

# 1 THESSALONIANS

Holiness, Love, and Future Hope

# Introduction

- 1 Thessalonians was one of the earliest, if not the earliest, of Paul's writings (AD 50-51)
- According to Acts 17, Paul, Silas, and Timothy evangelized the ancient city of Thessalonica and many came to faith (vv. 2-4)
- However, the believers were accused of defying Caesar, the emperor of the Roman empire (17:7):
- “<sup>7</sup> and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus.”
- Paul and Silas eventually fled the city for their lives
- This letter was Paul's attempt to reconnect with the people after he received a report from Timothy that they were flourishing in spite of persecution

# Outline

- Chapters 1-3: A celebration of their faithfulness to Jesus
- Chapters 4-5: A challenge to keep growing as followers of Jesus
- These two sections are connected by three prayers
  - 1:1-5: A prayer of thanksgiving
  - 3:11-13: A prayer for endurance
  - 5:23-28: A prayer for hope

# Prayer of Thanksgiving (1:1-5)

- **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.
- **2** We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. **3** We 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.
- **4** For we know, brothers and sisters 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 deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake.

# Christian Conversion (1:6-10)

- The Thessalonians turned away from institutions that honoured Greek and Romans gods:
- <sup>6</sup>You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. <sup>7</sup>And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. <sup>8</sup>The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it. <sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

# Christian Conversion (2:1-12)

- Conversion to Christianity came with a cost, involving isolation, ostracism, and hostility from family members. So, Paul sought to care for these members like a parent:
- **1**You know, brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not without results. **2**We had previously suffered and been treated outrageously in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in the face 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 those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people 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 people, not from you or anyone else, even though as apostles of Christ we could have asserted our authority. **7**Instead, we were like young children among you.
- Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, **8**so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well. **9**Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, 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. **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.

# Consequences of Conversion (2:13-16)

- In 2:13-16, Paul then reflects on their common persecution. Just as Paul experienced persecution from the Jews, the Thessalonians faced hostility from their Greek neighbors:
- <sup>13</sup> And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe. <sup>14</sup> For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own people the same things those churches suffered from the Jews <sup>15</sup> who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to everyone <sup>16</sup> 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.

# Prayer for Endurance (3:11-13)

- As a result of their good progress in the faith, Paul prays for them:
- <sup>11</sup> Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. <sup>12</sup> May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. <sup>13</sup> 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.

# Future Hope (4:13-18)

- Paul address various questions regarding the future hope of Jesus' return
- Apparently, a number of people died, probably due to martyrdom and people wondered about their fate when Jesus returns:
- <sup>13</sup> Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. <sup>14</sup> For 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. <sup>15</sup> According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> Therefore encourage one another with these words.

# Future Hope (4:13-18)

- Apparently, Paul uses the imagery of Caesar's arrival met by his delegates as a point of comparison to Jesus' return
- The term "meet" (*apantesis*) refers to a delegation party meeting an arriving dignitary outside of town to bestow honour on the visitor and escorting him back to their city (cf. Matt 25:6; Acts 28:15)
- Paul's word choice implies that the church, once "caught up" or "raptured" to Christ in the air, escorts him to earth
- Believers will meet the Lord in the air (4:17), as they welcome him and escort him back to this world where he will establish his kingdom of justice and peace

# Future Hope (5:1-11)

- Paul encourages those alive to live in the present as if that day is already here:
- Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, <sup>2</sup>for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. <sup>3</sup>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.
- <sup>4</sup>But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. <sup>5</sup>You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. <sup>6</sup>So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. <sup>7</sup>For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. <sup>8</sup>But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. <sup>9</sup>For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>10</sup>He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. <sup>11</sup>Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

# Future Hope (5:1-11)

- Paul told his readers that they need not fear “the day of the Lord” (v. 2)
- In the OT, this expression refers to a future time when God will come to both punish the wicked and vindicate his people, the day of judgment (Jer 46:10; Ezek 30:2-3; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31)
- Paul comforts his readers by stressing their status as “children of the light” (v. 4)
- That is, Christians do not merely live in the light but are characterized by the light (v. 8)
- As such, our status is vastly different from those outside the faith, who foolishly look to the Roman Empire for peace and security (*Pax Romana*) and who will be surprised by the judgment they receive at Christ’s return

# Prayer for Hope (5:23-28)

- Paul prays a final prayer for hope that God would keep them holy, as they await the arrival of Jesus:
- <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it. <sup>25</sup> Brothers and sisters, pray for us. <sup>26</sup> Greet all God's people with a holy kiss. <sup>27</sup> I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers and sisters. <sup>28</sup> The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

# Conclusion

- Following Jesus will result in a new way of life, which engenders suspicion and conflict among family members and neighbours
- Nevertheless, we should respond with love and service, and live in the light of Christ's second coming