Rev 3:5-6

5 He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the **book of life**, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels.

Rev 13:8 states the book of life belongs to Jesus:

8 All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast – all whose names have not been written in the **book of life** belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.

In Rev 20:11-12, the book of life will be opened with other books:

12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is **the book of life**. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.

Anyone whose name is not found in the life is thrown in the lake of fire in Rev 20:14-15:

The lake of fire is the second death. 15 If anyone's name was not found written in **the book of life**, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Rev 21:27 teaches explicitly that one's name must be written in the Lamb's book of life to enter heaven:

27 Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the **Lamb's book of life**.

Phil 4:4-7

*4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

When the trials and troubles of life are upon us, let us turn our attention to the joy we have in the Lord and rejoice. So important is this admonition that Paul repeats it: "Rejoice!" There is no getting around it; Christians are to be gentle, and that gentleness is outward and overt in order for all to see. The Lord himself cautioned in Matt 5:39-42:

39 But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. 40 And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. 41 If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. 42 Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

The "to all" phrase is all-inclusive, including wives and husbands, children and family, friends and co-workers, and even our enemies in our gentleness. At the very best, one should strive to be imitators of the Lord Jesus who said in Matt 11:29-30:

29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for **I am gentle and humble in heart**, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Anxiety is the great crippler in our lives. The Lord addressed this issue, trying to focus us on each day in Matt 6:33-34:

33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not **worry about tomorrow**, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Perhaps, the greatest challenge is how to eliminate anxiety in our lives. There are so many things that one could worry about: wars, debt, joblessness, health, children, the economy, etc. Paul's answer is to turn to the Lord in everything with prayers, petitions, and thanksgiving. Paul made a like statement in 1 Tim 2:1-3:

2 I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone— 2 for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

Although we may not know how, the peace of God will guard our hearts and minds through all of life's troubles. We need not understand how this happens, only that it does happen for each and every child of God.



## **Think about Such Things**

Phil 4:8-9

*8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. 9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.*

How often it is said: “A good defense is a good offense.” Everyday, hardships notwithstanding, we may choose what to think about. Paul instructs us to think on the noble, right, pure, lovely, and admirable. We are to think of the excellent and praiseworthy. The word used here for *excellent*, may be translated moral excellence or virtue. The positive steps in managing the troubles of the day must move beyond thinking to doing (*put into practice*) what we have learned, received, or heard from Paul and what we have seen in him. Paul described these acts as the fruit of the spirit in Gal 5:22-25:

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.

Sinful nature (flesh), as contrasted to the spiritual attributes, is crucified with Christ, leaving a new nature of the excellent. In baptism, we put off the sinful nature of the flesh (passions and desires) and put on the fruit of the Spirit. As Peter explains in 2 Peter 1:3-7, having put off the sinful nature, we participate in the divine nature

3 His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

5 For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7 and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love.

## **I Can Do Everything through Him**

Phil 4:10

*10 I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. 11 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do everything through him who gives me strength.*

Paul returns in these verses to his personal circumstance to illustrate the object lesson of being able to do everything through the Lord. Perhaps no human has suffered as Paul. His secret to survive is learning to be content no matter what. Paul has described his sufferings in 2 Cor 11:23-28:

I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. 24 Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was

stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, 26 I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. 27 I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. 28 Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.

Paul's ability to suffer does not free the Philippians from responsibility; therefore, he begins this passage suggesting they should help. In verse 10, he began: "I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me." The next verses, 14-17 continue in that vein.

### ***The Philippians Renew Their Support of Paul***

*14 Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. 15 Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; 16 for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. 17 Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. 18 I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. 19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.*

In the early days of the gospel, the Philippians sent support to Paul once and again; and now they have sent support to Paul in Rome by Epaphroditus. Paul describes their gifts as "a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God."

Many use this passage to teach that support of preachers must be direct from the church to the preacher. They teach that apostolic examples are mutual exclusive; that is, that since there are only examples of sending aid directly from assisting congregation to preachers, churches cannot send to another church (sometimes called the sponsoring church) and have the receiving church send it on to a preacher in the field. Without delving into the many arguments that have already been made through the years, we will note that if this example is mutually exclusive, a congregation could not send support via the U. S. Postage Service; but they would have to send it via a messenger like Epaphroditus. If apostolic examples are mutually exclusive, money from the collection on the first day of the week could not go to pay a preacher or the utilities but could only be used to help the needy. Indeed, we only have one example of how to collect money and in that example the money is to help needy saints. 1 Cor 16:1-4 offers the example of how to collect money; and in deed, we follow it to this day:

*16 Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. 2 On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made. 3 Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem.*

### ***Closing Comments and Exhortations***

*20 To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

*21 Greet all the saints in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me send greetings. 22 All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household.*

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

## 6. 1 Thessalonians 1:1-20

The establishment of the church in Thessalonica was much more difficult and dangerous than Paul's work at Philippi. They seemed to have gotten off to a good start with many converts, as recorded in Acts 17:2-11:

2 As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 3 explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ," he said. 4 Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women.

However, jealous Jews created a riot and disturbance, forming a mob and rushing Jason's house, seeking Paul and Silas. Not finding them, they dragged Jason and some other brothers before the city officials (Acts 17:5-6a).

They accused them of defying Caesar's decrees in Acts 17:6b-9:

"These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, 7 and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus." 8 When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil. 9 Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go.

The situation became so strained and dangerous that the brothers sent Paul and Silas out of town to Berea by night. In Acts 17:13-15, we learn that the Jews did not give up but pursued Paul and Silas to Berea, from which Paul once again had to flee to Athens.

It is to this church, established under great trial and tribulation, that Paul writes this letter, duly noting the troubles they had had in 1 Thess 3:7: "7 Therefore, brothers, in all our distress and persecution, we were encouraged about you because of your faith."

The letter, written from c. 48 to c. 54 A.D., confirms the accuracy of the gospel accounts and Luke's account, illustrating that the gospel events from Christ birth to resurrection, were not myths concocted toward the end of the century.

### ***Greetings and Prayers: 1 Thess1:1-3***

1 Thess 1:1

*1 Paul, Silas and Timothy,*

*To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:*

*Grace and peace to you.*

Paul includes in the salutation Silas and Timothy as fellow workers, addressing the church of the Thessalonians. Paul states his usual prayer of grace and peace.

1 Thess1:2-3

*2 We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. 3 We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Paul's prayer includes rhetorically interesting structures noted for their simple harmony and beauty:

Work produced by faith.

Labor prompted by love.

Endurance inspired by hope.

The actors in our lives are faith, hope, and love. The objects in our lives are work, labor, and endurance. And the acts of our lives are to produce, to prompt, and to inspire. Tied together, they become a plan for minute by minute daily living: productive, timely, and inspirational.

### ***The Gospel, the Source of All Power 1 Thess 1:4-10***

1 Thess 1:4-5

*4 For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake.*

The instrument by which God chooses us is the gospel—a gospel of words and power. Later Paul will write in 2 Thess 2:13-14:

... from the beginning God **chose** you to be saved through the sanctifying work of **the Spirit** and through belief in **the truth**. 14 He called you to this through our **gospel**, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul described this power in Rom 1:16: "16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes . . . "

1 Thess 1:6-7

*6 You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. 7 And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. 8 The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia – your faith in God has become known everywhere.*

This passage shows the multiplying effect of the gospel where conversion leads to conversion. The Thessalonian Christians imitated Paul; believers in Macedonia and Achaia modeled themselves after the Thessalonians; their faith shined everywhere. Today, churches may generate this same effect throughout the world by doing just what the New Testament says to do—nothing more. Paul also described this multiplying effect to Timothy in 2 Tim 2:2:

2 And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.

1 Thess 1:8b-10

*Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, 9 for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead – Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.*

Actions speak louder than words. When the life and character of a church is abiding in the gospel, everyone will come to know it. In our present world, have we turned from the materialism and fleshly pleasures around to us to serve the living and true God? Are we waiting for his Son from heaven? Will we be rescued from the coming wrath?

Verse 10 reflects the theme: Are you ready?

## 7. 1 Thessalonians 2:1-20

In chapter one, Paul described the church at Thessalonica as imitators of him in 1 Thess 1:6-8:

6 You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. 7 And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. 8 The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia – your faith in God has become known everywhere.

The fact that others followed their example led Paul to say, “The Lord’s message rang out!” The church’s influence is felt throughout the churches even today, by this scripture and by the hymn it inspired: *Ring It Out*. The text of that song resounds in our assemblies to this day:

There's a message true and glad  
For the sinful and the sad, Ring it out, ring it out;  
It will give them courage new,  
It will help them to be true; Ring it out, ring it out.  
Tell the world of saving grace,  
Make it known in ev'ry place, Ring it out, ring it out;  
Help the needy ones to know  
Him from whom all blessings flow;  
Ring it out, ring it out.

### ***Paul’s Character and Characteristics as a Preacher***

1 Thess 2:1-6

2 You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure. 2 We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition. 3 For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. 4 On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. 5 You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed – God is our witness. 6 We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else.

As Paul describes his experience with the church, he offers, imbedded in the discussion, an explanation of just what a preacher says and does. In spite of the fact that he was driven out of town, his work was not a failure.

He told the gospel in spite of strong opposition.  
He did not teach error, have impure motives, nor try to trick them.  
He spoke as one approved of God to be entrusted with the gospel.  
He did not try to please men but God.  
He did not use flattery.  
He was not into it for greed.  
He was not looking for praise from men.

## **Paul Not a Burden to Anyone**

1 Thess 2:6b-9

*As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, 7 but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. 8 We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. 9 Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.*

Paul often spoke of his rights as an apostle which he sometimes chose not to exercise. In 1 Cor 9:3-6, he described those rights:

3 This is my defense to those who sit in judgment on me. 4 Don't we have the right to food and drink? 5 Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas? 6 Or is it only I and Barnabas who must work for a living?

On the other hand, he often worked, sometimes making tents, his trade, that the local church be not burdened. Such was the case at Corinth in Acts 18:1-4:

18 After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. 2 There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, 3 and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them.

Paul never wanted to be a burden to anyone while he preached.

1 Thess 2:10-12

*10 You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. 11 For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, 12 encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.*

On the one hand Paul and his companions were holy, righteous, blameless, responding to the church as a father responds to his children—encouraging, comforting, and urging. On the other hand, with lives worthy of God, they were called into his kingdom and glory.

## **They Received the Word of God as It Actually Is the Word of God**

1 Thess 2:13-15

*13 And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe. 14 For you, brothers, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews, 15 who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to all men 16 in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last.*

This passage is a wonderful proof text to establish the unity of the gospel and the oneness of the gospel whenever and wherever it is preached. There are those who believe that the Christian Jews circulated the gospel stories about Christ toward the end of first century. Yet, Paul in the passage written about 47 AD established the oneness of the gospel for all time:

They received the word of God as it was in truth the Word of God.

They imitated the churches of Judea who practiced this very same gospel

Both the church in Thessalonica and the churches in Judea suffer persecution.  
The gospel they both preached is the gospel that saves.

Jude stated the certitude of the gospel for all times in Jude 3: Jude 3-4

3 Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.

### ***Paul's Hope and Joy and Glory When the Lord Jesus Comes***

1 Thess 2:17-20

*17 But, brothers, when we were torn away from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. 18 For we wanted to come to you – certainly I, Paul, did, again and again – but Satan stopped us. 19 For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? 20 Indeed, you are our glory and joy.*

Paul had wanted to come to Thessalonica time and again; but Satan stopped. Satan, the devil, continuously impedes our work. Perhaps, we are too casual in considering his influence. His power and deceit is all about us. Luke 22:3-6 shows how he entered Judas:

3 Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve. 4 And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus. 5 They were delighted and agreed to give him money.

Satan also entered into the heart of Ananias in Acts 5:3-4:

3 Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?"

Jesus spoke of Paul's work turning people from the power of Satan in Acts 26:17-18:

7 I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them 18 to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

Paul's hope and joy result from this deliverance of the Thessalonians from Satan and the presence of these Christians, converted and nurtured by Paul, at the coming of the Lord.

## 8. 1 Thessalonians 3:1-13

Paul ended the second chapter by announcing the church at Thessalonica was their hope, their joy and their crown in 1 Thess 2:18-20:

19 For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? 20 Indeed, you are our glory and joy.

From this grand pronouncement, he begins chapter three saying that they could stand it no longer and so sent Timothy to see about them.

### **Paul Sends to Find Out about Their Faith**

1 Thess 3:1-3

**3** *So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. 2 We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God's fellow worker in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, 3 so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them.*

Paul was willing to be left alone so that Timothy might go to see about their faith, knowing that they were beset by trials and persecutions. Timothy was described as “our brother and God’s fellow worker in spreading the Gospel of Christ.” Timothy’s mission was to strengthen and encourage them so that the trials would not unsettle them. Evidently they all understood that such trials were unavoidably coming.

1Thess 3:4-5

*4 In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know. 5 For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter might have tempted you and our efforts might have been useless.*

Paul, while with them, had kept warning of the persecution to come. One might say that Paul was a “nervous wreck” waiting to find out what had happened. His real concern was that the tempter might have tempted and nullified the work for the Lord. The only other use of “tempter” for Satan was when he came to tempt the Lord in the wilderness in Matt 4:1-3:

1 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. 2 After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. 3 The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

In 1 Thess 2:18, Paul has called the devil by name—Satan—saying that Satan had stopped them. The discussion of Satan and his work will gain momentum during the course of these two letters to the Thessalonians.

### **Timothy Reports Back to Paul**

I Thess 3:6-10

*6 But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you. 7 Therefore, brothers, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. 8 For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord. 9 How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? 10 Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.*



With Timothy's return, Paul received good news concerning their faith and love. The memories and the longing to see each other were mutual feelings flowing between Paul and Thessalonians. Their faith encouraged Paul, who now knew that they were standing in the Lord. They were constantly in Paul's prayers that he see them again and supply whatever was lacking.

1 Thess 3:11-13

*11 Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. 12 May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. 13 May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.*

Paul's prayer concludes asking God to make possible his return to them, to make their love increase and overflow, and to strengthen their hearts that they may be blameless and holy in the presence of God when Jesus comes with his holy ones. These holy ones are explained in 2 Thess 1:6-8:

6 God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you 7 and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels.

## 9. 1 Thessalonians 4:1-18; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3

In the fourth chapter, Paul turns from his personal concerns and prayers to issues of godly living and preparation for the Lord to return. The chapter starts with Paul emphasizing that what he is teaching is by the authority of the Lord Jesus.

### ***Paul Declared His Teachings Given by the Authority of Jesus***

1 Thess 4:1-2

**4** *Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. 2 For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.*

Paul states that his instructions were by the authority of Jesus echoing the Lord's own instruction to the apostles in Matt 28:18-20:

18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.** 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 **and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.** And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Paul had already praised them for receiving the word as the very word of God in 1 Thess 2:13:

13 And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.

### ***Avoid Sexual Immorality, Love All the Brothers, and Lead a Quiet Life***

1 Thess 4:3-8

*3 It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; 4 that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, 5 not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; 6 and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. 7 For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. 8 Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit.*

On the moral side, Christians are to avoid sexual immorality: permissive sex, homosexual sex, sexual infidelity and adultery, etc. Moderns would have us think that God is somehow responsible for their sexual drives; and therefore, they are excused. A "God made me this way" excuse for promiscuity excuses no one. In reality, all Christians must control their passions and lusts. Whether man's inclinations are toward adultery or homosexuality, he must "control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable. Man must control his passionate lust in order to be saved. All those of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, who rationalize their sins and who cave into lusts will receive punishment from the Lord.

It is not enough to maintain a morally pure life, but eternal life depends on not wronging another person by taking advantage of them. Paul states the certainty of punishment by God for all **such sins**. The word **such sins** show that we are to broadly apply these commands and warnings, and not narrowly apply them to see, perhaps, just how much we can get away with. Paul used a similar expression, **the like**, in Gal 5:19-21:

19 The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish

ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and **the like**. I warn you, as I did before, that those who **live like** this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

1 Thess 4:9-12

*9 Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. 10 And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more.*

*11 Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, 12 so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.*

Paul commends the church for their love of the brethren even throughout Macedonia. Paul's teaching on personal living concludes with the admonition to lead a quiet life, mind our own business, and work with our hands. The very prayers of the Christians for political leaders is so that they may lead tranquil lives according to 1 Tim 2:1-3:

2 I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone— 2 for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

Peter teaches in 1 Peter 3:3-4 that the adornment of the Christian woman is to be that of gentle and quiet spirit:

3 Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. 4 Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.

### ***The Coming of the Lord***

1 Thess 4:13-15

*13 Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. 14 We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. 15 According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.*

What will happen to the living and the dead when Jesus comes? The teaching of the Lord is certain: the dead in the Lord will come with him and the living will be changed. This passage and 1 Cor 15:50-53 concur what will happen to the followers of Christ at his coming:

50 I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51 Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— 52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53 For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.

1 Thess 4:16-18

*16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. 18 Therefore encourage each other with these words.*

There will be no kingdom on earth for "then the end will come." 1 Cor 15:20-25 explains:

20 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. 22 For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. 24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.

There will be no kingdom on earth, for no earth or material heavens will remain, according to 2 Peter 3:11-13:

You ought to live holy and godly lives 12 as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. 13 But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

According to 1 Cor 15:54, there will be no kingdom on earth, for flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God:

“50 I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.”

We must be ready for the trumpet call of God in 1 Cor 15:51-

51 Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed – 52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53 For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.

All mankind will be aware of his coming in Matt 24:30-31:

30 "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. 31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

Anyone who says otherwise contradicts the truth of God's word, according to Matt 24:26-28:

26 "So if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the desert,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. 27 For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

No where does the Bible teach that Christ will ever set foot on the earth again. 1 Thess 4:17 teaches that we will be caught up to meet him in the air and be there with him forever:

After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

Are you ready for the trumpet call of God? 2 Thess 1:7-10 teaches:

This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. 8 He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power. . . .

## 10. 1 Thessalonians 5

What will happen when Jesus comes? A review from chapter 4:13-18 outlines the first principles of the coming of the Lord:

God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

We who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.

The Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God.

The dead in Christ will rise first.

We who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.

We will be with the Lord forever.

Anyone advancing contrary positions to these is a false teacher. Paul now turns to the suddenness of the coming of the Lord.

### ***The Day of the Lord Will Come Suddenly***

1 Thess 5:1-3

*5 Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, 2 for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3 While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.*

The Thessalonians understood clearly that the Lord "will come like a thief in the night." This understanding stands in stark contrast to moderns and latter day prophets who try to forecast the exact time of the Lord's coming. Most notable of these are the predictions of the Jehovah Witnesses:

Charles Taze Russell was the first president of the Watch Tower Society:

Christ invisibly present and ruling from the heavens since 1974

The resurrection of the saints in 1875

The end of the "harvest" and the Rapture of the saints to heaven for 1878

The final end of "the day of wrath" in 1914

Watch Tower Society publication predicted that in 1918, God would begin to destroy churches and millions of their members. J.F. Rutherford, who succeeded Russell as president of the Watch Tower Society predicted that the Millennium would begin in 1925 with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David would be resurrected as "princes".

From 1966, witness publications raised strong expectations that Armageddon would arrive in 1975.

In 1974, witnesses commended for selling their homes and property to "finish out the rest of their days in this old system" in full time preaching

In 1976, the Watchtower advised those who had been "disappointed" by the failure of the predictions for 1975 to adjust their viewpoint

Four years later the Watch Tower Society admitted its responsibility in building up hope regarding 1975.

[Adapted "Jehovah's Witnesses". *Unfulfilled predictions of Jehovah's Witnesses*. Wikipedia,]

The most notable 2011 end times prediction was made by American Christian radio host Harold Camping:

The Rapture and Judgment Day would take place on May 21, 2011,

The end of the world would take place five months later on October 21, 2011.

On May 23, Camping stated that May 21 had been a "spiritual" day of judgment, and that the physical Rapture would occur on October 21, 2011, simultaneously with the destruction of the universe by God. However, on October 16 Camping admitted to an interviewer that he did not know when the end would come, and October 21 passed without Camping's predicted apocalypse. (*2011 end times prediction*, Wikipedia). On Wednesday, before the Camping date, the same day that national TV blanketed the news with his prediction to come on the following Saturday, Gospel Lessons download 33,423 lessons, titled *The Completion of the Revelation of God* taken from Rev 21.

### ***The Lord and Peter Agreed with Paul***

The Lord taught the suddenness of his coming, compatible with this statement by Paul in Matt 24:36, "36 No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." In Matt 24:42, the Lord emphasized again that no man knows when he would come: "42 Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come."

Peter wrote in 2 Peter 3:10: "

10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

### ***Sons of the Light and of the Day***

1 Thess 5:4-

*4 But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. 5 You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. 6 So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night.*

Light and darkness are common metaphors for good and evil. Here Paul adds night as a time when evil takes place. John uses this light metaphor in 1 John 1:5-7 as the path to purification of sins by the blood of Christ:

5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

In Eph 5:8-12, Paul spells out how to live as children of light:

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) 10 and find

out what pleases the Lord. 11 Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.

Paul gives Christians a three-fold test of what is the fruit of light: goodness, righteousness, and truth. The deeds of darkness bear no fruit.

1 Thess 5:8-11

*8 But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. 9 For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. 10 He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. 11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.*

Those that belong to the day (light) put on self-control, faith, love, and love. The breastplate and helmet metaphors are used by Paul in Eph 6:11-17 to describe the Christian armor which equips us to contend with the devil and his evil forces of darkness:

11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this **dark** world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. 13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. 14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the **breastplate** of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the **helmet of salvation** and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

### ***Support the Elders***

1 Thess 5:12-13

*12 Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. 13 Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.*

Those who are over us in the Lord are elders, called overseers and pastors as outlined by Peter in 1 Peter 5:1-3:

5 To the **elders** among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: 2 Be **shepherds [pastors]** of God's flock that is under your care, serving as **overseers [bishops]** – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; 3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

The work of elders is difficult and challenging and often without thanks or even encouragement. The Hebrew writer gave this same admonition to support the elders in Heb 13:17:

17 Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Paul would count the elders that rule well as worthy of double honor in 1 Tim 5:17-20:

17 The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching . . . 19 Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses.

### **Final Admonitions**

1 Thess 5: 14-15

*14 And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. 15 Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.*

The idleness of some members will come back as a topic 2 Thess 3:10-12:

10 For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat."

11 We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. 12 Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat.

This series of admonitions spell out how we are to act toward all men: warn the idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient toward everyone, and be kind to everyone. Embedded in these admonitions is an allusion to the golden—"make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong"—which reads in Matt 7:12: "12 So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets."

1 Thess 5:16-17

*16 Be joyful always; 17 pray continually; 18 give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

Once again, these admonitions bring to memory others who taught the same thing. For example we are taught in Eph 6:18:

18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints."

Continually means all the time where continuously is constant but sporadic. No matter how hard our times are, "give thanks."

1 Thess 5:19-22

*19 Do not put out the Spirit's fire; 20 do not treat prophecies with contempt. 21 Test everything. Hold on to the good. 22 Avoid every kind of evil.*

The balance between treating prophecies with contempt and testing everything is demonstrated by the Bereans in Acts 17:11:

11 Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

We have the obligation to test teachings and teachers, false prophets and false teachers, and ourselves. Consider 1 John 4:1-3 which brings up a topic that Paul will deal with in 2 Thess 2:

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not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

Finally, we are told to test ourselves in Gal 6:4-5: "4 Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else."

*Avoid every kind of evil* covers the map of human experience where evil lurks unexpectedly:

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2 Tim 2:16: 6 Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly.

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*23 May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.*

*25 Brothers, pray for us. 26 Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. 27 I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.*

*28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.*

## Leftover from Last Week: 1 Thessalonians 5:4ff

### ***Sons of the Light and of the Day***

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## **Benediction**

1 Thess 5:23-28

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25 Brothers, pray for us. 26 Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. 27 I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.

28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

## 11. 2 Thessalonians 1

Issues of the second coming and the resurrection of the dead from the 1 Thessalonians form the foundation for the content of 2 Thessalonians. Themes of the rise of the man of sin and the necessity for Christians to forge forward comprise most of the content of the letter.

### ***Greeting and Prayer***

2 Thess1:1-2

1 Paul, Silas

and Timothy,

*To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:*

*2 Grace and peace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

As usual, Paul gives Silas and Timothy equal status in his salutation. In addressing the church the word *eklesia*, which is Greek for assemble. The word, church in modern English portrays many concepts foreign to the New Testament. The English word church has no entomological connection with *eklesia*, opening a flood gate of erroneous conclusions. When used is today the word may mean these uses:

- 1: a building for public and especially Christian worship
- 2: the clergy or officialdom of a religious body
- 3 often capitalized: a body or organization of religious believers: as
  - a: the whole body of Christians
  - b: denomination <the Presbyterian church>
  - c: congregation
- 4: a public divine worship <goes to church every Sunday>
- 5: the clerical profession <considered the church as a possible career>

*Dictionary and Thesaurus - Merriam-Webster*

In truth of these meanings, only *body of believers* and *congregation* describe the meaning of the word church in the New Testament. Vine describes the New Testament uses of the word church, which should be the only ways that it is applied in the 21<sup>st</sup> century:

1. *ekklesia* from *ek*, "out of," and *klesis*, "a calling" (*kaleo*, "to call"), was used among the Greeks of a body of citizens "gathered" to discuss the affairs of state, . . . It has two applications to companies of Christians, (a) to the whole company of the redeemed throughout the present era, the company of which Christ said, "I will build My Church," Matt 16:18, and which is further described as "the Church which is His Body," Eph 1:22; 5:23, (b) in the singular number (e. g., Matt 18:17, RV marg., "congregation"), to a company consisting of professed believers, e. g., Acts 20:28; 1 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:13; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1; 1 Tim 3:5, and in the plural, with reference to churches in a district. (from *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, Copyright © 1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers.)

The modern word church more aptly leads back to a Greek root meaning of *Christ*:

Middle English *chirche*, from Old English *cirice*, ultimately from Late Greek *kyriakon*, from Greek, neuter of *kyriakos* of the lord, from *kyrios* lord, master; akin to Sanskrit *śūra* hero, warrior. *Dictionary and Thesaurus - Merriam-Webster*

In this sense, when we use the word *church*, which has the root meaning of Christ, we are without any modification saying **church of Christ**. All other interpretation result from the perversion taught by men.

2 Thess 1:3-4

*3 We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing. 4 Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.*

Paul returns to the theme of their perseverance, faith, and endurance of trials of the first letter, setting the context for the next verses.

### **God's Judgment**

2 Thess 1:5-10

*5 All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. 6 God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you 7 and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. 8 He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power 10 on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.*

By their suffering, the Thessalonian Christians were counted worthy of the kingdom of God, proving the God is right and just. He will pay back those that trouble his children while giving relief to his children. What follows is a play by play description (to use a sport's analogy) of what will happen to the guilty when Jesus comes:

He will come in blazing fire with his powerful angels.

He will punish who do not know God and obey not the gospel.

They will be punished with everlasting destruction.

They will be shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power.

For the righteous, just the opposite will happen:

He will come to be glorified in his holy people.

He will come to be marveled at among all those who have believed.

This includes we who believed Paul's testimony.

### **Worthy of His Calling**

2 Thess 1:11-12

*11 With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. 12 We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Christians must secure God's calling; it is not automatic. Paul admonished in Eph 4:1-4:

4 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

The calling of the Lord is to humility and gentleness, patience and loving forbearance, and unity and peace. This is the worthy life to which we have been called.

The Hebrew writer spoke of the focus that we are to have in Heb 3:1:

3 Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess.

To share the heavenly calling, look to Jesus and confess him.

In 2 Peter 1:10-11, Peter told us to make our calling and election sure:

10 Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, 11 and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Peter's *these things* are commonly called the Christian virtues, it is these virtues by which we make our calling and election sure, in 2 Peter 1:5-9:

5 For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7 and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. 8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.

## 12. 2 Thessalonians 2

The main purpose of this chapter is to refute the false teaching that the Lord Jesus Christ has already come. However, Paul also enters into the discussion the revelation of the man of lawlessness who opposes God and exalts himself over everything called God or worshiped. The “man of “lawlessness or “the lawless one” even proclaims himself to be God. Some describe this event as the rise of the Roman Catholic Church with the Pope ascending to the papal chair and setting himself up with titles reserved in the Bible for God; such as:

**Reverend**--Ps 111:9: “9 He hath sent redemption unto his people; He hath commanded his covenant for ever: **Holy** and **reverend** is his name.” ASV

**Father**--Matt 23:9-10: “9 And do not call anyone on earth '**father**,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven.”

**Your Holiness**: Rev 4:8: “8 Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying:

‘Holy, holy, holy  
is the Lord God Almighty,  
who was, and is, and is to come.’”

And Rev 16:4-5: 4: “The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. 5 Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say:

‘You are just in these judgments,  
you who are and who were, **the Holy One**,  
because you have so judged;’”

We cannot minimize the error taught by centuries of catholic error, especially as it regards the Pope and doctrines found nowhere in the Scriptures. The Catholic Church and its papal hierarchy are just one of many evil manifestations of the lawless one and his sponsor, Satan.

A brief review of the evil and horrible forces marshaling around Satan will help make this passage clear. Paul speaks in broad terms of Satan’s spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places in Eph 6:12:

12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

### ***Three Entities with One Resembling the Lawless One***

**The antichrist.** At the heart of Satan’s domain are spiritual forces of evil and not merely earthly churches no matter their numbers and false doctrines. These earthy dominions are mere pawn in the epic struggle of good over evil. John names these spiritual forces of evil the antichrist. He introduces them to become influential in our age, but not at the very beginning in 1 John 2:18-19:

18 Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour.  
19 They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.



The use of the singular, antichrist, and plural, antichrists, indicates that the earthly minions follow the spiritual force of evil, the antichrist. 1 John 2:22-23 identifies this antichrist as a liar:

22 Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist – he denies the Father and the Son. 23 No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.

John, in his gospel, shows the path of liars from the father of lies the devil, to the spirit of lies, the antichrist, to the earthly minions, or should we say victims. John 8:42-45

43 Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. 44 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

The great lying deceit is the denial of Christ words as the truth and the refusal to hear them, and even worse, substituting ones own words as if they were the words of God and Christ. Jesus exposed this deceit of word substitution and abuse in John 12:48-50:

48 There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day. 49 For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it.

**The beast.** The beast in the *Revelation* represents metaphorically the spiritual power of evil, commissioned, as it were, by the dragon himself Rev 13:1-2:

And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority.

This beast was wounded, possibly by Christ's victory over sin, which the beast fosters continuously according to Rev 13:5-8:

5 The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months. 6 He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. 7 He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. 8 All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast – all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.

The wounded beast was joined by another beast in Rev 13:11-17:

11 Then I saw another beast, coming out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon. 12 He exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed. 13 And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men. 14 Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth.

The second beast, as powerful as the first beast and one with the mission of the first, forced the inhabitants of the first to worship falsely. With miraculous powers, he deceived the nations of the earth.

Thus, the dragon, Satan, the first beast, and the second beast form the coalition of evil in the heavenly places, constituting powerful and spiritual forces of evil dedicated to the spiritual destruction of all the inhabitants of the earth. They are the triad of evil spoken of in Rev 13:18, with 6 being the imperfect number:

18 This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man's number. His number is 666.

**The false prophet.** Perhaps, it is that second beast that is called the false prophet in Rev 19:20-21:

20 But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur.

The metaphor of the false prophet fits the description of the man of lawlessness, of whom Paul speaks of in 2 Thessalonians 2.

### ***The Man of Lawlessness Revealed***

2 Thessalonians 2:1-4

2 *Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, 2 not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. 3 Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. 4 He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.*

In the early church, confusion about the coming of the Lord was nurtured by those sowing discord. In this case, false prophecies, reports and letters contended that he had already come. Even today transmillennialists contend that he came in 70 AD with the destruction of Jerusalem. Peter wrote in 2 Peter 3:3-4 of those who contended that he was not coming, since he had not come already:

3 First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. 4 They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised?"

Paul's warning to them—"don't let anyone confuse you in any way"—introduced conditions that must be met before the day of the Lord's coming. First, the rebellion comes and man of lawlessness is to be revealed. Some versions say *man of sin*, but the original word is the word for *lawlessness*:

anomia (an-om-ee'-ah); from NT:459; illegality, i.e. violation of law or (genitive case) wickedness: (Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary.

The word *lawless* is literally without law and, therefore, close in meaning to John's *antichrist*, and to *the Revelation's false prophet*. [See the introduction above.]

Second, he will exalt himself above everything that is called God. He will even proclaim himself to be God. The use of the personal pronoun gives this being the force of personality and makes him the main minion in the devil's "spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." (Eph 6:12). His access to the temple of God is through the devil's ministers, described in 2 Cor 11:13-15:

13 For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. 14 And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. 15 It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.

### ***The Coming of the Lawless One According to the Work of Satan***

#### **2 Thessalonians 2:5-8**

*5 Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? 6 And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. 7 For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming.*

Since Paul had told them these things, they were already informed of what was holding the lawless one back. From our prospective, the Holy Spirit left to protect the apostles, prophets and early church would have the power to constrain the spiritual forces of evil. The Lord explained this to his disciples before he left. In John 14:25-26, he promised the apostles:

25 "All this I have spoken while still with you. 26 But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

The power of the comforter was enormous and extended spiritual gifts to the early church according to 1 Cor 12:7-11:

7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. 8 To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, 10 to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, **to another distinguishing between spirits**, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

These gifts fully equipped an infant church to survive the attacks of the devil, but they were not permanent. Paul describe this impermanence in 1 Cor 13:8-10

8 Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, **they will be stilled**; where there is knowledge, **it will pass away**. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when **perfection** comes, the imperfect disappears.

Perfection was the perfect law of James 1:25:

25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it — he will be blessed in what he does.

Therefore, as the apostolic age of the prophetic man—the apostles and holy prophets—ended, the age of the recorded word—permanent forever—took its place. Paul spoke of how this was to happen in Eph 3:3-5:

. . . that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. 4 In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets.

By the time of these writings, by the apostles and prophets, the forces of evil stirred to be released upon the Lord's people and the all the people of the world. We have already discussed in the introduction how the devil, the beast, and the false prophet will all be destroyed in the lake of fire and brimstone. Here, Paul declares the fate the lawless one: "Whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming."

2 Thess 2:9-12

*9 The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, 10 and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 11 For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie 12 and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.*

The lawless one goes forward against the church and all the people of the word with a full arsenal provided by Satan: counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil. People who perish in this environment refuse to love the truth and be saved, and they do not believe the truth but delight in wickedness. Those, who follow the deceit of the devil, will be condemned and lost. In effect, they do it to themselves.

### ***The Chosen to Stand Firm and Hold to the Teachings***

2 Thessalonians 2:13-15

*13 But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. 14 He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 15 So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.*

This passage offers the way of escape for true believers who follow God's revealed pathway to salvation. At the same time, the passage serves to destroy any argument favoring the false teaching on predestination of believers. From the beginning God set the standard by which people are sanctified; that is, by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit and through belief in the truth. All those who believe and obey the truth rather than the devil's lies are set apart as God's children. In this sense, we are called by the gospel. We must stand firm and hold to the teachings of the written word in order to share in the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

### ***The Lord Jesus and God, our Father Encourage Us and Strengthen Us***

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17

*16 May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, 17 encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.*

Facing the attacks of the devil's forces and maintaining our faith over centuries requires focus. That focus comes from knowing that God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who love us and give us eternal encouragement and good hope, also encourage our hearts in every good deed and word.

## 13. 2 Thessalonians 3

In the first letter, Paul presented detailed information about the second coming of the Lord, emphasizing that no one knows the time or place in 1 Thess 5:1-3:

Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, 2 for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3 While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

Evidently some did not accept this teaching and stopped working, waiting for the Lord to come—a situation that sparked Paul's final command in this chapter. He had also taught them to remain industrious in their present lives in 1 Thess 4:11-12:

11 Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, 12 so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.

The two former statements govern Paul's direction to them in this final chapter.

### **Final Prayer**

2 Thess 3:1-5

*3 Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you. 2 And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith. 3 But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one. 4 We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command. 5 May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance.*

The points of Paul's prayer are applicable to saints today, as the church suffers similarly difficult times.

1. Pray for the message of the Lord.
2. Pray to be delivered from evil and wicked men.
3. Look to the Lord for strength and protection from the evil one.
4. Pray for the Lord's help in keeping the commandments.
5. Pray for the Lord to direct our hearts.

The direction that we wish to always go is into God's love and Christ's perseverance. This is a prayer for all time for the people of God.

### **Final Command**

2 Thess 3:6-10

*6 In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. 7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, 8 nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. 9 We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow. 10 For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat."*

Paul's command is to stay away from idle brothers and sisters. Paul had clearly taught them this principle already, now he cites himself and his cohorts as an example: for they were not idle when they were with them. Even though Paul and his companions had the right to forgo work, they did not exercise it, so that they might be a model to the church. He also had laid down a fundamental rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat."

2 Thess 3:11-13

*11 We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. 12 Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat. 13 And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right.*

The idle had become busybodies. Paul's urgent plea was for them to settle down and earn their food.

### ***How to Take Special Note of the Disobedient***

2 Thess 3:14-15

*4 If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. 15 Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.*

There are two passages that reinforce this instruction. The first speaks to how special note is taken in 1 Cor 5:2-5:

Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? . . . 4 When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, 5 hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.

The second speaks to the attitude that we must have while trying to restore the fallen brother in Gal 6:1:

6 Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently.

### ***Salutation***

2 Thess 3:16-18

*16 Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you.*

*17 I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand, which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters. This is how I write.*

*18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.*

Paul closes with a prayer that they may receive the peace and Grace of the Lord.