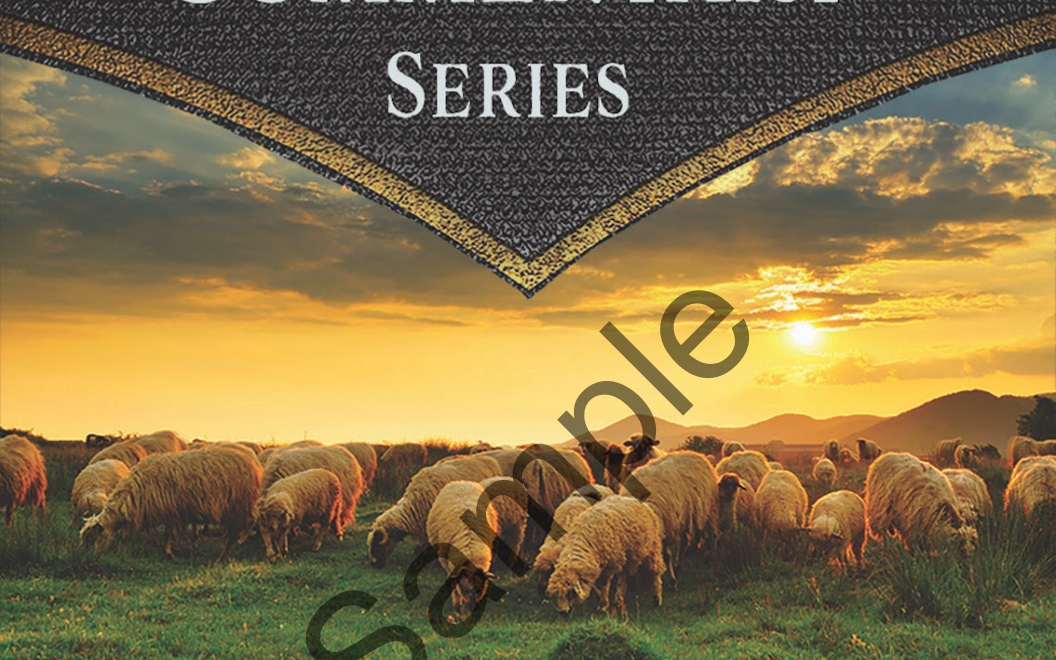


WAY OF LIFE  
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THE THESSALONIAN EPISTLES  
DAVID W. CLOUD

*The Thessalonian Epistles*

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# Introduction to Paul's Epistles

## Paul

Paul is prominent in the early history of the churches. Eighteen of the 28 chapters of the book of Acts are devoted to Paul's ministry. He wrote 14 of the 27 New Testament epistles (if we include Hebrews), 100 of the 260 chapters in the New Testament.

Paul began his life as Saul, a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin (Php. 3:5), apparently named after Israel's first king. He was called Saul of Tarsus, because he was born in Tarsus, the chief city of the Roman province of Cilicia (Ac. 9:11; 22:3). It was "one of the great learning centers of the Eastern World." He was brought up a Pharisee (Php. 3:5), the son of a Pharisee (Ac. 23:6). Educated in Jerusalem by Gamaliel, a prominent rabbi, Saul's expertise was "the law of the fathers," referring to Jewish tradition (Ac. 22:3). He was "exceedingly zealous of the traditions" (Ga. 1:14). This is the vain Jewish tradition that was later incorporated into the Talmud.

Saul was a freeborn Roman citizen (Ac. 22:25-29). He was familiar with pagan literature (Ac. 17:28; Tit. 1:12) and was taught the trade of tent making (Ac. 18:1-3).

Saul persecuted Christians unto death, beginning with his consent to the martyrdom of Stephen (Ac. 7:58; 22:4; Ga. 1:13; 1 Ti. 1:13).

Paul apparently was not impressive in appearance (2 Co. 10:1, 10; 11:6), and he had some sort of eye affliction (Ga. 4:13-15).

Paul was converted in about AD 33 in the midst of his persecuting activity. A large portion of Scripture is devoted to the account of his conversion (Ac 9:1-31; 22:1-21; 26:1-23). On a journey to Damascus, the resurrected Christ appeared to him in a bright light and spoke to him. He fell to the

ground, was stricken with blindness, and was led to Damascus. There he was healed at the hands of Ananias, put his faith in Jesus as the Christ, and was baptized. Paul immediately began to preach Jesus as Christ and the Jews wasted no time in trying to kill him. He escaped by being let down the city wall in a basket (Ac. 9:20-25). He went to Arabia (Ga. 1:17), then to Jerusalem, where he was befriended by Barnabas (Ac. 9:26-28). There the Greek Jews plotted to kill him, and he went to Tarsus (Ac. 9:29-30).

It was at this time that Paul was called to be an apostle to the Gentiles (Ro. 11:13; Ga. 2:8; 1 Ti. 2:7; 2 Ti. 1:11). At his conversion, the Lord told him that “he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles” (Ac. 9:15). Paul did not include himself among the 12 apostles (1 Co. 15:5-8). Paul was given special grace to be an example to the brethren. “According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation...” (1 Co. 3:10). “But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which *was bestowed* upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Co. 15:10). Paul excelled in faith, zeal, patience, labour, love, holiness, surrender, passion, wisdom. Of the apostles and prophets, only Paul said, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also *am* of Christ” (1 Co. 11:1). See also 1 Co. 4:16; Php. 3:17; 2 Th. 3:9.

Saul began to be called Paul after his conversion (Ac. 13:9) and is called by this name 163 times in the New Testament. He is not called Saul after the first missionary journey in Acts 13-14, except three times when he was recounting his conversion (Ac. 22:7, 13; 26:14). Peter called him “our beloved brother Paul” (2 Pe. 3:15).

When Antioch began to receive the gospel, Barnabas traveled to Tarsus and fetched Saul from thence to be his co-laborer in the establishment of that church (Ac. 11:19-26). They traveled

# Thessalonian Epistles Introduction

## The Ancient City of Thessalonica

Thessalonica (also known as Salonica or Salonika) is a sea port on the Thermaic Gulf (also called the Macedonian Gulf) in the northwest corner of the Aegean Sea.

It is about 500 miles north of Athens and 100 miles southwest of Philippi.

Thessalonica became a major city of the Greek kingdom of Macedonia after the deaths of Philip II and his son Alexander the Great. Following Alexander's death in 323 BC in Babylon, his empire was divided into four major parts among warring generals, relatives and friends (the Diadochi), and Cassander became the ruler of Macedonia. Cassander had grown up with Alexander and been educated with him, but on his path to the throne he murdered Alexander's wives Olympia and Roxanna and Alexander's son by Roxanna, Alexander IV.

In 315 BC, Cassander built Thessalonica on the ancient town of Therma in honor of his wife Thessalonike, daughter of Philip II of Macedon and half-sister of Alexander the Great. *Thessalonike* means "Thessalonian victory" (from *Thessalos* and *Nike*, the goddess of victory). She was given that name by her father who won victory over the Thessalonians at her birth.

Thessalonica was located on the Via Egnatia (Egnatian Way), a major Roman road connecting Constantinople, the eastern capital of the empire, with Dyrrachum on the coast of the Adriatic Sea in the west. Dyrrachum was directly across the sea from Brindisi, the terminus of the Appian Way, which ran from Rome to the southeastern tip of Italy. Thus the Via Egnatia connected Constantinople with Rome. The road ran through Thessalonica, Philippi, and Neapolis, and Paul would

have traveled it on his missionary journeys. It was 19.6 feet wide and paved in most places with stone slabs. As we saw in the studies on Philippi, the Via Egnatia served as Philippi's *cardo maximus* or main north-south boulevard.

Thessalonica was also important because of its harbor. The Roman harbor was called the Burrow Harbor. "In the Apostle Paul's day it was the chief seaport of the Roman province of Macedonia. ... Thessalonica ranked with Corinth and Ephesus, the main ports of the provinces of Achaia and Asia, as a great shipping center" (*Bible Knowledge Commentary*). The Thessalonica harbor is still one of the most important Greek seaports. It is the second largest container port (after the port of Piraeus), with a capacity of 16 million tons. It is also a passenger terminal.

"Strabo, writing in the reign of Augustus, speaks of it as the most populous town in Macedonia and the metropolis of the province (vii. 323, 330), and about the same time the poet Antipater, himself a native of Thessalonica, refers to the city as 'mother of all Macedon' (Jacobs, *Anthol. Graec.*, II, p. 98, number 14); in the 2nd century of our era Lucian mentions it as the greatest city of Macedonia (Asinus, 46)" ("Thessalonica," *Biblestudytools.com*).

In 168 BC, Macedonia was conquered by the Romans after the battle of Pydna, and in 146, Thessalonica became the seat of the governor of the Roman province of Macedonia. Thessalonica was declared a free city in 42 BC by Gaius Octavius (Octavian or Caesar Augustus) for the city's assistance in defeating Brutus and Cassius, the enemies of Anthony and Octavian. "The Romans ruled Thessalonica with a loose hand; though the Roman proconsul (or governor) lived there, no Roman troops were garrisoned in the city. The citizens were allowed to govern themselves, as in a Greek city-state, which they did through a group of five or

# 1 Thessalonians Introduction

## Theme of 1 Thessalonians

The major theme of both Thessalonian epistles is Christ's coming. This theme is dealt with in every chapter for a total of forty verses. See 1 Th. 1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:1-11, 23; 2 Th. 1:6-10; 2:1-12; 3:5.

The return of Christ is a *major* theme of the New Testament, from Matthew to Revelation. See Mt. 13:37-43, 47-50; 16:27-28; 24:3-30; 25:31-32; 26:64; Mr. 13:3-37; 14:62; Lu. 21:25-28; Joh. 14:1-3; Ac. 1:11; 3:19-20; Ro. 11:26; 13:12; 1 Co. 1:7-8; 4:5; 11:26; 15:51-48; Php. 1:6, 10; 2:16; 3:20-21; 4:5; Col. 3:4; 1 Th. 1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:1-11, 23; 2 Th. 1:7-9; 2:1-12; 3:5; 1 Ti. 6:14; 2 Ti. 4:1, 8; Tit. 2:13; Jas. 5:7-9; Heb. 9:28; 10:37; 1 Pe. 1:7; 4:7; 5:4; 2 Pe. 1:19; 3:10-13; 1 Jo. 2:28; 3:2; Jude 1:14-15, 21; Re. 1:7; 2:25-27; 3:10, 11; 19:11-21; 22:7, 12, 20.

Bible prophecy is a fundamental of the faith once delivered to the saints. It is not a secondary matter. It will be a major theme of every sound Bible-believing church. God's people must be well grounded in prophetic truth so they can have a proper worldview and understanding of the times. God's people must be protected from heresies pertaining to Bible prophecy. A right understanding of Bible prophecy produces holiness, obedience, comfort, zeal, and watchfulness.

"In our days we often hear the statement that the coming of our Lord is an unessential doctrine. Those who make such an assertion are ignorant of the fact that ... Christian preaching and teaching which ignores the blessed hope, the coming of the Lord, is incomplete; it omits one of the most vital truths which the Spirit of God has linked with the gospel and with the life and service of the believer" (Arno Gaebelein).



1 Thessalonians contains the major teaching on the Rapture, including the timing. The Rapture is pre-tribulational. This is so clear in Scripture that I consider it a fundamental doctrine and will not have any ministry association with preachers or churches that do not hold to it.

The pre-tribulational Rapture is taught in 1 Thessalonians as follows:

1. The coming of the Lord for the redeemed of this age is imminent. "For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, *even* Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come" (1 Th. 1:9-10). The believers are to be watching at all times, waiting, ready. The church at Thessalonica modeled this. See also Ro. 13:12; Php. 4:5; Tit. 2:13; Jas. 5:8-9; 1 Pe. 4:7. The only way that the Rapture could be imminent is if it occurs before any part of Daniel's 70th Week, which begins with the Antichrist's peace covenant with Israel (Da. 9:27). That will mark the building of Israel's third temple and the preaching ministry of the two prophets in Jerusalem (Re. 11:1-6). The first six seal judgments will be poured out upon the world, as described in Revelation 6. These events will be unique in history and will be unmistakeable, and as soon as they begin, it will be known that in seven years Christ will return in glory to establish His kingdom. If the church age believers were on earth for any part of these events, there could be no imminency of Christ's return. I consider the Bible's doctrine of the imminency of Christ's return to be a major fundamental of the Bible prophecy issue.

2. The Rapture is a mystery revealed to the church and is not something that pertains to Israel.

The only way to understand the Rapture properly is to understand the clear distinction between Israel and the

# 1 Thessalonians Commentary

## Greeting (1 Th. 1:1-3)

“Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians *which is* in God the Father and *in* the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace *be* unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father.”

**“Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus”** (1 Th. 1:1)

- **Silvanus** is also called Silas. He was chosen by Paul to accompany him on the second missionary journey (Ac. 15:27). Before that, Silas was a prophet in the church at Jerusalem (Ac. 15:32). He was sent to Antioch following the apostolic conference on the gospel recorded in Acts 15 (Ac. 15:27). Silas was imprisoned with Paul in Philippi (Ac. 16:25). Silas was with Peter when he wrote his first epistle (1 Pe. 5:12).

- **Timothy** was called to be Paul's co-laborer at Derbe earlier on this second missionary journey (Ac. 16:1-3). Already Paul is including the young man in his greeting to a church. Timothy is also included in Paul's greeting to Corinth (2 Co. 1:1), Philippi (Php. 1:1), and Colosse (Col. 1:1). For an overview of the life of Timothy, see the *Way of Life Commentary Series The Pastoral Epistles*, introduction to 1 Timothy.

**“unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ”** (1 Th. 1:1)

- This is the only place in the New Testament in which a church is said to be “in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ.”

- The church is “**in God the Father**.” This amazing statement describes the believer's intimate relationship with God the Father. 2 Th. 1:1 reads, “in God **our** Father and the Lord Jesus

Christ,” thus describing the believer’s relationship with God the Father even more intimately. We are not only “in Jesus Christ,” we are “in God the Father.” He is called “our Father” 17 times (Ro. 1:7, etc.). The Father is the head of the Trinity. Each member of the Trinity is co-equal as God, but there is an order of authority with the Father at the head. We are told that “the head of Christ is God” (1 Co. 11:3) and “Christ is God’s” (1 Co. 3:23). When the Bible says that all things have been put under Christ’s feet and He has been given a name that is above every name, this refers to everything except God the Father. “For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under *him*, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all” (1 Co. 15:27-28). In the New Jerusalem, we see “the throne of God and of the Lamb” (Re. 22:3). We won’t see the Father, we will see the Son, but the Father is on the throne with the Son. It is the Father’s throne (Re. 3:21). We see this throne in Re. 4-5, “And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and *one* sat on the throne. And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and *there was* a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.” All prayer is to be addressed to the Father (Mt. 6:9). This is the Father in which the church at Thessalonica dwelt and in whom every born again believer dwells. The Father loved sinners and sent the Son to save them (1 Jo. 4:14). The Father elects sinners according to His foreknowledge (1 Pe. 1:2). The Father draws sinners to Christ (Joh. 6:44). The Father loves those who love the Son (Joh. 16:27). The Father has bestowed great love upon the believers (1 Jo. 3:1). The Father adopts believers (Ga. 4:6) and sanctifies them (Jude 1:1). He is “the Father of all mercies, and the God of all comfort” (2 Co. 1:3), “the Father of glory” (Eph. 1:17), “the Father of spirits” (Heb. 12:5), “the Father of lights” (Jas. 1:17).

- The church is “*in the Lord Jesus Christ.*” Without Christ, sinners have no part with God the Father. Christ’s full name and title are given here. He is *Lord*; He is *Jesus* the Saviour; He is

*Christ* the Anointed of God, the theme and focus of Bible prophecy.

- These are not mere words (“the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ”), not a mere religious formula, and this cannot be said of every church that professes Christ. The church at Thessalonica was in God because it had a regenerate membership of saints who gave clear evidence of their election (1 Th. 1:4-10). The Bible warns of the great apostasy or turning away of the true faith on the part of a majority of churches, and this is what we see in history and in our day (Mt. 13:33; 2 Th. 2:3; 1 Ti. 4:1-3; 2 Ti. 3:1-5, 13; 4:3-4; 2 Pe. 2:1-2). The Bible warns of large numbers of false professions (Mt. 7:21-23; 2 Ti. 3:5; Tit. 1:16). A great many churches in these last days, even those that claim to be staunch Bible-believing churches, are not careful in receiving members and accept any flimsy profession of faith regardless of whether it is backed up by scriptural evidence of regeneration. As a result these churches are mixed multitudes of saved and unsaved. It is impossible that such a church could be “in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ.”

- In the words “in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ” we see the Trinity. As is often the case, the Father and Son are mentioned without the Spirit. Christ is not a mere man. He is described as equal with the Father. The church is in the Father AND in Jesus Christ, and the church has grace from the Father AND from Jesus Christ.

***“Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ”*** (1 Th. 1:1).

- This greeting is repeated in all of Paul’s epistles (Ro. 1:7; 1 Co. 1:3; 2 Co. 1:2; Ga. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Php. 1:2; Col. 1:2; 1 Th. 1:1; 2 Th. 1:2; 1 Ti. 1:2; Tit. 1:4; Phm. 1:3).

- Grace and peace describes the believer’s new standing before God through Christ. It is not something that is a mere possibility; it is a reality, a possession. To the sinner who comes to God through Jesus Christ, God says, “Welcome, grace be unto you, and peace.” It is to be adopted into God’s family. It is to be a

citizen of God's country. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Ro. 5:1-2). Grace and peace is how God looks upon the redeemed saint. Grace and peace encapsulates everything the believer has in Christ. Grace and peace is eternal salvation. It is perfect security. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Ro. 8:31). The blessing that is encompassed in the two "little" words "grace" and "peace" is incalculable.

- Grace and peace can best be understood by what we are by nature in Adam. Before salvation, we are enemies of God because of sin ("when we were enemies," Ro. 5:10). We were separated from Him and were under his wrath. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Ro. 1:18). In Adam, we are "by nature children of wrath" (Eph. 2:1-3). In Adam, we are shut out from the presence of God. We cannot approach unto God. His throne is a throne of judgment. In Christ, all of this is changed and we have grace and peace. God's throne of judgment becomes a throne of grace to which we are invited to come boldly (Heb. 4:16). The golden sceptre is held out in mercy and favor (Est. 5:2).

- "**Grace**" is the unmerited, undeserved blessing of God in Christ. Grace is the free gift of salvation that was purchased by the vicarious atonement of Christ. "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood" (Ro. 3:24-25). Grace is a one-word description of salvation. Grace comes before peace, because it is God's grace in Jesus Christ that brings the believer into a position of peace with God.

- "**Peace**" is reconciliation with God. We have peace *from* God because we have peace *with* God through the atonement of Christ. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ro. 5:1). What unspeakable blessing it is to be reconciled with Almighty God!

Peace comes today to the individual who believes in Christ savingly. Peace will come to this world when the Prince of Peace sits upon its throne and rules in righteousness. This world has no peace, because mankind is not at peace with God. “*There is no peace, saith the LORD, unto the wicked*” (Isa. 48:22).

- Grace and peace are “***from God our Father.***” Grace and peace is God’s gift. It is the Father who sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world (1 Jo. 4:14). Jesus said, “For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God” (Joh. 16:27). God is the Father of the redeemed. “And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (Ga. 4:6). We can pray, “Our Father which art in heaven...” (Mt. 6:9). What an amazing thing, to have the almighty Creator God of Genesis 1 as one’s Father! “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 Jo. 3:2). We can love God as Father; we can rejoice in Him as Father; we can trust Him as Father; we can serve Him as Father.

- We have grace and peace “***from ... the Lord Jesus Christ.***” He purchased grace and peace for us. He “loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood” (Re. 1:5). Again, Christ’s full name and title are given. He is *Lord*; He is *Jesus* the Saviour; He is *Christ* the Anointed of God. Grace issues to us from all that God is and all that Christ is. Note again that Jesus Christ is equal to God the Father. These blessings are “from God our Father, AND the Lord Jesus Christ.” It would be blasphemy to mention a mere man in connection with the bestowal of God’s blessings. If Paul said, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the apostle Paul,” that would be blasphemy.

***“We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; Remembering without ceasing ...”*** (1 Th. 1:2-3).

- Prayer is a major theme of Paul’s epistles to Thessalonica (1 Th. 1:2-3; 3:10-12; 5:17, 23, 25; 2 Th. 1:11-12; 2:16-17; 3:1-2, 5, 16).

- Paul prayed with “**giving thanks to God always.**” His prayers were filled with thanksgiving and praise. God wants His people to be a thankful people. God’s Word commands thanksgiving to God. God responds to thanksgiving. See Eph. 5:20; Php. 4:6; Col. 2:7; 3:15, 17; 4:2; 1 Th. 5:18; Heb. 13:15. Thanksgiving lifts our hearts to God, puts us into a positive frame of mind, and drives away doubt, fear, worry, frustration, anger, and self-pity.

- Paul prayed with “**thanks to God always for you all.**” He was continually thankful to God for the brethren in Christ. Compare Ro. 1:8; 1 Co. 1:4; Eph. 1:15-16; Php. 1:3; Col. 1:3; 1 Th. 2:13; 2 Th. 1:3; 2:13; Phm. 1:4. Only God can create saints! We should never cease to be thankful for our brethren in Christ, both for individuals and for biblical congregations. Their new life in Christ and every good thing in them and through them is of God. It is a product of His love and miracle-working power. Thanksgiving for the saints promotes and protects spiritual unity. If our hearts are always filled with thanksgiving to God for the brethren, we are not frustrated with them, angry at them, offended at them, divided from them. When we are continually expressing thanksgiving for the brethren, it is easier to be patient and merciful. Note that this is not ecumenical prayer. Paul was praying for saints that he personally knew well or for those whose testimony he knew well. He knew their “election of God,” meaning that he saw the evidence of salvation in their lives (1 Th. 1:4-10). We are not to be thankful for apostates and heretics, we are to separate from them! See 2 Ti. 2:16-21; 3:5; Tit. 3:10-11; 2 Jo. 1:9-11.

- Paul prayed by “**making mention.**” “Mention” is the Greek *mneia*, which is also translated “remembrance” (Php. 1:3; 1 Th. 3:6; 2 Ti. 1:3). Paul didn’t necessarily pray for each believer and each church for a long time each time he prayed; he simply made mention of them to the Lord. He remembered them before the Lord. By remembering them, he was remembering all of the things associated with them. Paul made mention of the church at Rome (Ro. 1:9), the church at Ephesus (Eph. 1:16), the church at Thessalonica (1 Th. 1:2), and Philemon (Phm. 1:4). “Making mention” is present tense, which indicates continual,

repetitive action. Paul made mention and kept on making mention. This reminds us of the need for a prayer list. My godly maternal grandmother had a prayer list, and I am glad that I was on it!

- Paul prayed **“without ceasing.”** Paul was persistent, steadfast, persevering in prayer. He prayed for individuals and churches, and he didn’t stop praying. This is a fundamental key to effectual prayer. God’s people are to pray without ceasing (1 Th. 5:17), to continue instant or steadfast in prayer (Ro. 12:12), to pray always (Eph. 6:18), to continue in prayer (Col. 4:2). Jesus told two parables to emphasize the importance of persistence in prayer: the parable of the friend who needs bread (Lu. 11:5-9) and the parable of the widow who drove a judge to distraction by her unceasing entreaties (Lu. 18:1-6). Perseverance is one of the essential things in every aspect of the Christian life and ministry. You have to be faithful (1 Co. 4:2); you have to be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord (1 Co. 15:58); you can’t be a quitter; you can’t be “wearied and faint” (Heb. 12:3); you can’t be doubleminded and wavering (Jas. 1:6-8). Being doubleminded is evidence of a lack of faith. It is unbelief, and without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6).

***“Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father”*** (1 Th. 1:3).

- Paul describes the church’s excellent spiritual character.

- **“work of faith.”** Consider two major lessons from this statement. (1) Acceptable works are the product of saving faith. Faith in Jesus Christ purifies the sinner before God and makes his works acceptable. The attempt to produce good works apart from saving faith is vain religion. It is self-righteousness. It is Cain offering the works of his hands (Ge. 4:3-5). Man’s works apart from faith in Christ are unclean before God. “But we are all as an unclean *thing*, and all our righteousnesses *are* as filthy rags...” (Isa. 64:6). (2) Saving faith produces good works. The works are the product and evidence of the faith. Any “faith” that



does not change the life is not saving faith. This is the theme of James' teaching. "What *doth it* profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? ... Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. ... For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (Jas. 2:14, 17, 26). James is saying that a so-called faith that does not produce works is not true faith. That kind of faith so-called cannot save. Paul and John taught the same thing (Ro. 6:1-2; Tit. 1:16; 1 Jo. 2:3-4).

- "**labour of love.**" There is "labour" to be done for Christ. We are saved "unto good works" (Eph. 2:10). We are redeemed to be "a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Tit. 2:14). "**Labour**" is *kópos*, "primarily denotes 'a striking, beating' (akin to *kopto*, 'to strike, cut'), then, 'toil resulting in weariness, laborious toil, trouble'" (Vine). It is translated "weariness" (2 Co. 11:27). This type of labor is what we see in Paul's life. "I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Co. 15:10). The labor that pleases God is the "labor of love." It is grounded in God's love and it treats love as the chief quality, as emphasized by Christ and the apostles. See Joh. 13:24; 15:12, 17; Ro. 13:8; 1 Co. 13:1-7; 1 Pe. 1:22; 1 Jo. 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11; 2 Jo. 1:5. Many professing Christians have labored without love. They have labored in an unregenerate condition without the Spirit; they have labored according to church sacraments and traditions. They have labored according to the flesh. They have even labored in inquisitions and militant crusades.

- "**patience of hope.**" Patience is an essential characteristic of the Christian life. It is necessary because of trials and testings. The Christian life is a long distance race, not a sprint. "... let us run with patience the race that is set before us" (Heb. 12:1). We see that patience is a product of hope. I can be patient and continue in the faith because of my hope in Christ, and hope is based on the promises of God's infallible Word. Hope is confidence that God's Word is true. There is nothing uncertain about biblical hope. It is not a maybe-so hope, but a know-so hope. It is "an everlasting consolation" (2 Th;. 2:16), a "strong

consolation” (Heb. 6:18), “sure and steadfast” (Heb. 6:19). The reason that Peter did not turn away from Christ when so many others did is because of his hope. He testified, “We believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God” (Joh. 6:66-69). Hope in the Word of God is what has kept every saint standing firm, moving forward, enduring hardships, waiting on God.

- **“in our Lord Jesus Christ.”** All of these things are in and by our Lord Jesus Christ. Note the word **“our.”** To have the work of faith and the labor of love and the patience of hope, one must be saved and know Christ personally. The attempt to live out these things apart from the new birth is vanity. Everything in the Christian life is of Christ, in Christ, and through Christ. Again Paul uses Christ’s full name and title. He is *Lord*; He is *Jesus* the Saviour; He is *Christ*, the Anointed of God, the Last Adam.

- **“in the sight of God and our Father.”** This is the right motivation for Christian life and service. The Christian life is lived out in Christ and in the sight of God the Father. This is the victory over hypocrisy. Living in the sight of God is the opposite of living to impress men as Ananias and Sapphira did (Ac. 5:1-2). Living in the sight of God is also the standard for Christian life and service: “How does God view this? What does God think about this? Does this thing please the Lord? Is this decision His perfect will?” The believer must live out every detail of his life in the sight of God, communing with God, delighting in God, meditating in God’s Word day and night, seeking wisdom and help from God.

### **The Power of the Gospel (1 Th. 1:4-10)**

“Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in

Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing. For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, *even* Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.”

This passage describes the glorious power of the gospel of Jesus Christ to change lives.

### **The gospel brings election (1 Th. 1:4-6).**

- Election is a major New Testament doctrine. “Elect,” “elected,” and “election” appear 23 times in the New Testament. “Elect” is the Greek *eklogé*, which is also translated “chosen” (Joh. 15:16, 19; Ac. 9:15; 1 Co. 1:27; Eph. 1:4). “Elect” is one of the chief terms for the saved. It is a synonym for salvation. The saved are the elect.

- The Bible’s emphasis in the doctrine of election is on the security of the believer. The doctrine of election is intended to be an encouragement to every born again believer. *As taught in Scripture, election is not something to puzzle over and be confused about and endlessly debate. It is something to be instructed by, edified by, comforted by, encouraged by, established by, strengthened by, challenged by.* We can’t understand everything about election at this present time, but since it is a clear teaching of Scripture, it is to be believed and studied and meditated upon. Election teaches us that God foreknew the redeemed and planned their lives accordingly, but it doesn’t teach that God pre-decided which sinners will be saved.

- Election comes by the gospel and is obtained by the gospel (“***for our gospel came ... unto you ... having received the word***

word" (1 Th. 1:6). Sinners are called by the gospel (2 Th. 2:14), and the gospel is to be preached to every person (Mr. 16:15). Christ invites all to come, and He is ready to receive them. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Mt. 11:28). "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Re. 3:20). "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Re. 22:17).

- The doctrine of election has been corrupted and confused by false teaching. "Sovereign election" was promoted by the heretic Augustine and popularized by John Calvin. It is the doctrine that God chose some sinners for salvation and for them only Christ died and they alone can be saved. According to sovereign election, God's choice has *nothing* to do with His foreknowledge of who will believe. The sovereignly elect are irresistibly drawn and given faith as a gift. The "non-elect" are left in their sins and there is *nothing* they can do to be saved. This is a slander on God's character. It is refuted by the clear teaching of hundreds of individual passages and by the whole tenor of Scripture. Though we do not know everything about election and we cannot fathom all of its details, we know what is revealed in Scripture and by that we know that the love of God and the salvation of God is for the whole world. God has ordained that the gospel be preached to all men and that those who believe on Christ will be saved. "And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day" (Joh. 6:40). Consider the following fundamental passage on salvation: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (Joh. 3:16-18). God loved the world and sent His Son to save the

world. The term “world,” which is used three times here, is never used for the elect. It refers to the whole world of lost sinners. God loved them, all of them, and gave His only begotten Son to save those who believe. If I am in the world, I am loved by God and salvation was provided for me and I *can* be saved. Any sinner in the world can believe and be saved. That is God’s sovereign plan. Salvation is a “whosoever” offer, and God is not playing games. “Whosoever” does not mean whosoever of the elect or whosoever is irresistibly drawn. John 3:16-18 teaches that the elect are those who believe in Christ. That is a fundamental teaching pertaining to election. When the Bible says that we are “elect according to the foreknowledge of God” (1 Pe. 1:2), it is referring to God’s foreknowledge of those who will believe. That much is clear. If God’s election means more than this, *and it might*, we are not told what more it means at this time, and we will learn about that only when it pleases God to give more revelation.

- Election is to be loved of God (“**brethren beloved**,” 1 Th. 1:4). The elect are the objects of God’s eternal love. Divine election is a love story. It is the love of the Creator for His fallen creatures, the love of a Father for His wayward children, the love of a Shepherd for His lost sheep. What God said of the true Israel by the prophet Jeremiah, can be said of every believer. “Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee” (Jer. 31:3). A right understanding of election is a great comfort to the believer. How unspeakably wonderful it is to know that God has loved me and foreknown me (“elect according to the foreknowledge of God,” 1 Pe. 1:2) and planned and prepared my salvation and fashioned me in the womb (Ps. 139:13-16) and drawn and enlightened and convicted me by His Spirit (“elect through the sanctification of the Spirit,” 1 Pe. 1:2) and washed me by the blood of Christ (“unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ,” 1 Pe. 1:2) and sealed me and adopted me and justified me and made me a king and a priest and a joint-heir with Christ! What an amazing thing election is!

- Election can be known (**“knowing ... your election of God,”** 1 Th. 1:4). The great emphasis in this passage is that God’s elect are those who receive Christ and are converted and show clear evidence thereof in their lives. Every verse of the passage emphasizes this. Verse 3, the elect are those who have the work of faith, the labor of love, and the patience of hope. Verse 5, the elect are those to whom the gospel comes not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance. Verse 6, the elect are those who receive the Word and become followers of Christ with joy even in much affliction. Verse 7, the elect are those who are examples to other believers. Verse 8, the elect are those whose faith is spread abroad. Verse 9-10, the elect are those who turn to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for his Son from heaven. Those who merely pray a sinner’s prayer or “walk the aisle” or make a public profession, but are not converted, have no biblical basis for claiming to be the elect. Election has clear evidence.

### **The gospel has life-changing power** (1 Th. 1:5).

- The gospel is not religion, not reformation, not philosophy, not psychology. It is the power of God unto salvation. The gospel came to the pagan city of Thessalonica and brought everlasting change to the lives of those who received it. It has accomplished the same thing in countless places and in countless lives over the past 2,000 years. Paul, who had experienced the power of the gospel in his own life, exclaimed, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Ro. 1:16).

- The power of the gospel is **“the Holy Ghost.”** He came at Pentecost to fill the believers for the work of the gospel (Ac. 1:8). When the gospel is preached, the Holy Spirit convicts (Joh. 16:7-11), enlightens (Joh. 1:9), draws (Joh. 12:32), and when the gospel is received, the Holy Spirit seals (Eph. 1:13) and sanctifies (2 Th. 2:13).

The gospel has assurance (**“in much assurance,”** 1 Th. 1:5).

- “**Assurance**” is *plerothoria*, “perfect certitude, full conviction.” It is translated “full assurance” (Col. 2:2; Heb. 6:11; 10:22).

- Assurance is because salvation is a free gift of God’s grace. The gift was purchased 100% by Christ. It is received by faith, not by works. So salvation is sure. It is a present possession, not a future possibility. If I am saved, I can know it and rejoice in it. This is stated in a great many passages, such as the following: “And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; *and* he that hath not the Son of God hath not life” (1 Jo. 5:11-12). “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (Joh. 3:16). “And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand” (Joh. 10:28).

- Paul appeals to the church’s personal knowledge of him and his ministry (“*as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake*”). He repeats this eight times in the epistle (1 Th. 1:5; 2:1, 2, 5, 10, 11; 3:4, 4:2). People who have benefited personally from a man’s ministry and have personal knowledge of the man should not listen to an outside critic unless he is exposing legitimate biblical issues that were unknown to them and has clear evidence.

The gospel must be received (“*having received the word*,” 1 Th. 1:6).

- The gospel is for all men, but it must be individually received. God “will have all men to be saved” and Christ “gave himself a ransom for all” (1 Ti. 2:4-6). “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, *even* to them that believe on his name” (Joh. 1:12).

The gospel brings affliction (“*in much affliction*,” 1 Th. 1:6).

- “**Affliction**” is *thlipsis*, “from *thlíbo*, to crush, press, compress, squeeze” (CWSB). It is also translated “persecution” (Ac. 11:19), “tribulation” (Ac. 14:22), “trouble” (2 Co. 1:8), “burden” (2 Co. 8:13).

- God's Word promises that every believer will have affliction for the gospel's sake and for Christ's sake. "... and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Ac. 14:22); "In the world ye shall have tribulation" (Joh. 16:33); "For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation" (1 Th. 3:4); "For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God" (1 Ti. 4:10); "If we suffer, we shall also reign with *him*" (2 Ti. 2:12); "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Ti. 3:12); "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you" (1 Pe. 4:12);

The gospel brings joy ("***with joy of the Holy Ghost,***" 1 Th. 1:6).

- "Joy" is *chará*, from *cháiro*. It is also translated "gladness" (Mr. 4:16) and "rejoice" (Joh. 3:29). The joy of salvation comes by faith in the promises of God ("joy of faith," Php. 1:25; "yet believing, ye rejoice with joy," 1 Pe. 1:8). There is joy in knowing from Scripture that I am beloved, accepted, adopted, forgiven, cleansed, regenerated, justified, a citizen of heaven, a joint-heir with Christ, seated in the heavenlies in Christ. Joy comes by the Holy Spirit ("the fruit of the Spirit is ... joy," Ga. 5:22). There is joy in the Holy Spirit's comfort, encouragement, instruction, enlightenment, guidance, even in His conviction and chastisement. For more on *cháiro*, see the commentary on 1 Th. 5:16.

The gospel makes examples ("***So that ye were examples to all that believe,***" 1 Th. 1:7).

- The church at Thessalonica was an exemplary church. It was an example to the brethren throughout Macedonia and Achaia, which is all of the territory of modern Greece. This is what Christ intends every church to be.

The gospel must be sounded out ("***For from you sounded out the word of the Lord,***" 1 Th. 1:8).