

1 Thessalonians

1

Summary: *Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy greet the church in Thessalonica, giving thanks for their faith, love, and hope. Paul recalls how the gospel came to them not merely in words but in power and the Holy Spirit, and how the Thessalonians became imitators of the apostles and of the Lord, receiving the word in the midst of affliction with joy from the Holy Spirit. Their faith became an example to believers throughout Macedonia and Achaia.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This is widely considered the earliest surviving letter of Paul, and possibly the earliest document in the New Testament (c. AD 49-51). The triad of faith, love, and hope (v. 3) appears here in what may be its earliest formulation, predating 1 Corinthians 13:13. The description of conversion in verses 9-10 provides one of the clearest summaries of early Christian proclamation: turning from idols, serving the living God, and awaiting the risen Son from heaven.*

Translation Friction: *The phrase 'election' (eklogē, v. 4) is rendered without imposing later Calvinist-Arminian frameworks. Paul's language about the gospel coming 'in power and in the Holy Spirit' (v. 5) describes experiential reality, not abstract doctrine. The reference to 'wrath that is coming' (v. 10) is eschatological, pointing to final judgment rather than a specific historical event.*

Connections: *The faith-love-hope triad reappears in 1 Corinthians 13:13 and Colossians 1:4-5. The description of turning from idols echoes Old Testament prophetic calls (Ezekiel 14:6, Isaiah 44:9-20). The expectation of Jesus's return from heaven connects to the fuller parousia teaching in chapters 4-5. Paul's self-description of his manner among them is expanded in chapter 2.*

¹Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, to the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ — Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. ²We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, ³We continually remember before our God and Father your faithful work, your loving effort, and your patient hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴Knowing, brothers and sisters beloved, your election of God., ⁵For our gospel arrived not to you in message only, but also in authority, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance. As you know what manner of men we were in the midst of you since your sake. ⁶And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in great affliction with joy from the Holy Spirit, ⁷So that you were ensamples to all that trust in Macedonia and Achaia. ⁸For the word of the Lord has sounded out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia,

but in every place your faith toward God has gone out, so that we have no need to say anything. ⁹For they themselves report about us what kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰To wait for his Descendant from the heavens above, whom he raised from the no longer alive, not even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The SBLGNT has the shorter greeting 'Grace to you and peace' without the additional 'from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ' found in some manuscripts and reflected in the KJV. We follow the critical text. The Greek *charis* ('grace') and *eirēnē* ('peace') combine a Greek greeting with the Hebrew *shalom*, bridging the two cultural worlds of Paul's audience.
1. Silvanus is the Latin form of Silas, Paul's companion from Acts 15-18. The letter is co-authored, though Paul is the primary voice.
2. The adverb *adialeiptōs* ('constantly, without ceasing') modifies the thanksgiving and prayer, indicating habitual practice rather than unbroken activity. Paul's thanksgivings are not mere formality — they typically preview the letter's main themes.
3. The three genitives — 'of faith,' 'of love,' 'of hope' — are best understood as subjective genitives: faith produces the work, love motivates the labor, hope sustains the endurance. This is possibly the earliest written occurrence of the faith-love-hope triad that Paul develops more fully in 1 Corinthians 13:13.
3. The Greek *kopos* ('labor') implies toil to the point of exhaustion, stronger than simple 'work' (*ergon*). Paul distinguishes the two: faith produces activity (*ergon*), but love drives costly effort (*kopos*).
4. The Greek *adelphoi* ('brothers') is used inclusively throughout Paul's letters to address the entire congregation, including women. We render it 'brothers and sisters' to reflect the inclusive scope. The noun *eklogē* ('election, choosing') denotes God's initiative in calling the Thessalonians — Paul grounds their identity in divine action, not human achievement.
5. The Greek *plērophoria* ('full conviction, complete certainty') could refer to the apostles' conviction in preaching or the Thessalonians' conviction in receiving. The ambiguity may be intentional — both the proclaimers and the hearers experienced deep assurance. The phrase 'our gospel' does not mean Paul invented it but that he was entrusted with proclaiming it.
6. The Greek *mimētai* ('imitators') is stronger than the KJV's 'followers' — it implies deliberate imitation of a pattern of life. The paradox of receiving the word 'in great affliction with joy' defines the distinctive Christian experience: suffering and joy coexist through the Holy Spirit's work. The affliction (*thlipsis*) likely refers to persecution from both Jewish and Gentile opponents in Thessalonica (cf. Acts 17:5-9).
7. The singular *typon* ('pattern, model') is used collectively — the entire church is one pattern. Macedonia and Achaia together comprise most of Roman Greece, indicating the rapid and wide spread of the Thessalonians' reputation.
8. The verb *exēchētai* ('has sounded out, has rung out') is onomatopoeic, suggesting a trumpet blast or the reverberation of thunder. It occurs only here in the New Testament. Paul portrays the Thessalonians' faith as an audible proclamation that reverberates outward from their city.
9. The phrase 'turned to God from idols' confirms the congregation was predominantly Gentile, since Jews would not be described as turning from idols. The two-part description — turning from (idols) and turning to (God) — mirrors the Old Testament prophetic call to repentance. 'Living and true God' (*theō zōnti kai alēthinō*) contrasts with the dead and false nature of idols, echoing Jeremiah 10:10.
9. [TCR Cross-Reference] Echoes Jeremiah 10:10. See the TCR's OT rendering for the Hebrew behind this passage and the translation rationale.
10. The present participle *rhyomenon* ('the one rescuing') portrays deliverance as ongoing, not merely a past event. 'The coming wrath' (*tēs orgēs tēs erchomenēs*) refers to eschatological judgment. This verse contains a compact early Christian creed: resurrection, heavenly exaltation, expected return, and deliverance from judgment. The three infinitives — serve (v. 9), wait (v. 10), and the implied rescue — summarize the Christian life as present service, future hope, and divine deliverance.

2

Summary: Paul defends the integrity of his ministry in Thessalonica, recalling how he and his companions came with boldness despite prior suffering in Philippi. He emphasizes their motives were pure — not from error, impurity, or deceit — and describes their gentle conduct, comparing themselves to a nursing mother caring for her children and a father encouraging his own. Paul then thanks God that the Thessalonians received his message as the word of God, not merely human speech. The chapter closes with Paul expressing his intense desire to revisit them, calling them his glory and joy.

What Makes This Remarkable: *Paul's extended self-defense in verses 1-12 likely responds to accusations from opponents in Thessalonica. The double parental metaphor — mother (v. 7) and father (v. 11) — is unusual in ancient rhetoric and reveals Paul's pastoral warmth. Verses 14-16 contain some of Paul's sharpest language about opposition, which has generated significant scholarly debate about its scope and intent.*

Translation Friction: *Verses 14-16 have been historically misused for anti-Jewish purposes. Paul's criticism is directed at specific opponents who hindered the gospel mission, not at the Jewish people as a whole — Paul himself remained proudly Jewish (cf. Romans 9:1-5, 11:1). We render the Greek as written while noting this critical context. The textual variant in verse 7 (ēpioi 'gentle' vs. nēpioi 'infants') affects the metaphor significantly; we follow the SBLGNT reading.*

Connections: *The suffering in Philippi is narrated in Acts 16:19-40. The description of opposition parallels Jesus's lament over Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37). Paul's longing to return anticipates the sending of Timothy in chapter 3. The 'crown of boasting' language (v. 19) connects to athletic and civic honor imagery Paul uses elsewhere (Philippians 4:1, 2 Timothy 4:8).*

¹For you yourselves know, brothers and sisters, that our coming to you was not without result. ²But though we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak the gospel of God to you in the midst of great opposition. ³For our appeal does not come from error or from impurity or with deceit, ⁴However, as we were allowed of God to be placed in trust with the good news, not even so we talk. Not as pleasing people, but God, which trieth our hearts. ⁵For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed — God is our witness. ⁶Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, ⁷But we were gentle in the midst of you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children:. ⁸So, being deeply fond of you, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become dear to us. ⁹For you remember, brothers and sisters, our labor and toil: working night and day so as not to burden any of you, we proclaimed the gospel of God to you. ¹⁰You are witnesses, and so is God, of how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we conducted ourselves toward you who believe, ¹¹As you recognize how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a Parent does his offspring,. ¹²Indeed, that you would walk worthy of God, who has called you to his reign and glory. ¹³And for this reason we also thank God continually, because when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human message but as what it truly is — the word of God, which is also at work in you who believe. ¹⁴For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of the churches of God in Judea that are in Christ Jesus, because you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Judeans — ¹⁵Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own God's spokespersons, and possess persecuted us. Then they please not God, and are contrary to all people:. ¹⁶They try to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they keep piling up their sins to the limit. God's wrath has come upon them at last. ¹⁷But as for us, brothers and sisters, after being torn away from you for a short time — in person, not in heart — we made every effort with great longing to see you face to face. ¹⁸For we wanted to come to you — I, Paul, again and again — but Satan hindered us. ¹⁹For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting? Is it not you, before our Lord Jesus at his coming? ²⁰For you are what we take pride in and joy.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The adjective kenē ('empty, vain, without result') can mean either 'empty of content' (the visit was not pointless) or 'empty of result' (the visit was not fruitless). The context favors the latter — Paul appeals to the visible fruit of his ministry among them.
2. The verb hybristhentes ('mistreated, shamefully treated') refers to the illegal beating and imprisonment described in Acts 16:22-24. The noun agōni ('struggle, opposition') carries athletic connotations — a contest or fight. Paul frames gospel proclamation as a struggle that requires divine boldness (parrēsia).
3. Paul denies three possible charges: planē ('error, delusion') — that his message is false; akatharsia ('impurity') — that his motives are impure, possibly with sexual overtones given the reputation of some itinerant teachers; and dolos ('deceit, trickery') — that he uses manipulative methods. This three-part denial suggests actual accusations were circulating.

4. The verb dokimazō ('to test, examine, approve') appears twice: God has tested and approved Paul (dedokimasmetha), and God continues to test (dokimazonti) their hearts. The same God who qualified them also holds them accountable. 'Hearts' (kardias) in biblical usage refers to the center of thought, will, and intention — not merely emotion.
5. The Greek kolakeia ('flattery') occurs only here in the New Testament. It was a standard accusation against sophists and traveling philosophers who told audiences what they wanted to hear for profit. Prophasis ('pretext, excuse') implies a hidden motive concealed behind a respectable front. Paul invokes God as witness precisely because hidden motives cannot be seen by humans.
6. The Greek doxa here means 'glory' in the sense of honor, recognition, or reputation from human sources. Paul's point is that apostolic ministry is not motivated by the desire for public acclaim.
7. The SBLGNT reads ēpioi ('gentle') rather than the variant nēpioi ('infants'), which would create the odd image of Paul being an infant in their midst. The metaphor of the trophos ('nursing mother') is remarkably intimate — Paul compares himself not to a hired nurse but to a mother with her own (heautēs) children. The phrase en barei einai ('to be burdensome' or 'to carry weight') likely refers to financial demands or the weight of apostolic authority.
8. The verb homeiromenoi ('being deeply fond of, yearning for') is rare and occurs only here in the New Testament. Its etymology is debated, but it expresses strong emotional attachment. The phrase tas heautōn psychas ('our own souls/selves') means Paul gave not just a message but his entire person — the gospel was embodied, not merely proclaimed.
9. The paired nouns kopos kai mochthos ('labor and toil') emphasize exhausting physical work — Paul supported himself through manual labor (tent-making, Acts 18:3) while simultaneously preaching. 'Night and day' is a Semitic idiom emphasizing totality of effort. Paul's refusal to accept financial support from the Thessalonians was a deliberate pastoral strategy, not mere preference.
10. Paul invokes both human witnesses (the Thessalonians) and the divine witness (God) — a legal formula establishing credibility. The three adverbs — hosiōs ('devoutly, in a holy manner'), dikaiōs ('justly, uprightly'), and amemptōs ('blamelessly') — cover duty toward God, duty toward others, and overall integrity.
11. Paul shifts from the mother metaphor (v. 7) to a father metaphor. The phrase 'each one of you' (hena hekaston hymōn) in verse 12 emphasizes individual pastoral attention — Paul did not merely address crowds but engaged persons one by one.
12. Three participles describe Paul's fatherly role: parakalountes ('urging, exhorting'), paramythoumenoi ('encouraging, consoling'), and martyromenoi ('charging, insisting'). The progression moves from encouragement to solemn appeal. The present participle kalountos ('who calls') indicates God's call is ongoing, not merely a past event. 'Kingdom and glory' is Paul's shorthand for the full eschatological reality.
13. Paul distinguishes between paralambanō ('received' — the act of receiving a tradition) and dechomai ('accepted' — the act of welcoming and embracing it). The Thessalonians both received the message as transmitted and accepted it as divine in origin. The verb energeitai ('is at work, is active') is middle voice, indicating the word of God is self-acting — it accomplishes its own purpose in believers.
14. The Greek symphyletōn ('fellow countrymen, compatriots') indicates the Thessalonians were persecuted by their own Gentile neighbors, paralleling the Jewish believers' experience in Judea. We render Ioudaiōn as 'Judeans' here because the context is geographical and sociopolitical — it refers to the local population in Judea who opposed the early church, not to the Jewish people globally.
15. Paul's language here echoes the Old Testament tradition of Israel's persecution of prophets (cf. Nehemiah 9:26, Jeremiah 26:20-23, 2 Chronicles 36:15-16). Jesus himself invoked this tradition (Matthew 23:31-37, Luke 13:34). Paul — himself Jewish — speaks as a prophetic voice within the tradition of intra-Jewish critique, not as an outsider condemning another religion. The verb ekdiōxantōn ('drove out, persecuted') may refer to the specific events in Thessalonica (Acts 17:5-10) and Berea (Acts 17:13).
15. [TCR Cross-Reference] This verse quotes Nehemiah 9:26 — see the TCR rendering of that passage for the Hebrew source text and translation decisions.
15. [TCR Cross-Reference] This verse quotes Jeremiah 26:20-23 — see the TCR rendering of that passage for the Hebrew source text and translation decisions.
15. [TCR Cross-Reference] This verse quotes 2 Chronicles 36:15-16 — see the TCR rendering of that passage for the Hebrew source text and translation decisions.
16. The phrase 'fill up the measure of their sins' (anaplērōsai autōn tas hamartias) echoes Genesis 15:16 where the Amorites' sins must reach their full measure before judgment comes. The final clause ephthasen de ep' autous hē orgē eis telos is debated: 'at last' (eis telos) could mean 'to the end, completely, finally.' The aorist ephthasen ('has overtaken') could be prophetic aorist (viewing a future event as already accomplished) or could refer to a recent event. Paul sees the obstruction of the Gentile mission as the culminating sin that triggers divine response.
16. [TCR Cross-Reference] Quotes Genesis 15:16. The TCR rendering of that OT passage preserves the Hebrew source text and documents the translation decisions behind it.
17. The verb aporphanisthentes ('having been orphaned from') is deeply emotional — Paul uses the language of an orphan separated from family. This is the only occurrence of this word in the New Testament. Combined with the mother (v. 7) and father (v. 11) metaphors, it creates a sustained family-relationship framework for understanding the apostolic bond.

18. Paul shifts to the singular 'I, Paul' (egō men Paulos) to emphasize his personal desire. The phrase hapax kai dis ('once and twice') means 'repeatedly.' The verb enekopsen ('cut in, hindered, blocked') is a military term for breaking up a road to prevent an army's advance. Paul does not specify how Satan hindered him — it could be opposition, illness, or circumstances.
19. The noun stephanos ('crown, wreath') refers to the victory wreath given to athletic victors, not the royal diadēma. Paul's 'crown of boasting' (kauchēseōs) is the Thessalonian church itself — his evidence of faithful labor when he stands before Christ. The word parousia ('coming, arrival, presence') here takes on its technical eschatological meaning — the future return of Christ. This is one of the earliest uses of parousia as a theological term in Christian literature.
20. This brief declaration serves as an emphatic conclusion to the chapter's argument. The word doxa ('glory') when applied to the Thessalonians means the visible evidence of God's work through Paul's ministry — they are the tangible proof that his labor was not in vain (cf. v. 1).

3

Summary: *Unable to return to Thessalonica himself, Paul sent Timothy to strengthen and encourage the believers in their faith amid persecution. Timothy has now returned with the good news that the Thessalonians' faith and love remain strong and that they remember Paul fondly. Paul expresses overwhelming relief and joy, describing Timothy's report as life-giving. The chapter closes with a prayer that God would direct Paul's path back to them and that the Lord would cause their love to increase and overflow toward one another and toward all people.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter reveals the anxiety Paul felt during the separation — the language is remarkably candid about emotional vulnerability. The phrase 'we really live now' (v. 8) shows that Paul's emotional and spiritual vitality was bound up with the health of his churches. The closing prayer (vv. 11-13) transitions from personal concerns to eschatological hope, ending with another reference to the parousia.*

Translation Friction: *The identity of 'the tempter' (v. 5) parallels 'Satan' in 2:18. Paul's statement that afflictions are 'destined' (v. 3) raises theological questions about suffering and divine will that we render without resolving. The phrase 'night and day' (v. 10) in Paul's prayer vocabulary indicates intensity, not literal continuous prayer.*

Connections: *Timothy's mission is briefly noted in Acts 18:5. The concern about being 'shaken' by afflictions (v. 3) connects to Jesus's parable of foundations (Matthew 7:24-27). The prayer for increasing love (v. 12) anticipates the ethical instructions of chapters 4-5. The parousia reference (v. 13) prepares for the extended teaching in 4:13-5:11.*

¹Therefore, when we could bear it no longer, we decided to be left behind in Athens alone, ²We sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, ³so that none of you would be shaken by these hardships. You know very well that we are destined for them. ⁴For even when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction — and so it happened, as you know. ⁵For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, fearing that the tempter had somehow tempted you and that our labor would be in vain. ⁶But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought us the good news of your faith and love, and that you always remember us kindly, longing to see us just as we long to see you. ⁷For this reason, brothers and sisters, in all our distress and affliction we have been encouraged about you through your faith. ⁸For we really live now, since you are standing firm in the Lord. ⁹For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, in exchange for all the joy that we feel on your account before our God, ¹⁰After dark and time praying exceedingly that we may witness your face, and may perfect that which is lacking in your faith? ¹¹Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you. ¹²And may the Lord cause you to increase and overflow in love for one another and for all people, just as we do for you, ¹³May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy before our God and Father when our Lord Jesus returns with all his holy ones.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The verb stegontes ('bearing, enduring, containing') conveys the image of a container that can no longer hold its contents — Paul's anxiety about the Thessalonians overflowed. 'Left behind alone' (kataleiphthēnai monoī) emphasizes the cost of sending Timothy — Paul chose isolation in Athens

rather than continued uncertainty about the church.

2. The SBLGNT reads *synergon tou theou* ('God's coworker'), which is the more difficult reading — some manuscripts soften it to *diakonon* ('servant'). The bold claim that Timothy is God's coworker follows Paul's theology that human ministry participates in divine action. The two infinitives *stērixai* ('to strengthen, establish') and *parakalesai* ('to encourage, comfort') define Timothy's mission.
3. The verb *sainesthai* is rare and its meaning debated — it may mean 'to be shaken, disturbed' or possibly 'to be deceived, beguiled.' The context of afflictions (*thlipsesin*) favors 'shaken.' The verb *keimetha* ('we are appointed, destined, set') indicates that suffering is not accidental but part of the expected Christian experience — Paul had warned them of this in advance (v. 4).
4. The imperfect *proelegomen* ('we kept telling') indicates repeated warning, not a single prediction. Paul had prepared the Thessalonians for persecution as a regular part of discipleship instruction, not an afterthought.
5. Paul shifts to the first person singular (*kagō*, 'I also') — the decision to send Timothy was personally his. The title *ho peirazōn* ('the tempter') identifies Satan by function rather than name (cf. 2:18). The concern that labor might be 'in vain' (*eis kenon*, 'into emptiness') echoes the same word (*kenē*) from 2:1 — Paul's deepest fear was that the Thessalonians' faith had not survived persecution.
6. Remarkably, Paul uses the verb *euangelisamenou* ('having brought good news') — the same word used for preaching the gospel — to describe Timothy's report about the Thessalonians. For Paul, news of their persevering faith is itself 'gospel.' The report covers three things: their faith (vertical relationship), their love (horizontal relationships), and their affection for Paul (the apostolic bond).
7. The noun *anankē* ('distress, necessity, hardship') combined with *thlipsis* ('affliction') reveals that Paul himself was under significant pressure — not just concerned for them but suffering in his own circumstances. Their faith became a source of encouragement (*paraklēsis*) for Paul in his own trials.
8. The emphatic *nyn zōmen* ('now we live') is one of Paul's most emotionally transparent statements — the news of their faithfulness was literally life-giving to him. The verb *stēkete* ('you stand firm') is present tense, describing their current state as reported by Timothy.
9. The verb *antapodounai* ('to give back in return, to repay') frames thanksgiving as a reciprocal act — God gave the joy; Paul wants to return adequate thanks. The rhetorical question implies that no thanksgiving is sufficient. The phrase *emprosthen tou theou* ('before our God') places Paul's joy in the context of worship.
10. The adverb *hyperekperissou* ('beyond all measure, most earnestly') is a Pauline superlative found only in his letters — he piles up prefixes (*hyper* + *ek* + *perissou*) to intensify the expression. The verb *katartisai* ('to mend, complete, supply') was used for mending fishing nets (Mark 1:19) — Paul sees faith not as defective but as needing completion. The 'lacking' (*hysterēmata*) refers to areas where further instruction is needed, which chapters 4-5 will address.
11. The optative *kateuthynai* ('may he direct') introduces a wish-prayer. The singular verb with a compound subject ('God and Father... and our Lord Jesus') is grammatically notable — Paul treats the two as a unified source of action. The prayer for a directed path (*hodon*, 'road, way') reflects Paul's conviction that his travel plans are subject to divine sovereignty (cf. 2:18 where Satan blocked the way).
12. Two verbs intensify the prayer: *pleonasai* ('to increase, multiply') and *perisseusai* ('to overflow, abound'). The love Paul prays for has two directions: *eis allēlous* ('toward one another' — within the community) and *eis pantas* ('toward all' — beyond the community). Christian love is not exclusive but expansive.
13. The goal of increasing love (v. 12) is established holiness (v. 13) — Paul connects ethics and eschatology. 'Holy ones' (*hagiōn*) could refer to angels (as in Zechariah 14:5, which Paul may be echoing), to deceased believers, or to both. The ambiguity is preserved in 'holy ones.' Each major section of 1 Thessalonians ends with a reference to the *parousia* (2:19, 3:13, 4:15-17, 5:23), making Christ's return the structural center of the letter.
13. [TCR Cross-Reference] References Zechariah 14:5 — the TCR OT rendering of that text provides the Hebrew source and explains the translation decisions involved.

4

Summary: Paul turns from personal narrative to instruction, addressing the 'what is lacking' in their faith (3:10). He begins with ethical exhortation: God's will is their sanctification, particularly in sexual purity and brotherly love. He then addresses the question that most concerned the Thessalonians: the fate of believers who have died before Christ's return. Paul provides the earliest written Christian teaching on the parousia — the Lord will descend from heaven with a shout, the dead in Christ will rise first, and then the living will be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air.

What Makes This Remarkable: *Verses 13-18 constitute the earliest surviving Christian text about the resurrection of the dead at Christ's return. This passage predates 1 Corinthians 15 and was written to address a specific pastoral crisis — grief over fellow believers who had died. The imagery of the 'meeting' (*apantēsis*, v. 17) is a technical term from Hellenistic civic life: when a dignitary approached a*

city, citizens would go out to meet him and escort him back in. Paul's eschatology is pastoral, not speculative — it ends with 'encourage one another with these words.'

Translation Friction: The phrase 'caught up' (harpagēsometha, v. 17) is the basis for the theological concept of 'the rapture,' though Paul himself does not use that term and the passage's imagery is debated. We render the Greek without imposing any particular eschatological framework. The phrase 'possess his own vessel' (v. 4) is ambiguous — it may refer to one's body or to one's wife. We note the ambiguity.

Connections: The parousia teaching connects to Jesus's Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24, Mark 13). The 'word of the Lord' (v. 15) may refer to an otherwise unrecorded saying of Jesus or to prophetic revelation. The trumpet imagery echoes Isaiah 27:13 and Exodus 19:16. The 'meeting the Lord in the air' language uses the civic apantēsis pattern found in Acts 28:15.

¹Finally then, brothers and sisters, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and please God — as you are in fact doing — that you do so more and more. ²For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. ³For this is the will of God: your sanctification — that you abstain from sexual immorality, ⁴Each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, ⁵Not in the lust of sinful desire, even as the Gentiles which know not God:. ⁶That no person depart beyond and defraud his brother in any matter — on account of the fact that that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we as well have forewarned you and testified. ⁷For God has not called us to impurity but to holiness. ⁸Therefore, whoever rejects this is not rejecting a human authority but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you. ⁹Now concerning brotherly love, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another. ¹⁰For indeed you are practicing it toward all the brothers and sisters throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more, ¹¹Make it your goal to live a quiet life, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you. ¹²That you may conduct your lives honestly toward them that are without, and that you may possess lack of nothing. ¹³But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have fallen asleep, so that you may not grieve as the rest do, who have no hope. ¹⁴For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, so also God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus. ¹⁵For this we declare to you by a word of the Lord: we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸Therefore encourage one another with these words.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The transition *loipon oun* ('finally then') marks the shift from personal narrative (chs. 1-3) to ethical instruction (chs. 4-5). The verb *peripatein* ('to walk') is a Semitism for conduct or way of life, adopted from the Hebrew *halak*. Paul both affirms their current practice and calls for growth — they are already walking rightly but should abound (*perisseuēte*) increasingly.
2. The noun *parangelias* ('instructions, commands, charges') is a military term for orders passed down a chain of command. Paul's ethical instructions carry the authority of the Lord Jesus — they are not mere suggestions but authoritative directives mediated through apostolic teaching.
3. The noun *hagiasmos* ('sanctification, being made holy') is the practical outworking of holiness in daily life. The first concrete application is sexual ethics. The Greek *porneia* ('sexual immorality') is broader than 'fornication' (KJV) — it covers all sexual activity outside the covenant of marriage. Paul begins with this topic because Thessalonica's Greco-Roman culture was highly permissive sexually, and new converts needed clear guidance.
4. The phrase *to heautou skeuos ktasthai* is debated: *skeuos* ('vessel') could mean 'body' (as we render) or 'wife' (as in 1 Peter 3:7's 'weaker vessel'). The verb *ktasthai* means 'to acquire' or 'to possess/control.' If 'body,' the instruction is about self-mastery; if 'wife,' about honorable marriage. The context of sexual ethics supports either reading. We follow 'body' as more likely given the parallel with verse 5.
5. The phrase *pathei epithymias* ('passion of desire') denotes uncontrolled sexual craving. Paul distinguishes believers from *ta ethnē* ('the nations, Gentiles') — ironic given that most Thessalonian believers were themselves formerly Gentile pagans (1:9). The distinguishing factor is knowing God (*eidota ton theon*), which transforms sexual ethics from cultural convention into covenantal faithfulness.
6. The verbs *hyperbainein* ('to overstep, transgress') and *pleonektein* ('to take advantage of, exploit') combined with *en tō pragmati* ('in this matter') likely refer to sexual violation of another person's marriage or family — not general business ethics. The Lord as *ekdikos* ('avenger') draws on Old Testament language of God as the defender of the wronged (Psalm 94:1, Deuteronomy 32:35).

6. [TCR Cross-Reference] Quotes Psalm 94:1. The TCR rendering of that OT passage preserves the Hebrew source text and documents the translation decisions behind it.
6. [TCR Cross-Reference] Quotes Deuteronomy 32:35. The TCR rendering of that OT passage preserves the Hebrew source text and documents the translation decisions behind it.
7. Paul grounds sexual ethics in vocation — the call of God defines the standard. The prepositions shift meaningfully: *epi akatharsia* ('upon/toward impurity') versus *en hagiismo* ('in holiness') — impurity is a destination God rejects; holiness is the sphere God intends believers to inhabit.
8. The verb *athetōn* ('rejecting, setting aside, nullifying') was used for annulling a treaty or covenant — to reject Paul's instruction is to violate the covenant relationship with God. The present participle *didonta* ('the one giving') indicates the ongoing gift of the Spirit. Some manuscripts read 'us' (*hēmas*) instead of 'you' (*hymas*); the SBLGNT reads 'you,' making the point more direct.
9. The compound *theodidaktōi* ('God-taught') is found only here in the New Testament and may be a Pauline coinage. It echoes the prophetic promise of direct divine instruction (Isaiah 54:13, Jeremiah 31:33-34). Paul's compliment is genuine but also serves as encouragement to continue.
9. [TCR Cross-Reference] Echoes Isaiah 54:13. See the TCR's OT rendering for the Hebrew behind this passage and the translation rationale.
9. [TCR Cross-Reference] Echoes Jeremiah 31:33-34. See the TCR's OT rendering for the Hebrew behind this passage and the translation rationale.
10. The love of the Thessalonians extends beyond their local congregation to believers throughout the province — evidence of inter-church relationships and mutual support in the earliest Christian movement. Paul's pattern is consistent: affirm what is already happening, then call for growth (cf. v. 1).
11. The phrase *philotimeisthai hēsychazein* ('to make it your ambition to be quiet') is a deliberate paradox — 'ambitiously pursue non-ambition.' Some Thessalonians may have abandoned daily work in light of the expected *parousia*. Paul counters this with a call to ordinary, productive life. The three infinitives — live quietly, mind your own affairs, work with your hands — form a practical ethic for eschatological living.
12. The phrase *tous exō* ('those outside') refers to non-believers — Paul is concerned about the church's public witness. The practical goals are reputation (*euschēmōnōs*, 'properly, respectably') and self-sufficiency (*mēdenos chreian echēte*, 'having need of no one'). A church financially dependent on outsiders loses credibility.
13. The formula *ou thelomen hymas agnoein* ('we do not want you to be ignorant') introduces a new and important teaching section. 'Fallen asleep' (*koimōmenōn*) is a common early Christian metaphor for death — it implies the expectation of waking. The Thessalonians' grief was not about death in general but about the specific fear that deceased believers would miss the *parousia*. Paul does not forbid grief but grief 'as those who have no hope' — Christian grief is real but bounded by resurrection hope.
14. Paul's logic: Jesus's death and resurrection is the pattern for believers' death and resurrection. The phrase *dia tou Iēsou* ('through Jesus') could modify 'fallen asleep' (those who died as Christians) or 'will bring' (God will bring them through Jesus). The ambiguity may be intentional — Jesus is the means of both their death-experience and their resurrection. Note Paul uses *apethanen* ('died') for Jesus but *koimēthentas* ('fallen asleep') for believers — Jesus's death was the raw reality; believers' death is softened by his victory over it.
15. The phrase *en logō kyriou* ('by a word of the Lord') may cite an unrecorded saying of Jesus, a prophetic revelation given to Paul, or an interpretation of Jesus's known teaching (cf. Matthew 24:30-31). The double negative *ou mē* ('by no means, definitely not') is the strongest negation in Greek — the living will absolutely not have an advantage over the dead. Paul includes himself among 'we who are alive' (*hēmeis hoi zōntes*), suggesting he expected the *parousia* in his lifetime, though he later moderated this (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:1-10).
16. Three auditory images accompany the descent: *keleusma* ('a command, a shout of authority' — used for a military officer's command or a charioteer's cry), *phōnē archangelou* ('voice of an archangel'), and *salpingi theou* ('trumpet of God,' echoing the Sinai theophany of Exodus 19:16 and the eschatological trumpet of Isaiah 27:13). The phrase 'the Lord himself' (*autos ho kyrios*) emphasizes personal presence — this is not delegated to angels. 'Dead in Christ' (*nekroi en Christō*) defines the scope: those who died in union with Christ.
16. [TCR Cross-Reference] Quotes Exodus 19:16. The TCR rendering of that OT passage preserves the Hebrew source text and documents the translation decisions behind it.
16. [TCR Cross-Reference] Quotes Isaiah 27:13. The TCR rendering of that OT passage preserves the Hebrew source text and documents the translation decisions behind it.
17. The verb *harpagēsometha* ('we will be caught up, snatched away') is the basis for the later theological term 'rapture' (from the Latin *rapturo* in the Vulgate). The Greek conveys sudden, forceful action. The noun *apantēsis* ('meeting') is a technical term from Hellenistic civic life: when an important dignitary approached a city, the citizens would go out to meet (*apantēsis*) him and escort him back into the city. This imagery suggests the believers go out to meet the descending Lord and accompany him — the destination is not specified as heaven but as permanent presence 'with the Lord.' The clouds echo Daniel 7:13 and the ascension narrative (Acts 1:9-11).
17. [TCR Cross-Reference] Draws on Daniel 7:13. Consult the TCR rendering of that passage for the underlying Hebrew and the rationale for key translation choices.
18. The verb *parakaleite* ('encourage, comfort, exhort') frames the entire *parousia* teaching as pastoral, not speculative. Paul's purpose in describing the Lord's return is not to construct a detailed eschatological timeline but to provide comfort for the grieving. The instruction is communal — 'one another' (*allēlous*) — making this teaching a shared possession of the church, not private knowledge.

5

Summary: *Paul continues the eschatological teaching from chapter 4, now addressing the timing of the Lord's return. The 'day of the Lord' will come like a thief in the night — sudden and unexpected for the unprepared, but not for believers who are children of light. Paul calls them to remain sober and watchful, putting on the armor of faith, love, and hope. The chapter then delivers a rapid series of community instructions: respect your leaders, live at peace, admonish the disorderly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient, pursue good, rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in everything, do not quench the Spirit, test everything, hold fast to what is good, abstain from every form of evil. The letter closes with a prayer for complete sanctification and a request for mutual prayer, greeting, and public reading.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The rapid-fire instructions in verses 12-22 form one of the densest collections of ethical imperatives in Paul's letters. The triad of 'rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in everything' (vv. 16-18) has become one of the most memorized passages in the New Testament. The closing prayer (v. 23) uses the tripartite 'spirit and soul and body,' the only place Paul uses all three terms together. The final verse's insistence that the letter be read to 'all the brothers and sisters' suggests awareness of its authoritative status.*

Translation Friction: *The phrase 'spirit and soul and body' (v. 23) should not be pressed into a systematic anthropological framework — Paul is using comprehensive language for the whole person, not teaching trichotomism. The 'thief in the night' imagery (v. 2) echoes Jesus's own teaching (Matthew 24:43, Luke 12:39) and was clearly part of early Christian tradition. We render without imposing a specific millennial framework.*

Connections: *The 'day of the Lord' language derives from Old Testament prophetic tradition (Amos 5:18-20, Joel 2:1-11, Zephaniah 1:14-18). The thief imagery appears in Matthew 24:43, Luke 12:39, 2 Peter 3:10, and Revelation 3:3, 16:15. The armor metaphor anticipates the fuller treatment in Ephesians 6:10-17. 'Do not quench the Spirit' connects to Paul's broader pneumatology in 1 Corinthians 12-14.*

¹Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you have no need for anything to be written to you, ²For yourselves recognize perfectly that the time of the Lord so comes as a thief in the after dark. ³When they say, "Peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them, like labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. ⁴But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness, so that the day would overtake you like a thief, ⁵You are every one of the children of light, and the children of the day — we are not of the night, nor of darkness. ⁶So then, let us not sleep as the rest do, but let us stay awake and be sober, ⁷Since they that sleep sleep in the night. Then they that be drunken are drunken in the night. ⁸But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. ⁹For God has not destined us for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰Christ died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with him. ¹¹Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as you are in fact doing. ¹²Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to recognize those who labor among you, who lead you in the Lord and admonish you, ¹³To esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace in the midst of yourselves. ¹⁴And we urge you, brothers and sisters: admonish the disorderly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. ¹⁵See that no one repays evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good for one another and for all people. ¹⁶Rejoice always, ¹⁷Never stop praying. ¹⁸Give thanks in every situation, for this is what God wants for you in Christ Jesus. ¹⁹Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰Do not despise prophecies, ²¹Indeed, prove all things. Hold fast that which is good. ²²Abstain from every form of evil. ²³Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it. ²⁵Brothers and sisters, pray for us also. ²⁶Greet all the brothers and sisters with a holy kiss. ²⁷I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers and sisters. ²⁸May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ remain with you. Amen.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Paul distinguishes *chronōn* ('times' — chronological duration) from *kairōn* ('seasons' — significant or decisive moments). The combination covers both 'when' and 'what kind of time.' The phrase echoes Acts 1:7 where Jesus uses the same pair to deflect timeline questions. Paul's point is not that timing is knowable but that it is irrelevant to readiness.
2. The phrase *hēmera kyriou* ('day of the Lord') is drawn directly from Old Testament prophetic vocabulary (Hebrew: *yom YHWH*). In the prophets it refers to God's decisive intervention in judgment and salvation. Paul applies it to the return of Christ. The thief simile emphasizes unexpectedness, not stealth or evil intent — a thief comes when you do not expect him (cf. Jesus's use in Matthew 24:43).
3. The phrase *eirēnē kai asphaleia* ('peace and security') may echo Roman imperial propaganda — the Pax Romana promised exactly this. Paul subverts the claim: true security is not found in empire but in Christ. The labor pain metaphor (*ōdin*) emphasizes inevitability and suddenness, not gradual process. The double negative *ou mē* ('they will absolutely not') stresses the impossibility of escape for the unprepared.
4. Paul shifts from 'they' (v. 3) to 'you' — the believers are in a fundamentally different position. The metaphor of darkness represents moral and spiritual ignorance, not merely the absence of chronological information. Those who live in the light will not be surprised because they are already prepared.
5. The Semitic idiom 'sons/children of' (*huioi*) expresses essential character — 'children of light' means people whose nature is defined by light. The phrase echoes language found in the Dead Sea Scrolls (War Scroll: 'sons of light vs. sons of darkness'). Paul shifts from 'you' to 'we' (*esmen*), including himself in the community of light.
6. The metaphors operate on two levels: literal sleep/waking (extending the night/day imagery) and moral alertness/negligence. The verb *grēgorōmen* ('let us stay awake, be watchful') becomes a key eschatological term in early Christianity (cf. Mark 13:35, 37). The verb *nēphōmen* ('let us be sober') refers to mental clarity and self-control, the opposite of spiritual intoxication.
7. Paul extends the night/day metaphor with commonsense observation — sleep and drunkenness are naturally associated with nighttime. The implication is that if believers belong to the day, they should exhibit daytime behavior: alertness and sobriety.
8. Paul introduces military armor imagery drawn from Isaiah 59:17 where God puts on righteousness as a breastplate and salvation as a helmet. Paul adapts the imagery: the breastplate protects the heart with faith and love, and the helmet guards the mind with hope. The faith-love-hope triad from 1:3 returns here in eschatological armor form. This is a condensed version of the fuller armor passage in Ephesians 6:10-17.
8. [TCR Cross-Reference] References Isaiah 59:17 — the TCR OT rendering of that text provides the Hebrew source and explains the translation decisions involved.
9. The verb *etheto* ('placed, appointed, destined') with *eis* ('toward, for') indicates divine purpose. The contrast is between *orgē* ('wrath' — eschatological judgment) and *peripoiēsis sōtērias* ('obtaining of salvation'). The noun *peripoiēsis* can mean 'possession' or 'obtaining/acquiring' — salvation is both God's gift and something believers receive.
10. The 'awake or asleep' language now carries double meaning: it refers to physical death and life (the concern from 4:13-18) as well as the moral alertness imagery of this chapter. Paul's answer to both questions — what about the dead? what about readiness? — is the same: Christ's death ensures that our state (alive or dead, alert or not) does not determine our destiny. Union with Christ does.
11. The verb *oikodomeite* ('build up, edify') uses construction imagery — the community is a building under construction, and each member contributes to the structure. The phrase *eis ton hena* ('one the one,' i.e., 'each other individually') emphasizes personal, one-on-one encouragement. Paul again affirms their current practice (cf. 4:1, 10).
12. Three participles describe church leaders: *kopiōntas* ('those laboring' — the same word for exhausting toil used in 1:3), *proistamenous* ('those who lead, stand before, care for'), and *nouthetountas* ('those who admonish, counsel, correct'). The verb *eidenai* ('to know, recognize') means more than mere awareness — it implies respect and acknowledgment of their role. The leadership structure in Thessalonica was not yet formalized into offices (no 'elders' or 'deacons' are named).
13. The adverb *hyperekperissou* ('beyond all measure') recurs from 3:10 — Paul characteristically piles up intensifiers. Esteem for leaders is to be 'in love' (*en agapē*), not in fear or obligation. The abrupt imperative *eirēneuete en heautois* ('be at peace among yourselves') suggests tensions within the community, possibly related to the disorderly behavior addressed in verse 14.
14. Four imperatives addressed to the whole community, not just leaders: *noutheteite tous ataktous* ('admonish the disorderly' — *ataktos* is a military term for soldiers who break rank, referring to those who refuse to work per 4:11-12); *paramytheisthe tous oligopsychous* ('encourage the fainthearted' — *oligopsychos* means 'small-souled,' those crushed by grief or fear); *antechesthe tōn asthenōn* ('help the weak' — whether physically, economically, or spiritually); *makrothymeite pros pantas* ('be patient with everyone' — including all three problem groups). The differentiated response is crucial: the disorderly need correction, the fainthearted need comfort, the weak need support. One-size-fits-all pastoral care fails.
15. The prohibition of retaliation (*kakon anti kakou*, 'evil in return for evil') parallels Romans 12:17 and 1 Peter 3:9, and ultimately echoes Jesus's teaching (Matthew 5:38-48). The verb *diōkete* ('pursue, chase after') implies active effort — doing good requires intentional action, not passive goodwill. The scope extends beyond the community (*eis allēlous*) to everyone (*eis pantas*).

16. The first of three brief imperatives (vv. 16-18) that form a well-known triad. *Pantote* ('always, at all times') is unqualified — Paul does not say 'rejoice when things go well.' Joy in Paul's theology is not dependent on circumstances but rooted in relationship with God (cf. Philippians 4:4, written from prison).
17. The adverb *adialeptōs* ('without ceasing, constantly') appeared in 1:3 and 2:13 for Paul's own prayer practice. This does not mean unbroken verbal prayer but a persistent orientation of life toward God — prayer as habitual conversation with God woven into daily existence.
18. The phrase *en panti* ('in everything, in every circumstance') does not mean 'for everything' — Paul calls for thanksgiving in all situations, not necessarily for all situations. The phrase 'this is the will of God' (*touto gar thelēma theou*) may refer to all three imperatives (vv. 16-18) together, not just thanksgiving. God's will is the triad: joy, prayer, gratitude.
19. The verb *sbennyte* ('quench, extinguish') treats the Spirit's work as fire — a metaphor consistent with Pentecost imagery (Acts 2:3). 'Quenching' implies suppressing or stifling the Spirit's manifestations, likely prophetic gifts given the next verse. The present imperative with *mē* suggests 'stop quenching' — this may have already been happening.
20. The verb *exoutheneite* ('despise, treat as nothing, hold in contempt') suggests some Thessalonians were dismissive of prophetic speech. Prophecy in the Pauline churches was Spirit-inspired speech for edification, not fortune-telling (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:3). The next verse provides the corrective: test, don't dismiss.
21. The verb *dokimazete* ('test, examine, assess') is the same word used for testing metals to determine their purity. Applied to prophecy, it means evaluate rather than accept uncritically or reject reflexively. The imperative *katechete* ('hold fast, retain') balances openness with discernment — accept what proves genuine, release what does not.
22. The Greek *eidous* can mean 'form, kind, type' or 'appearance.' The KJV's 'appearance of evil' has been misapplied to mean 'anything that looks bad.' The Greek more likely means 'every kind of evil' — each type or manifestation of evil should be avoided. This provides the negative counterpart to verse 21's positive imperative.
23. The title 'God of peace' (*theos tēs eirēnēs*) is a standard Pauline benediction formula. The adjective *holoteleis* ('completely, entirely') and the adjective *holoklēron* ('whole, complete, intact') create emphatic completeness — every part of the person is included. The threefold 'spirit and soul and body' (*pneuma kai psychē kai sōma*) is comprehensive language for the whole person, not a systematic anthropological division. This is the only place Paul lists all three together. The *parousia* serves once again as the horizon toward which sanctification is directed.
24. The brevity is powerful: *pistos ho kalōn* ('faithful is the one calling'). The present participle *kalōn* indicates God's call is ongoing. The assurance that 'he will do it' (*hos kai poiēsei*) grounds the prayer of verse 23 in God's faithfulness — sanctification will be completed because God's character guarantees it.
25. The request for prayer is brief and mutual — Paul who prays constantly for them (1:2, 3:10) asks for the same in return. The *kai* ('also') emphasizes reciprocity.
26. The 'holy kiss' (*philēmati hagiō*) was a standard greeting in early Christian worship (cf. Romans 16:16, 1 Corinthians 16:20, 2 Corinthians 13:12). The adjective 'holy' distinguishes it from romantic or familial kisses — it was a sign of spiritual kinship and mutual peace.
27. The verb *enorkizō* ('I put under oath, I adjure') is strikingly solemn for a letter closing — Paul uses oath language to ensure the letter is read publicly to the entire congregation, not just leaders. This suggests both the letter's authoritative status and the possibility that some might try to restrict its circulation. Paul shifts to the first person singular (*enorkizō*, 'I'), lending personal weight to the charge.
28. The closing benediction follows Paul's standard formula. The SBLGNT does not include 'Amen,' which appears in some later manuscripts. 'Grace' (*charis*) forms an *inclusio* with the opening greeting (1:1), framing the entire letter in the reality of divine favor.