

“Work and Wait” (1 Thessalonians 1:1-10)

Do you have a favorite sports team? If so, I want you to lock that team into your mind for just a moment. Perhaps you graduated from the UW or WSU, so you are a die-hard Husky or Cougar. If so, God bless you. What happens when your favorite team wins a big game? You respond like this: “WE DID IT! WE WON!” You may run around the living room high-fiving, chest-bumping, and doing a little jig. Now my question is: What role did you play in this victory? Maybe you bought a jersey or a cap, but the truth is you didn’t do anything that contributed to your team’s success. Yet, you feel intense ownership because this is YOUR team.

If you and I can feel this strongly about our favorite sports team, how much more intense should our feelings be for our local church? We need to think of the church as “we,” not “they.” Although churches are made up of individuals, when you and I speak of the church we must never say “they.” Instead we should say “we”...for *we* are the church!¹ In the book of 1 Thessalonians, we will learn about a church that we can get excited about. Although there are no “perfect” churches, the church in Thessalonica is a model church. As we study this church, we will learn how we can be a church that glorifies God and leads the world to Him. Specifically, in 1 Thess 1:1-10, we will see that God uses the church to encourage leaders. *Encouragement is found in the lives that we live.*

1. Leaders need encouragement in ministry (1:1-5).² In this first section, we discover that even godly and competent leaders need encouragement. Even though many leaders look confident and secure on the outside, on the inside they can be discouraged and insecure. God’s leaders are constantly under attack from Satan and need to be encouraged. In 1:1, Paul introduces his letter with these words: “**Paul³ and Silvanus⁴ and Timothy,⁵ to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father⁶ and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.**”⁷ Paul has written 13 New Testament books, yet this is the shortest of any of Paul’s greetings. He is obviously fond of this church⁸ and they are familiar with Paul and his traveling companions.⁹ Paul does not include his official title “apostle” in either 1 or 2 Thessalonians. This is also true of Philippians and Philemon. In Paul’s other nine epistles he uses his title, most likely because he is “under fire” from others. The reason for its omission in every case appears to have been the intimate and affectionate character of his relations with the parties addressed.¹⁰ Paul includes “Silvanus and Timothy” because they were with him in Corinth when he wrote this letter,¹¹ and these men had also assisted him in the building up of the Thessalonian church.¹² More importantly, Paul seems to be affirming team leadership as the basic New Testament pattern.¹³ Paul was a team player that shared ministry and trained others to do ministry.¹⁴ In your area of ministry, are you seeking to build a team? Have you sought to train others for ministry? Do you seek to train others so well that they surpass you in your ministry? Our staff and elders have adopted a team ministry philosophy. We are all co-equals who simply fulfill different responsibilities. When Billy Graham received his Congressional Medal of Honor, the first thing he is reported to have said upon receiving the award is, “This has been a team effort from the very beginning,” and he proceeded to name the people who had ministered unto him through the years. In closing he said, “We did this together.”¹⁵ What a humble and God-honoring attitude!

It is worth noting that the phrase “in God” is as unusual as the phrase “in Christ” is familiar. The Thessalonians needed to be reminded that their sphere of protection and provision was “in God.”¹⁶ In the midst of tribulation and suffering it is easy to forget this. Still, in the greeting, Paul accords Jesus Christ equality with God the Father.¹⁷ Furthermore, he uses the full title of our Savior: “Lord Jesus Christ.” “Lord” refers to Yahweh—the God of the Old Testament.¹⁸ As “Lord,” Christ is God and the supreme Creator and Sustainer of the universe.¹⁹ “Jesus” means “Yahweh saves.” This is His earthly name and points to His humanity. Yet, Jesus is not just an exalted man but the eternal God who became man that He might die for our sin. “Christ” refers to the long promised Messiah who is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies.

The final words of Paul's greeting are "grace and peace." "Grace" was a common Greek salutation that meant "greeting" or "rejoice." "Peace" is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *shalom* meaning "favor," "well-being," and "prosperity in the widest sense," especially prosperity in spiritual matters. Paul used both words when he greeted the recipients of his epistles. God's grace is the basis for and leads to our peace.²⁰ When you trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, He gives you grace that leads to peace with God.

Paul now launches into the longest thanksgiving section in the entire New Testament.²¹ He is pumped about this church!²² Although Paul is quite pleased with this church, there is another reason he spends so much time expressing thanks. It is fairly certain that this congregation lacks confidence in their salvation.²³ Consequently, Paul spends time affirming them. In 1:2-3 he writes, "**We²⁴ give thanks²⁵ to God always for all of you,²⁶ making mention of you in our prayers;²⁷ constantly bearing in mind your²⁸ work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father.**" It's been said, "You can tell a man's values by what he appreciates." In these verses, Paul expresses his deep appreciation for the spiritual maturity of the Thessalonians. The words "always"²⁹ and "constantly"³⁰ don't indicate an uninterrupted task of incessant praying, but rather a faithful, regular pattern of prayer and thanksgiving. Nevertheless, these verses are challenging. They call you and me to pray for our church, specifically. Not just a generic, "Lord, bless our church," but specific expressions of gratitude for individuals in our church. Start with your small group, Sunday school class, or youth or college group. Cry out to God for individuals in your ministry. Paul had a prayer list. Do you? Use a prayer list, a prayer diary, a prayer card. Stick a photo on the fridge, on the bathroom mirror, or on the steering wheel of your car. Whatever it takes!

In 1:3, Paul shares three characteristics he appreciates about the Thessalonian believers.³¹ First, he mentions their "**work of faith.**" Salvation is God's gift. Faith rests upon the work of God, not our work. Yet, when we rest on God's work, God produces His work in us.³² Paul blesses these believers because of the works that followed their faith. *Encouragement is found in the lives that we live.*

Second, Paul refers to their "**labor of love.**" The word "labor"³³ denotes wearying toil involving sweat and fatigue to the point of exhaustion. It is a love of blood, sweat, and tears. When I was in Bible College and seminary, I worked for Neptune Swimming Pool Co. in Clackamas, OR. During the summers, I was responsible for unloading several palettes with 100-pound sand bags. I can remember these days of mid-90's heat, unloading these bags of filter sand. It was hard work. I labored because I had to, but I also labored because I wanted to. You see, I was saving money for my honeymoon and upcoming marriage. This was a labor of love. I know many individuals in our church who work their tails off. Like most people, these folks have a spouse, children, and work responsibilities. Nevertheless, they refuse to say, "I don't have time to serve the Lord. I have family responsibilities, I have work responsibilities, and I need my free time." These choice people are concerned about all of these responsibilities, but they are equally concerned about their obligation to their Lord. Interestingly, it is those people in our church who serve the most that also tend to have the best marriages and families. They are also the most successful in their careers. God is no man's debtor. If you labor for Him, He will multiply your time and bless you to boot! It is really a question of love.

Lastly, Paul refers to their "**steadfastness of hope.**" Our English word "steadfastness" seems soft and passive. Yet, the Greek term behind this translation is tenacious and aggressive.³⁴ Similarly, the English word "hope" transmits the idea of wishful thinking. We say, "I hope it is sunny tomorrow." We mean by that, "I wish for another warm day tomorrow." Biblical hope, however, is not wishful thinking. No, hope has the idea that we have assurance in the future because of who God is. Hope helps us claim the promises of God. In other words, the problems we currently face do not daunt us because we see beyond the moment. We possess a holy stick-to-it-iveness that enables us to remain steadfast in the midst of trials and difficulties.

Our dog, Jerome, lives out the biblical definition of steadfast hope. Jerome has a stuffed cat that he loves to play with. He puts it in his mouth and begs us to come outside and throw it. I always fall for this ploy. Call me a sucker. Instead of gleefully dropping the stuffed cat out of his mouth, Jerome refuses to let me get close to him. Instead, he runs away from me! He has a 75-foot dog lead so he can go quite a ways. If I want to play catch, when he comes close to me I have to step on his dog lead and pull him to me. When I do finally get a hold of Jerome and try to take the stuffed cat out of his mouth, do you think he lets me? Not on your life! When I go after the cat, our basset hound turns into a bulldog. To get the cat from him, I practically have to yank his fangs out of his mouth. What used to annoy me now reminds me of steadfastness of hope. Do you have this type of tenacity? If God calls you to a task, do you refuse to let go? Those who want to advance the cause of Christ in the world cannot give up.

These three characteristics can only be lived out by noting the last phrase of 1:3: “in the Lord Jesus Christ.” When we abide in Christ and live in Him, supernatural living occurs. This is what is really exciting! As a pastor, I have to ask the question, “What do I give thanks for?” Am I especially grateful for an increase in our attendance or weekly offering? Would I be really impressed with new programs and a new facility, or am I most thankful for expressions of faith, hope, and love I see in you? *Encouragement is found in the lives that we live.*

Paul continues his thought in 1:4 and explains why the Thessalonians are able to live such godly lives. The short and sweet phrase he pens is: **“knowing, brethren³⁵ beloved by God, His choice³⁶ of you.”³⁷** With the word “choice,” we are confronted with the doctrine of election, a doctrine that has different effects on various people.³⁸ It can be a frightening, confusing, and maddening doctrine, for in election man’s finite mind meets head-on with the infinite mind of God. But this issue doesn’t have to be as hard as we like to make it. Scripture teaches both God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility.³⁹ How does all this work together? I’m not sure. But I know this: We will never understand the total concept of election this side of heaven. But we should not ignore this important doctrine that is taught throughout the Bible. In the end, we must recognize that the doctrine of election is an antinomy—two irreconcilable truths that are nonetheless true. It is sufficient to ask this question: Do you understand how a brown cow can eat green grass and give white milk and yellow butter? Of course not! Yet, we enjoy the products. In the same way, even though we can’t completely understand or explain election, we should still enjoy it because the Bible teaches it.⁴⁰

Since Paul doesn’t elaborate on the doctrine of election neither will I.⁴¹ I will just quickly break down this phrase. First of all, Paul is confident that the Thessalonians are elect so he uses the word “know.”⁴² There are no doubts, no ifs, no maybes, and no buts. We can know that we are elect, if we have believed in Christ. Works give further human or visible confirmation of one’s election (Jas 2:14-26). Paul affirms the Thessalonians in three expressions: (1) brethren, (2) beloved by God,⁴³ and (3) chosen of God.

When it comes to election, all you need to know is this: (1) Salvation begins with God.⁴⁴ (2) Salvation involves God’s love.⁴⁵ (3) Salvation requires faith.⁴⁶ God chose you to be saved.⁴⁷ If He had not chosen you, you would not be saved today. Sometimes we speak of “finding” the Lord, but if He had not found us first, we would never have found Him at all. Salvation begins with God, not with us. He chooses us and then we believe. Salvation is all by grace, all of God, all the time. If you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ, this should give you incredible confidence. The assurance of your salvation does not depend upon you; it rests on God’s choice of you. Many godly people try to explain away election and in doing so remove one of the strongest arguments for assurance and the security of the believer. The truth is: Nothing gives security to salvation like the concept of election. God is the creator, sustainer, and preserver of your salvation. Even if you are faithless, He remains faithful (2 Tim 2:13) because He has chosen you and adopted you into His family. You may choose to fall away from God, yet He will not choose to cast you out of His family (John 6:37-40). He loves you and will remain loyal in His commitment to you.

Paul is confident of the Thessalonians' election because of the evidence of God's grace at work in them and the gospel that he delivered. He concludes this section in 1:5 with a "triple whammy:" **"for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know⁴⁸ what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake."** (1) God's election is effective because it is the Word of God. The gospel is based upon the promise of God who says, "Whosoever will believe in Christ can have eternal life." (2) God's election is effective because it comes in the power of the Holy Spirit. Even when we have done our best as preachers, it will count for nothing without the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the hearers. God must prepare hearts and make them receptive to His Word. (3) God's election is effective because it produces deep conviction in the hearts of the hearers. This means people are so deeply convicted of their sin and their need for a savior that they run to the cross and embrace Jesus as their only hope of heaven. The phrase "full conviction" also means that the preacher and the hearers can be confident that the Word of God has been preached.

Paul closes this section by saying, "The gospel is not word only, for talk is cheap. We proved to be godly men among you." The gospel will be most effective when Christians live a life worthy of their calling. This means cultivating the fruit of the Spirit and godly character. John Wooden, the former basketball coach at UCLA said, "Ability may get you to the top, but it takes character to keep you there." Will you work on your character this week? Will you strive to become a contagious Christian? Will you become a person of faith, love, and hope? *Encouragement is found in the lives that we live.*

[Leaders need encouragement in ministry because it is easy to become discouraged. In our next section we will clearly see that...]

2. Our lives can provide much needed encouragement (1:6-10). In this section, Paul shares the specific reasons *why* he is so excited about the Thessalonians. Before we jump into these reasons, we must remember that this church is not typical of many churches today. It was not even typical of churches in Paul's day. (Read about the church at Corinth that Paul planted.) Nevertheless, the church at Thessalonica is God's ideal—it is the type of church that He wants every church to become. Sometimes you see a label on a bottle of powerful cleaner that says, "Do not use at full strength. Dilute with water first," because the liquid is too strong in its undiluted form. In this section we see Christianity in its earliest, undiluted form. No wonder the first Christians turned the world upside down.⁴⁹ We need to work through this section and pray for undiluted Christianity. In the paragraphs that follow, Paul provides several reasons why he is particularly excited about the faith of the Thessalonian believers.

The church followed their spiritual leaders (1:6a). Paul writes, **"You also became imitators of us and of the Lord."** The word translated "imitators" comes from the word *mimos* meaning "a mimic." Throughout his letters, Paul urges believers to "mimic" him as he mimics Christ.⁵⁰ It is important that young Christians respect spiritual leadership and learn from mature believers. Just as a newborn baby needs a family, so a newborn Christian needs the local church and the leaders there. It is equally important that leaders give believers something to look up to and mimic. Fortunately, many of you are worthy of imitation. You are an inspiration to me in every area of your lives.

The church received the Word (1:6b). The Thessalonian Christians **"received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit."** Paul does not use the typical word for "received," instead he uses an unusual word that refers to the warm welcome of a guest (as in Luke 10:8, 10; Heb 11:31). The Thessalonians seized the gospel with joy even in the midst of suffering. They received the Word with gladness. They could not get enough of it. What a congregation! A dream for every preacher! They were hungry for the Word; they were drinking in every word that was spoken; they were sitting on the edge of their seat. And they kept coming back for more.⁵¹ Does this describe you? Do you look forward to coming to church to hear God's Word? Do you look for opportunities throughout the week to get into the Word?

Please note that the Thessalonian believers received the Word “in much tribulation.” The word “tribulation” means “to press.”⁵² Do you ever feel like the world, your flesh, and Satan are pressing in on you? Trusting in Christ does not guarantee a life free from tension. These believers experienced rejection from family members, loss of employment, and social disgust.⁵³ Today, many believers experience physical persecution and even martyrdom.⁵⁴ Yet, we must recognize that God may bring suffering for the sake of an effective corporate witness.⁵⁵ Persecution can be the fastest way to grow a church in health and number. I know some of you willingly suffer for Christ. You’re willing to be an outcast at school and work. You don’t always fit in with your family and friends because of your faith. But you continue to persevere in Christ. I can assure you that God will honor you in the life to come.

The church encouraged other churches (1:7). By following their leaders and receiving the Word in much tribulation, yet with joy, the Thessalonians “**became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.**” This verse is the only place in the New Testament where a whole congregation is viewed as an example for other churches. And notice the word “example” is singular. Paul is referring to the whole church, not just a few standout members. The word “example” refers not merely to being an example which others are to follow, but also a pattern which influences them.⁵⁶ It’s not enough to passively live our lives before other Christians. Sometimes we must be more direct in our influence. Lori and our kids occasionally make cookies using different molds. Perhaps you have seen star-shaped cookies.⁵⁷ Those cookies were prepared using a mold. But it isn’t enough to show off the mold, one must press the dough into the mold and onto the baking sheet. This is what Paul is talking about—intentionally influencing Christians for Christ. When we do this, we will be able to lead the world.

The church spread the Word (1:8). The Thessalonian believers were both “receivers” (1:5) and “transmitters”—the Word went out from them. Paul writes, “**For the word of the Lord⁵⁸ has sounded forth⁵⁹ from you,⁶⁰ not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth,⁶¹ so that we have no need to say anything.**” The verb “sounded out” is not used anywhere else in the New Testament. Outside of the NT, it is used of a clap of thunder or the sound of a trumpet. It means “to reverberate like an echo.” Wherever Paul went, the people told him about the faith of the Thessalonian believers. It is interesting to note that the town of Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia.⁶² Similarly, Emmanuel resides in the state capital of the most unchurched state in the nation. If we showcase godly lives and sound forth the Word, we are capable of impacting our entire state. But this must involve you.⁶³ In my pastoral experience, I have discovered that most people will not respond to a pastor’s public invitation. For most people to believe in Christ for the first time, the personal touch is required. This means that we have folks into our home or take them out to a meal or talk to them in the foyer about a faith relationship with Jesus Christ. I can recall several times when people have told me that one of our regular attendees has believed the gospel. Consequently, I have been asked why this person didn’t believe in Christ through my gospel invitations. The answer is simple: Most people require a personal invitation in a one-on-one context. This is the responsibility of the church. We all bear the privilege and responsibility to share Christ with others. The Word must sound forth from YOU!

When I was in 6th grade, I started playing the guitar. I idolized my 16-year-old cousin who lived in San Jose and was in a heavy metal band. I wanted to follow in his footsteps. I even wanted acne and braces just like Duane. (God gave me the desires of my heart and I had both.) Anyway, I started playing the guitar because I wanted to play loud and proud. I had an electric guitar, but I knew I needed an amplifier. Unfortunately, I didn’t have the money to buy one and my parents weren’t going to buy me one for me. They were afraid of the damage I would do when the house started quaking with volume. They also didn’t want their ears or my ears turned to prunes. Unfortunately, I gave up the guitar and never purchased my amp. I never did learn how to rock. I believe there are some Christians out there who want to rock. They want to “sound forth” God’s Word but have never learned how and have struggled to be faithful in this task. God doesn’t want you to give up; He wants you to persist until He makes our church what He wants it to be. *Encouragement is found in the lives that we live.*

The church turned to God (1:9).⁶⁴ Paul writes, “**For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God.**”⁶⁵ The people throughout Thessalonica and Macedonia saw a change in the Thessalonian saints and they talked up the church. This is the best form of advertising there is! What made this church “the talk of the town?” They turned⁶⁶ to God from idols and immediately began serving the Lord. Note the order of words here. We would normally think in terms of turning *from* idols *to* God but here Paul’s argument is that they first turned to God and *then* away from idols. The Thessalonians didn’t leave their idols and then go out to find God. They turned to God and then left their idols.⁶⁷ Conversion is not only turning from something but it is a turning to Someone. Don’t worry about cleaning yourself up *first*. Let God do this. Now not everyone turns immediately or sufficiently, but this is God’s business. He is more interested in the growth and health of His children than we are. Let Him work in His time and in His way.

The church waited for Jesus’ return (1:10).⁶⁸ Paul writes that these believers who converted to Christ responded by “**wait[ing] for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues⁶⁹ us from the wrath to come.**” The word “wait” is only used here in the New Testament,⁷⁰ but it is used in the Greek Old Testament to describe a servant’s eager waiting for his wages (Job 7:2). It is also used to describe the longing of an afflicted person for his deliverance (Isa 59:11). The word means literally, to wait up. The Thessalonians were waiting up for the Lord’s return. The “coming wrath” could refer to a couple of significant events. (1) It could speak of the frightening eternal judgment of God. (2) It could refer to the tribulation period when God pours out His wrath on earth for a period of seven years. It seems to me that “the coming wrath” of 1:10 is best understood to refer to a particular wrath, the wrath of the Tribulation.⁷¹ Chronologically, the next great expression of God’s wrath is the Tribulation, which is a time of God’s wrath poured out on a Christ-rejecting world. The judgment of the Great White Throne (see Rev 20:11-15)—a judgment of all the unbelieving of all generations—does not occur until after the millennial reign of Christ, which occurs after the Tribulation and the events of Revelation 6-19. In this book, the resurrection of believers and the deliverance of believers are closely related or tied together (see 1 Thess 4:13f). Thus, the implication is that deliverance comes through the rapture.

This past weekend, my family and I went to Bremerton to officiate a wedding and celebrate my dad’s 70th birthday. My parents prepared for several days prior to our arrival. They cleaned the house, prepared bedrooms, and made desserts. They were ready for us when we arrived at the door. They anticipated our arrival. When you schedule a family vacation, likely you count down the days until you can “take off.” If you are engaged, you count down to your wedding day! If you have a husband in the military and he goes away for a year, do you and the kids count the days until he returns? Looking for the Lord to return at any moment will change our lives. It will transform our way of doing things. It will change the way we deal with temptations. It will alter our priorities. It will lead us to do something about broken relationships. Many of you are living this type of life and I thank God for you. *Encouragement is found in the lives that we live.* You have encouraged me. You bless me on a daily basis whenever I think of you.

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Scripture References

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10
Acts 17:1-10
Romans 1:7-9
Romans 5:1-5
Galatians 5:22-23
1 Corinthians 13:1-13
1 Corinthians 4:16; 11:1

Study Questions

1. The book of 1 Thessalonians covers some controversial topics. This can make for an uncomfortable study. With this in mind, reflect on the words of the great Southern Baptist pastor, Adrian Rogers (1931-2005), who said, "It is better to be divided by truth than to be united in error. It is better to speak the truth that hurts, and then heals, than falsehood that comforts, then kills. It is not love, and it is not friendship, if we fail to declare the whole counsel of God. It is better to be hated for telling the truth than to be loved for telling a lie. It is impossible to find anyone in the Bible who was a power for God who did not have enemies and was not hated. It's better to stand alone with the truth than to be wrong with a multitude. It is better ultimately to succeed with truth than to temporarily succeed with a lie." Do I agree with this quote? Why or why not? How can our church live this quote out? How can I apply this quote in my own life? In what ways can I support preachers and Christians who are speaking God's truth in love?
2. Am I sincerely thankful for my church (1:2-10)? How do I express my gratitude to my leaders and fellow members? Read about other examples of Paul's thankfulness in Romans 1:8; 1 Corinthians 1:4; 2 Corinthians 1:11; Ephesians 1:15-16; Philippians 1:3-5; Colossians 1:3-4; and 2 Thessalonians 1:3. What is Paul thankful for in these passages? How can I learn to share his heart of gratitude?
3. Do I have a prayer list (1:2-3)? If so, who is on my list? If not, will I begin one today? Who will I include in this prayer list? Will I include some people from Emmanuel? If so, who? How will I faithfully carry out the task of praying for others? In what ways can our church grow in prayer? How can I be involved?
4. Why are faith, love, and hope mentioned so frequently in the New Testament (1:3; 5:8)? See Romans 5:2-5; 1 Corinthians 13:13; Galatians 5:5-6; Colossians 1:3-4; Hebrews 6:10-12; 10:22-24; and 1 Peter 1:21-22. How can our church grow in our understanding and application of each of these areas? How can I apply these characteristics in my life?
5. How well do I exude joy in the midst of tribulation (1:6)? What was my response to the last trial I experienced? How can I improve both my perspective and my response? How can I imitate godly Christian leaders and become a spiritual model worthy of imitation (1:6-7)? Do I faithfully spread God's Word to others (1:8)? If so, how do I go about doing this and with whom? Do I anxiously anticipate the return of Christ (1:10)?

Notes

¹ This is not to disregard the importance of the individual, for individual persons make up each local church. Thus, if individuals have spiritual characteristics our churches will become what God wants them to be.

² Paul's words in 1 Thess 1:2-5 are one long sentence in Greek.

³ The name "Paul" occurs 158x's in then NT (128 of them in Acts).

⁴ "Silvanus" whom Paul mentions elsewhere (2 Cor 1:19; 2 Thess 1:1) is the same person as the "Silas" mentioned in Acts (see Acts 15:22-40; 16:19-29; 17:4-15; 18:5) and probably the person mentioned in 1 Peter 5:12. Either he had (like Paul) two names, one Semitic and one Latin, or "Silvanus" and "Silas" represent Latin and Greek forms, respectively, of a Semitic name. Michael W. Holmes, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*. NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 35.

⁵ Silas and Timothy were Paul's primary associates on his second missionary journey during which the church at Thessalonica came into existence (Acts 15:40). We know more about Timothy's background than we do about Silas'. Paul may have led Timothy to faith in Christ on the first missionary journey (1 Tim 1:2; Acts 13-14). Timothy had recently returned to Paul in Corinth. He had come from Thessalonica bearing news of conditions in the church there (3:1-2, 6). The Thessalonians knew all three men personally. Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on 1 Thessalonians" (<http://www.sonlight.com/constable/notes/pdf/1thessalonians.pdf>, 2007 ed.), 5

⁶ The phrase "in God the Father" is an unusual expression. Morris writes, "It is Paul's usual habit to speak about being 'in Christ,' though 'in God' does occur (Col 3:3; cf. Eph 3:9). But throughout these two epistles he constantly associates the Father and the Son in the closest of fashions (cf. v3; 3:11-13; 5:18; 2 Thess 1:1,2,8,12; 2:16-17; 3:5...). No higher view can possibly be taken of the Person of Christ. God is occasionally called 'Father' in the Old Testament, but Jesus taught his followers to see God as Father and it is a characteristic designation among the Christians." Leon Morris, *The Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians*. Tyndale New Testament Commentary series (London: Tyndale, 1984), 41.

⁷ The absence of any reference to Paul's apostleship in any of his inspired writings to the Macedonian churches, namely, those in Thessalonica and Philippi, is noteworthy. He mentioned his apostleship in all his other epistles and sometimes had to defend it vigorously (e.g., in 2 Corinthians). Evidently the Macedonian churches never questioned Paul's apostleship as did the churches elsewhere (e.g., in Galatia and Corinth). Constable, "Notes on 1 Thessalonians," 5.

⁸ Of all of Paul's churches, Thessalonica and Philippi were the most supportive.

⁹ 1-2 Thessalonians are the only Pauline Epistles in which Paul did not elaborate on his name or the names of his fellow writers. This probably implies that his relationship with the Thessalonians was stable. D. Michael Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians*. The New American Commentary series. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 47.

¹⁰ *Contra* Holmes, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 39, who doesn't see any significance to this omission.

¹¹ See Acts 18:5; 2 Cor 1:19.

¹² Acts 16:1-3; 17:4, 10, 14.

¹³ Holmes, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 39.

¹⁴ Hampton Keathley III, "Christian Greetings, The Salutation" (1 Thess 1:1): *An Exegetical and Devotional Commentary on First Thessalonians* (www.bible.org).

¹⁵ Sam Gordon, *Hope and Glory*. Truth for Today (Greenville, SC: Ambassador International, 2005), 13.

¹⁶ For further explanation see Keathley III, "Christian Greetings, The Salutation."

¹⁷ "God" and "Jesus" are combined in a syntactical way by using one Gk. preposition (*en*) to identify both (1 Thess 3:13; 2 Thess 1:2, 12; 2:16).

¹⁸ *Kurios* is the Septuagint representation of the Hebrew *Yahweh* of the Old Testament. "Jesus is Lord" seems to have been a very early Christian credal confession, especially in Gentile churches.

¹⁹ See John 1:1; 20:28; Rom 10:9-13; Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:15-18.

²⁰ Constable, "Notes on 1 Thessalonians," 5.

²¹ Paul's thanksgiving extends from 1 Thess 1:2 to 2:12 and is formally picked up again in 2:13 and 3:9. G.K. Beale, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*. IVP New Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 44.

²² At least three times in 1 Thess, Paul gave thanks for the church and the way it responded to his ministry (1:2; 2:13; 3:9). He usually begins his letters with thanksgiving. Galatians is the one exception to this rule. Weima writes, "The Pauline thanksgiving possesses at least three important functions. First, it has a *pastoral* function: The thanksgiving reestablishes the apostle's relationship with his readers by means of a positive expression of gratitude to God for their faith and work. This is important if Paul wants his letters to be accepted and his exhortations to be obeyed by his readers. Second, it has a *paraenetic* function: There is an implicit (or even, at times, explicit)

challenge for the readers to live up to the praise that the apostle is giving them in his words of thanksgiving. Third, the thanksgiving has a *foreshadowing* function: It anticipates the main themes to be developed in the body of the letter.” Jeffrey A.D. Weima, “1 Thessalonians,” *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 411.

²³ Beale, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 44.

²⁴ Paul uses the plural pronoun “we” (*humon*) more in 1 Thessalonians than in any other NT letter. Bob Utley 87.

²⁵ The verb *eucharistoumen* “we give thanks” is related to the noun *charis* (“grace”). Paul and his companions thank God for the fruits of grace (i.e., the Thessalonians).

²⁶ In giving thanks and praying for the Thessalonians (1:2), Paul models behavior he will later exhort them to practice (5:17-18).

²⁷ Paul introduces the subject of prayer at least thirteen times in 1 and 2 Thessalonians. On four occasions, he reminds his flock that he has and is praying for them (1:2-4; 3:9-10; 2 Thess 1:3; 2:13). Most frequently (six times), Paul is found praying for his beloved flock (3:11-13; 5:23, 28; 2 Thess 1:11-12; 2:16-1). Twice Paul’s need for the church to pray for him surfaces (5:25; 2 Thess 3:1-2). Only once does the pastor instruct his people on how to pray (5:16-18). Richard Mayhue, *First and Second Thessalonians*. Focus on the Bible (Great Britain: Christian Focus, 1999), 43.

²⁸ The word *humon* (“your”) is placed emphatically at the head of the three phrases.

²⁹ Gk. *pantote*, cf. 1 Thess 2:13; 3:9; 2 Thess 1:3; 2:13.

³⁰ The word *adialeptos* (“unceasingly”) occurs three times in 1 Thess (1:3; 2:13; 5:17) and elsewhere in the NT only in Rom 1:9.

³¹ The three nouns (“work,” “faith,” “perseverance”) are also found in the same order in Rev 2:2.

³² Grant C. Richison, *1 Thessalonians* (<http://www.gracenotes.info/> 1997), 16.

³³ Gk. *kopos*, see 1 Thess 2:9; 3:5; 2 Thess 3:8; cf. 1 Cor 3:8; 15:58; 2 Cor 6:5; 11:23, 27; Gal 6:17.

³⁴ The Greek word *hupomone* is defined by BDAG as “the capacity to hold out or bear up in the face of difficulty, patience, endurance, fortitude, steadfastness, perseverance.”

³⁵ The Greek word translated “brethren” (*adelphoi*) should be rendered “brothers and sisters” or “fellow Christians” Cf. BDAG 18 s.v. *adelphos* 1, where considerable nonbiblical evidence for the plural *adelphoi* (meaning “brothers and sisters”) is cited. The word is used 15 times in 1 Thess (1:4; 2:1, 9, 14, 17; 3:7; 4:1, 10, 13; 5:1, 4, 12, 14, 25, 26, 27; cf. 2 Thess. 1:3; 2:1, 13, 15; 3:1, 6, 13).

³⁶ The noun *ekloge* (“choice”) only occurs six times in the NT (1 Thess 1:4; Rom 9:11; 11:5, 7, 28; 2 Pet 1:10).

³⁷ Whenever you read about a call in the Bible, it indicates divine election—God is calling out a people from this world (Acts 15:13-18). Seven times in John 17, Jesus referred to believers as those whom the Father gave to Him out of the world (John 17:2, 6, 9, 11, 12, 24).

³⁸ Witherington notes, “The Pauline documents which have the highest proportion of the terminology of election and calling are not Romans and Ephesians but 1 and 2 Thessalonians where we find some eight instances (election in 1 Thess 1:4; 5:9; 2 Thess 2:13; calling 1 Thess 2:12; 4:7; 5:23-24; 2 Thess 1:11; 2:14).” Ben Witherington III, *1 and 2 Thessalonians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 64.

³⁹ Election and evangelism go together. The person who says, “God will save those He wants to save and He doesn’t need my help!” understands neither election nor evangelism. In the Bible, election always involves *responsibility*. God chose Israel and made them an elect nation so that they might witness to the Gentiles.

⁴⁰ Gordon, *Hope and Glory*, 26-27.

⁴¹ Weima suggests, “The fact that the apostle uses the term *election* without any accompanying explanation suggests that this subject must have been an integral part of his original preaching in the Thessalonian church.” Weima, “1 Thessalonians,” 412.

⁴² If God chooses individuals for salvation, why should I bother being a witness? After all, those whom God chooses will be saved one way or another. I would simply say this: The doctrine of election is not an excuse to not share Christ; it is one of the greatest encouragements for sharing Jesus, for it means that there will be those who will trust in Christ! If salvation was solely a matter of the effectiveness of the witness or humankind choosing God, we would have every right to be discouraged and quit because no one would believe in Christ. But since God takes the initiative with people and salvation is God’s work, we can be sure that there will be some who believe our message. Paul’s experience at Corinth (Acts 18:1-11) is a perfect illustration of this truth. Corinth was a wicked city, and it was not easy to start a church there. The people were godless sinners (1 Cor 6:9-11), but Paul preached the Word faithfully. When persecution arose from the Jewish unbelievers, Paul moved from the synagogue into the house of Justus. Then the Lord encouraged Paul: “Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I

am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city” (Acts 18:9-10). The fact that God had His elect in Corinth encouraged Paul to remain there for a year and a half.

⁴³ The phrase “beloved by God” was a phrase which the Jews applied only to supremely great men like Moses and Solomon, and to the nation of Israel itself. Now the greatest privilege of the greatest men of God’s chosen people has been extended to the humblest of the Gentiles. Furthermore, the adjective “beloved” (*agapetos*) is usually used of God’s love for Jesus (Matt 3:17; 12:18; 17:5; Eph 1:6).

⁴⁴ Paul writes, “God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation” (2 Thess 2:13). Jesus declared, “You did not choose Me but I chose you” (John 15:16a). Again, Paul states, “He [the Father] chose us in Him before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:4). The entire plan of salvation was born in the heart of God long before man was created or the universe formed.

⁴⁵ Paul called these saints “brethren beloved”—not only beloved by Paul (see 1 Thess 2:17), but also beloved by God. God’s love made Calvary possible (Rom 5:8), and there Jesus Christ died for our sins. But it is not God’s love that saves the sinner; it is God’s grace. God in His grace gives us what we do not deserve, and God in His mercy does not give us what we do deserve. This explains why Paul often opened his letters with, “Grace to you and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess 1:1).

⁴⁶ Paul writes, “For by grace you have been saved through faith” (Eph 2:8a). Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy brought the Gospel to Thessalonica and preached in the power of God (1 Thess 1:5). Some people who heard the message believed and turned from their vain idols to the true and living God (1 Thess 1:9). The Spirit of God used the Word of God to generate faith (Rom 10:17). Paul called this “sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth” (2 Thess 2:13).

⁴⁷ Cf. Eph 1:4-5: “...just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will.”

⁴⁸ Beale writes, “The second person plural of know (*oida*) is always used to underscore a reminder for assurance of a truth in the Thessalonian epistles (ten times).” Beale, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 52.

⁴⁹ Ray Pritchard, “What is a Christian?” (1 Thess 1:4-10):

<http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/2007-05-20-What-is-a-Christian/>.

⁵⁰ E.g., 1 Cor 4:16; 11:1.

⁵¹ Gordon, *Hope and Glory*, 39.

⁵² See 2 Thess 1:4, 6; cf. John 16:33; Acts 14:22.

⁵³ Weima, “1 Thessalonians,” 412 writes, “The reference here and elsewhere to the suffering experienced by the Thessalonian church does not likely refer to physical persecution but to social harassment. There is virtually no evidence that Christians anywhere in the Roman empire during the 50s suffered from any organized opposition or physical oppression. Many sources do indicate, however, the offense, even disgust, felt by non-Christian neighbors and fellow citizens when converts to Christianity declined to take part in normal social and cultic activities.”

⁵⁴ To learn more see <http://www.opendoorsusa.org/> and <http://www.persecution.com/>.

⁵⁵ Beale, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 59.

⁵⁶ I. Howard Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*. New Century Bible Commentary series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans and London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott Pub. Ltd., 1983), 55.

⁵⁷ This idea came from Beale, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 58.

⁵⁸ “The word of the Lord” is a technical expression in OT literature, often referring to a divine prophetic utterance (e.g., Gen 15:1; Isa 1:10; Jonah 1:1). In the NT it occurs 15 times: 3 times as *rhema tou kuriou* (Luke 22:61; Acts 11:16; 1 Pet 1:25) and 12 times as *logos tou kuriou* (1 Thess 1:8; 4:15; 2 Thess 3:1; Acts 8:25; 13:44, 48, 49; 15:35, 36; 16:32; 19:10, 20). As in the OT, this phrase focuses on the prophetic nature and divine origin of what has been said. See NET study notes.

⁵⁹ The verb *exechetai* is found only here in the NT. It is where we get our English word “echo” from. Morris writes, “It is a vivid word, and expositors from Chrysostom on have often thought the imagery to have been derived from the sounding out of a trumpet, though some prefer to think of the rolling of thunder. Either way there is nothing apologetic about it! The perfect denotes the continuing activity, as does the use of *en* rather than *eis* (though this cannot be pressed). The word is pictured as still sounding forth.” Morris, *The Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians*, 46.

⁶⁰ The words “from you” (*aph humon*) are placed first in the Greek text for emphasis. Gordon writes, “The ‘you’ is personal—it is as individual as they can be, and at the same time, it is corporate, for none are left out. There is no exclusion clause. There was no way any of them could opt out if they did not feel like it or feel up to it.” Gordon, *Hope and Glory*, 42.

⁶¹ Literally, the Greek text has, “the faith of you, the one toward God (*he pistis humon he pros ton theon*).” The article is repeated to emphatically call attention to the new object of their faith.

⁶² When the Thessalonians came to know Jesus, God’s message of salvation seemed to reverberate through all the hills and valleys of Greece. John R.W. Stott, *The Gospel and the End of Time: The Message of 1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991), 35.

⁶³ At the end of each of the four Gospels and at the beginning of the book of Acts, there are commissions for the churches to obey (Matt 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-49; John 20:21; Acts 1:8).

⁶⁴ How did Paul know that these Thessalonians were elected of God? He saw a change in their lives. If you put 1 Thess 1:3 next to 1:9-10, you will get the picture:

Your work of faith	You turned to God from idols
Your labor of love	You served the living and true God
Your steadfastness of hope	You wait for His Son from heaven

⁶⁵ The closest parallel to 1 Thess 1:9-10 is Jer 10:10: “But the LORD is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King. At His wrath the earth quakes, and the nations cannot endure His indignation.” See Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 57 and Beale, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 61. It is also worth noting that this is the only place in the NT where the phrase “living and true God” is used. Cf. John 1:9; 7:28; 15:1; 17:3; Exod 34:6; Ps 86:15; Isa 65:16. Ernest Best, *A Commentary on the First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*. Black’s New Testament Commentaries series. 2nd ed. (London: Black, 1977), 82-83.

⁶⁶ Keathley writes, “The verb *epistrepho* ‘to turn, return’ and was used of a change of mind or course of action. Idolatry in any of its forms is the product of those who have turned away from God (see Rom. 1:18f). Faith in Christ is the first step in returning to God. In keeping with 1:8, turning to God involves faith in God through Christ, as the whole of the New Testament teaches. It is in essence the concept of repentance; it means turning from former sources of trust (whatever that might be) to trust in God’s plan of salvation and life through Christ. This also fits with 1:6 which shows the change in their lives was the product of welcoming the gospel in faith.” Hampton Keathley III, “The Commendation and Thanksgiving” (1 Thess 1:2-10): *An Exegetical and Devotional Commentary on First Thessalonians* (www.bible.org).

⁶⁷ An idol is anything that we worship, anything that takes the place of God in our lives. Many people worship money, sex, family, work, leisure, etc.

⁶⁸ Christians are waiting for Jesus Christ, and He may return at any time. We are not waiting for any “signs”; we are waiting for the Savior. That is one of the primary differences between the rapture and the Second Coming (cf. Rev 19:11-21).

⁶⁹ Paul rarely refers to Jesus as the “Deliverer,” but we find this term in Rom 11:26, which draws on the LXX rendering of Isa 59:20 where the participle is used as a divine title. F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*. Word Biblical Commentary series (Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 20.

⁷⁰ The word *anameno* (“wait for”) only occurs here in the NT. However, a related word occurs in Acts 1:4 where Luke writes, “Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait [*perimenein*] for what the Father had promised, ‘Which,’ He said, ‘you heard of from Me.’”

⁷¹ Some reasons are as follows: “Wrath” has the definite article, actually, it is a restrictive attributive, “the wrath, the coming one,” and this suggests something very specific which was on the minds of the Thessalonians as seen later in this epistle (5:1f). Jesus will deliver Christians “from the wrath to come.” Thessalonian Christians do not have to be delivered from Hell sometime in the future. For them the deliverance is past (John 5:24). This “wrath” is the wrath of the Tribulation just before the Millennium (Revelation 6:17). Jesus delivers believers from this period of Tribulation. First Thessalonians deals with the coming of Christ in every chapter (1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:23). Each chapter ends with a reference to this event. The present tense of “wait” suggests that “wrath” here is the Tribulation. They expected His return at any moment and it is His imminent return that delivers them and all believers. Keathley III, “The Commendation and Thanksgiving.”