

## “Tomorrow’s World” (1 Thessalonians 2:13-20)

It’s been said, “Only two things in this world are eternal—the Bible and people.” If this is true (and it is), it only makes sense to build your life around those things that will last forever. Think about it: God’s Word will last forever...people last forever...everything else disappears. In light of this sobering reality, how should we live? We should live our life backwards from the judgment seat of Christ and ask, “What difference will my life make in 10,000 years?” Most of the things we work for or worry about won’t matter in three weeks, let alone three months or three years. We focus on the trivial and forget to pursue the eternal. But 10,000 times 10,000 years from now, you’ll still be glad you invested your life for Jesus Christ. In 1 Thess 2:13-20 Paul says, “*You can shape tomorrow by starting today.*” In these eight verses, we are challenged to give thanks for two of God’s blessings.

**1. Thank God for the work of His Word (2:13-16).**<sup>1</sup> In this first section, Paul thanks God for the response of the church to Scripture.<sup>2</sup> In 2:13, Paul pens a lengthy but potent verse: “**For this reason<sup>3</sup> we also constantly<sup>4</sup> thank God that when you received<sup>5</sup> the word of God<sup>6</sup> which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which<sup>7</sup> also performs its work<sup>8</sup> in you who believe.**”<sup>9</sup> Paul states that he and his coworkers “constantly” thank God for the way the Thessalonians responded after they preached the gospel to them. He thanks God that they “received” God’s Word. The word “received” is an objective external response that refers to “the hearing of the ear.” It’s like signing a receipt at the post office so you can accept a package. Paul means that the Thessalonians listened intently to the message he preached because they knew it came from God. The word translated “accepted” is a subjective internal response that refers to “the hearing of the heart.”<sup>10</sup> This word is used of welcoming a guest into your home. It is a picture of warm hospitality. The point is: it’s very possible to listen to preaching and not be changed by it. It’s something else to welcome God’s message into your heart and let it transform your life.<sup>11</sup>

How frequently do you thank God for people who have received and accepted the gospel? This past Sunday I met a wonderful first-time couple. After church my family and I went to the *Mayan* restaurant and ran into this same couple. We asked them to join us and we learned that the wife believed the gospel within the last year. Furthermore, she came from a Muslim home in South Africa! After hearing her testimony, I couldn’t help but express thanks to God! I was overwhelmed by how He reached this young woman who vowed that she would never become a Christian with the gospel of Jesus Christ. During this past week, I have been reminded to thank God for how He is constantly touching people and reaching people with His Word. Do you need to express thanks for some people you know who have trusted in Jesus? Why not write down several names on a 3x5 card or a Post-it-Note and then daily thank the Lord for these individuals and pray that they continue to grow?

Before we move on to 2:14, we need to further apply 2:13. As a church family, how can we grow in our response to God’s Word?

- ***Pray for a deeper appreciation for the Word.*** Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865) once said, “The Bible is God’s best gift to man.”<sup>12</sup> It is easy to nod our head at this statement, but it is harder to live out its truth. It’s been said, “There is little difference in people, but that little difference makes a big difference.” The little difference is attitude.<sup>13</sup> If you’re not really excited about the Word, pray that God will deepen your appreciation. Specifically, pray that you will treasure God’s Word like Job who said it was worth more than his daily food, or David who said it was more valuable than fine gold, or even the Psalmist who said it was more valuable than sleep. If the preaching of the Word bores you and you can’t seem to stay awake and engaged, don’t just keep sleeping through sermons and devotional times. Pray that the Lord will give you an insatiable hunger and zeal for His Word. *You can shape tomorrow by starting today.*

- **Work hard in your study of the Word.** James 1:21 tells us that the Word is implanted in us the moment we believe in Christ. Yet, we still bear a responsibility to read and study God's Word. We can't pawn this responsibility off on busyness or any other excuse. This past week, I played several games of chess with my son, Justin. I have never played chess before but I am trying to learn the game so that I can spend more time with Justin doing things he likes to do. Well, after getting skunked three games in a row, I thought to myself, "This is frustrating. Why do I make such dumb mistakes? Why can't I play better than a nine-year-old boy?" It immediately dawned on me that Justin learned how to play chess from his mom who is quite good. If I really wanted to learn how to play chess, I could ask Lori to teach me. I could also check out *Chess for Dummies* at the local library. Easier still, I could go online and study various websites on how to be a chess champion. So why don't I? I haven't made the decision to do so. Perhaps you have never chosen to read and study the Word. If so, you are without excuse. (I say this with love and compassion.) We have every opportunity in this day and age to learn the Bible for ourselves. Today, ask a fellow believer to study the Bible with you. Plug into a Sunday class or small group where the Bible is taught. Visit a website that will teach you more about the Bible. I recommend [www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org). On this website, you will find excellent articles arranged by way of topic and biblical book. But do something today! *You can shape tomorrow by starting today.*
- **Apply what you hear and learn in the Word.** It is not enough to appreciate the teaching of God's Word; we must apply it in our experience to make it fully effective in our lives. After all, what makes the Bible unique from all other books is its inherent ability to transform lives. Those who read and apply the Bible will see their lives transformed like a caterpillar turns into a butterfly. Think of it this way: What if you took food into your mouth, chewed it up, and never swallowed it? The food would be of no benefit to you. It might taste good, but its nutrients would not be absorbed into your system. If you do not digest your recommended daily intake of food you will eventually die. This principle is also true in the spiritual realm. Are you on spiritual life support? Do you have a head full of Bible knowledge and feet empty of Bible obedience? If so, get your feet in gear and obey what you read. One of your goals ought to be to consistently model Christ in everything you say and do. Personally, I find that one of my most challenging ambitions is that my wife, Lori, would be able to honestly say that I am the godliest man that she knows. If the one who knows me best can say that, I know I am making progress in applying the Scriptures and modeling Christ to others.

In 2:14, Paul further explains that he is thankful for the Thessalonians because they willingly accepted persecution for the sake of Christ. He writes, **"For you, brethren, became imitators<sup>14</sup> of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews."** The Christian life is no manicured bed of perfumed roses. It's not all plain sailing into an orange sunset.<sup>15</sup> The church at Thessalonica became "imitators" of other churches by undergoing suffering. The exact nature of the persecution is not stated. It may have been persecution by the local government. Perhaps it consisted largely of persecution from former friends, discrimination in the marketplace, and even violence that went unnoticed by the magistrates. Regardless, belief in Christ and God's Word attracts persecution. The term "countrymen" refers to fellow Thessalonian Gentiles.<sup>16</sup> In our context, it could mean the people closest to you. If you decide to believe the Bible is the Word of God, many people who are close to you will not share your faith. If your spouse, your siblings, your parents, your children, or your friends reject your faith, how will you respond? Will you boldly carry on even though you may not please them? It is very difficult to live a dynamic Christian life when we are constantly trying to please people. I like what Bill Cosby once said, "I don't know the key to success, but the key to failure is trying to please everybody."<sup>17</sup> If those closest to you criticize you, will you take it on the chin like a spiritual man or woman? People constantly hurt by what others say about them are usually distracted and ineffective. It is very difficult to live a dynamic Christian life when wearing a thin skin.<sup>18</sup>

If you struggle with being a people pleaser and having thin skin, I have two suggestions for you. *(1) Seek to hang out with bold believers.* When you observe a brother or sister that is fearless, you will become emboldened. It is nearly impossible to spend time with a bold believer and not have some of their courage rub off on you. If you don't know any bold believers, get to know some bold unbelievers and learn how they share their message with others. *(2) Study the persecuted church.* When you read about our brothers and sisters in Christ who are being tortured and killed for their faith in Christ, you will find yourself challenged and inspired to be bold for Christ. I would encourage you to get on the mailing list of *Voice of the Martyrs*. Their website can be found at [www.persecution.com](http://www.persecution.com). They have a very helpful weekly e-mail called "VOM—USA News & Prayer Update." This helps me to stay current on the suffering of my spiritual family members. I also subscribe to a VOM monthly magazine, along with various resources for my children, available from their website. These tools will help you to be bold for Christ. *You can shape tomorrow by starting today.*

In 2:15-16, Paul pens two very controversial verses directed toward Jews. Although the purpose of these words is illustrative, these verses have caused some to insist that Paul is anti-Semitic. However, before arriving at a decision, read Paul's words for yourself: "[The unbelieving Jews who persecuted the churches in Judea] **who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out.<sup>19</sup> They are not pleasing to God, but hostile<sup>20</sup> to all men, hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved;<sup>21</sup> with the result that they always fill up<sup>22</sup> the measure of their sins.<sup>23</sup> But wrath has<sup>24</sup> come upon them to the utmost.**"<sup>25</sup> Paul says that some first-century Jews were responsible for instigating the death of Jesus. Furthermore, the nation of Israel has a long history of rejecting the prophets God sent to them. Finally, it was the Jewish religious leaders in Thessalonica who instigated the riot that led to Paul, Silas, and Timothy being run out of town. It was also the Jewish religious leaders who resisted Paul's efforts to share God's good news about Jesus with the non-Jewish people. So in these verses Paul is not talking about all Jewish people of all time, or even all Jewish people of his time.<sup>26</sup> This passage is a condemnation of some of the Jewish people of a particular time in a particular place, specifically the religious leaders who rejected Jesus and opposed the early church in the first century. What Paul is saying here is that those Jewish people who were engaged in the activities he lists here are under God's judgment. He's not talking about all Jewish people everywhere, because Paul himself is Jewish, and the Christians living in Judea who were suffering were also Jewish.

Tragically, horrible evils have been justified toward Jews from a misinterpretation of this passage. This is not God's heart, for God loves the Jewish people—they are His chosen people. Nevertheless, we can't exonerate those who reject Christ. Paul makes it clear that the Jews who are hostile to Jesus are heaping judgment on themselves and their hostility will one day be answered by God.<sup>27</sup> It is important to understand that God's wrath isn't referring to God losing His temper and flying off the handle in anger. Paul is talking about God's justice to those who oppose His work in the world.<sup>28</sup>

[We must thank God for the work of His Word. Why? Because God's Word changes lives!]

**2. Thank God for the work of His followers (2:17-20).** In this second section, Paul specifically expresses his joy over the Thessalonians. In 2:17 he writes, "**But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short while—in person, not in spirit—were all the more eager with great desire to see your face.**" Paul fervently loved his Thessalonian converts, but persecution forced him to leave. The words "taken away" (*orphanizo*) means to make an orphan of someone.<sup>29</sup> Paul viewed himself as an orphan separated from his family. Perhaps you have observed on film some of the horrible scenes from World War II when Jewish fathers and mothers were "torn away" from their children and sent off to different locations, sometimes never to see each other again. Imagine the inner pain!<sup>30</sup> Paul's pain is comparable to these families. Consequently, he is "eager" and possesses "great desire." The term "desire" is the word used for lust in the New Testament. It almost always has a negative sense. The point being, this is a strong word to describe Paul's love for this church.

Do you have this type of love for your church? It has been said, “If absence makes the heart grow fonder, some Christians must really love the church.” Seriously, do you love God’s people? When you are separated from this body, do you ache or do you breathe a sigh of relief? Are you attending church to merely fulfill your religious obligation or do you truly love God’s people? If this church family was taken away from you, what would you do? How would you feel? Would you even care? Pray that God increases your love and commitment to His church. *You can shape tomorrow by starting today.*

In 2:18, Paul shares a very intriguing verse. He writes, **“For we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, more than once—and yet Satan hindered us.”**<sup>31</sup> This verse informs us that not all of Paul’s plans worked out.<sup>32</sup> One of the primary reasons for this is that Satan “hindered” him. The word “hindered” is a military term used for the destruction of roads and bridges in the face of the enemy’s advance. That’s right, Satan hindered Paul and he can hinder you and me. However, we must recognize that God permits satanic opposition. In fact, Satan can’t touch our lives or our ministries apart from God’s permission.<sup>33</sup> If Satan cuts up one road, then God will create another. If the devil closes a door, God will open a window. We must always recognize that wherever God is at work, Satan and his demons are surely present.<sup>34</sup> Yet, instead of being frustrated by this, we need to be complemented because we are a threat to hell. If we aren’t doing much for the Lord, Satan will leave us alone. You may face opposition at work or from a critical colleague or from a classmate, a friend, a teacher, a neighbor, a relative, or even from your children or your spouse. Satan’s primary strategy against the church is to discourage us by stirring up opposition so that we will stop spreading the gospel. We must always recognize that our battle is not against flesh and blood but against satanic rulers, principalities, and powers (Eph 6:12).

Paul concludes in 2:19-20 by explaining (“for”) why he is so eager to see the Thessalonians: **“For who**<sup>35</sup> [not “what”] **is our**<sup>36</sup> **hope or joy or crown of exultation?**<sup>37</sup> **Is it not even you, in the presence**<sup>38</sup> **of our Lord Jesus at His coming?**<sup>39</sup> **For you are our glory and joy.”** Every new parent understands what Paul means. What happens when a baby is born? You can’t wait to tell the good news. You have pictures and statistics and stories about how he has his daddy’s chin and his mother’s eyes and how smart he is and how it doesn’t matter what the doctor says, you know he smiled at you. He’s the smartest, best-looking, cutest baby ever born. And you’ve got pictures to prove it!<sup>40</sup>

In these two verses, Paul and his coworkers call the church at Thessalonica our “joy.” Paul concludes this passage the way he began, with thanksgiving. These new believers are Paul’s hope. He is confident in their faith and obedience. The Thessalonians are also a source of joy and spiritual delight, not only in the present time but in the future, at the return of the Lord. Paul also calls these believers his “crown of exultation.”<sup>41</sup> Paul did not say that he would receive a crown, though this is suggested. He said that the saints themselves would be his crown when he met them at the judgment seat. To be sure, some of the believers in the church were not living as they should, and some were a burden to Paul. But when he looked ahead and saw them in glory, they brought joy to his heart. In his letters, Paul often pictured these rewards as “crowns.”<sup>42</sup> It is the word *stephanos* from which we get the names Stephen and Stephanie. The word refers to a wreath of leaves given to the winner of a race in the Isthmian Games. One of Paul’s rewards in heaven would be the pleasure of seeing all those new Christians standing with him.

In 2:20 Paul declares, **“For you are our glory and joy.”** The word “you” is emphatic in the Greek—“*you* and especially *you* are our glory and joy.” The word “glory” (*doxa*) means “fame” or “renown”<sup>43</sup> that a person receives when honored by others. Paul is saying, “Whatever honor is ascribed to me has its source in you Thessalonians.”<sup>44</sup> It is Paul’s honor to introduce his converts to the Lord Jesus Christ. When he sees the Lord, he will know that his team’s glory will be people in heaven because of their witness. This is legitimate pride because it is based on what God did through them. Our reputation in eternity will be based, in part, on winning people to Christ.<sup>45</sup> Do you have a part in building up Christ’s Kingdom? Will people point to you that you had a part in bringing them into the Kingdom?<sup>46</sup> *You can shape tomorrow by starting today.*

This leads to a very fascinating question: Does it make any difference what local church you attend? I would argue that it makes an eternal difference because of the biblical significance of team ministry and corporate rewards. In the West, we are consumed with individual performance, but in the Scriptures, God makes it clear that He cares about the church.

By way of analogy, the National Football League each year “crowns” a team the Super Bowl Champions. All team members receive, among other things, a ring commemorating their participation on the championship team. Whether or not they actually played in the last game (or any game), all are rewarded. All that matters is that each player was on the team. Of course, it is hard to imagine a player who does not contribute in some way to a championship team, especially as the whole group embraces its quest together. Corporate rewards, as a possibility at the judgment seat of Christ, will mean that some of the believer’s rewards (or loss of rewards) will be based on the corporate faithfulness and works they all accomplished (or neglected) together. This in no way compromises individual responsibility. Indeed, a “most valuable player” exists in the Super Bowl analogy. Individuals can be rewarded for both his/her own efforts and the entire team’s results.<sup>47</sup>

So both individual and corporate rewards are significant. We need to impact people individually and corporately with the gospel. You may be serving in our VBS ministry next week. As an individual, you have served behind the scenes, invited your neighbors, prayed, and prepared for your responsibilities. Next week though, you will also be teaming up with the one of the greatest groups of people ever assembled. You will be a part of what God is going to do simply because you’re a part of the Emmanuel family. And you will reap whatever rewards come from this next week because of your partnership with this church.

This principle is applicable for youth, college, and adult ministries as well. It matters what your church believes. It matters how faithful your pastors are. It matters how zealous your ministry partners are. It matters how unified your body. It matters in this life and it will matter for all eternity.

What difference will your life make in 10,000 years? How will you wish you had spent your few years on this earth? Live your life backwards from the judgment seat of Christ. *You can shape tomorrow by starting today.*

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**Scripture References**

1 Thessalonians 2:13-20

2 Thessalonians 1:4-5

Hebrews 10:33-34

Matthew 23:29-34

Philippians 4:1

James 1:21-25; 5:7-8

Revelation 2:10

**Study Questions**

1. What is my typical response to preaching (2:13)? Boring? Exciting? Depends? How do I prepare my heart every Sunday morning to receive and welcome the preached Word? Do I spend time in God's Word throughout the week with the goal of feeding my own soul? If so, how do I go about this? What have I learned over the years? Can I pass on some of my experiences (both good and bad) with another believer?
2. Am I thankful for believers I know who are receiving God's Word (2:13)? Presently, who am I most thankful for? How often do I thank God for these persons? Have I followed up these believers and also affirmed God's work in their lives? What was their response?
3. Am I willing to suffer hardship for the gospel (2:14)? Read 2 Timothy 1:12; 2:3, 9. How will I prepare my heart and mind for various hardships that I may experience? How can I encourage Jewish people to believe in Christ (2:14-16)? Have I been intimidated by those who reject Christ? If so, how can I learn to be bolder in my faith and witness? How should God's future judgment give me a sense of confidence and urgency?
4. Have I experienced Satan hindering me in my life and ministry (2:18)? When did this happen? How did I respond? As I look back on this episode do I now see how Christ used Satan to accomplish godly purposes in my life and ministry?
5. Have I ever considered the concept that the church I attend and serve can play a role in my eternal reward (2:19-20)? Am I conscious that Christianity can be a "team sport?" How will this affect my decision as to what church I attend? Do I need to remain in my current church or consider other options? If the Lord calls me to remain, how will I grow in my role as a teammate?

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Thess 2:13-16 serves a transitional role in this letter. In 2:12, Paul's focus shifted from the behavior of the missionaries (the primary subject of 2:1-12) to that of the Thessalonians. Now, still focusing on the Thessalonians, he picks up and develops further a point touched on in 1:6: the Thessalonians' acceptance of the gospel in spite of severe suffering (2:13-14). This reference to suffering in turn sets up what he will say in 2:17-20 (where his focus again shifts from the Thessalonians back to the missionaries). Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians*. New International Greek Testament Commentary series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/Exeter, England: Paternoster, 1990), 109.

<sup>2</sup> This verse begins with the second thanksgiving section in a series of three (1:2-5; 2:13; 3:9-13) that dominate the tone of the first three chapters. Holmes notes, "In 1:2 Paul's thanks are ultimately rooted in God's choice of the Thessalonians (1:4); here he gives thanks for their acceptance of the message, and in 3:9 he will give thanks for their continuing steadfastness (3:8)." Michael W. Holmes, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*. NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 80.

<sup>3</sup> The phrase *dia touto* ("for this reason") can either refer to previous (1 Thess 2:1-12) material (see G.K. Beale, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*. IVP New Testament Commentary [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003], 76-77) or forthcoming material (Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 110. Holmes, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 81). A similar use in 1 Thess 3:5 supports a forward view. Interestingly, this phrase is omitted from the NIV.

<sup>4</sup> The word "constantly" (*adialeipto*) is an adverb which means "without interruption, continually, regularly." It is used in 1 Thess 1:5; 2:13; 5:17; and Rom 1:9. In each passage it has to do with some aspect of prayer.

<sup>5</sup> The word "received" (*paralambano*) means "to receive from another," but it is especially used in the NT of receiving a message or body of instruction or doctrine (cf. 1 Cor 11:23; 15:1, 3; Gal 1:9, 12 [2x], Col 2:6; 1 Thess 2:13; 4:1; 2 Thess 3:6). See also John 1:11-12 where John writes, "He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive [*paralambano*] Him. But as many as received [*lambano*] Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name."

<sup>6</sup> The Greek phrase *to theo* ("of God") is in the emphatic position.

<sup>7</sup> A preferable translation of the Greek pronoun *hos* (rendered "which") is "who," referring to God. Thus, it is "God who also performs His work in you who believe." The reasons for adopting this translation are: (1) God is usually the subject of *energo* ("work") in the Pauline epistles. (2) The verb *energo* and its noun form *energia* typically have supernatural beings (whether good or evil) as their subject. Earl J. Richard, *First and Second Thessalonians*. Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1995), 114-115.

<sup>8</sup> "Performs its work" is *energeo* from which we get our word energy or energize.

<sup>9</sup> The word "believe" at the end of 2:13 is in the present tense indicating continuing action. The Thessalonians continued to believe in the power of the Word of God to change their lives. The Word brings ongoing evidence of changing lives. They endured trial by God's grace (2:14).

<sup>10</sup> Hampton Keathley III, "Commendation and Concern for the Thessalonians" (1 Thess 2:13-20): *An Exegetical and Devotional Commentary on First Thessalonians* ([www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org)).

<sup>11</sup> Ray Pritchard, "What Does It Mean to Believe the Bible?" (1 Thess 2:13-16):

<http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/1996-09-08-What-Does-It-Mean-to-Believe-the-Bible/>.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Gordon, *Hope and Glory*, 86.

<sup>13</sup> This quote is attributed to W. Clement Stone and is quoted in Sam Gordon, *Hope and Glory*. Truth for Today (Greenville, SC: Ambassador International, 2005), 85.

<sup>14</sup> The word *mimetai* ("imitators") was used earlier in 1 Thess 1:6.

<sup>15</sup> Gordon, *Hope and Glory*, 90.

<sup>16</sup> The term *sumphuletes* ("countrymen") is not found anywhere else in the NT.

<sup>17</sup> See Preaching Today citation: [www.quotationspage.com](http://www.quotationspage.com).

<sup>18</sup> Grant C. Richison, *1 Thessalonians* (<http://www.gracenotes.info/>, 1997), 64.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Stephen's words in Acts 7:52. The slaying of the Lord Jesus was the outworking of the same essential attitude as that displayed so often to the prophets. Jesus, of course, had himself denounced with some emphasis what his nation had done to the prophets (Matt 23:33-35).

<sup>20</sup> The Greek term *enantios* ("hostile") is normally used of such things as winds (Mark 6:48; Acts 27:4), or deeds (Acts 26:9; 28:17). This is the only place in the NT where the word is used of people.

<sup>21</sup> Paul probably had in mind the opposition that provoked the riot when he was at Thessalonica (Acts 17:5ff.).

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<sup>22</sup> Wallace notes that the aorist verbal infinitive *anaplerosai* (“fill up”) has in mind “an act...already in progress [i.e., in the past history of Israel] and...then brings the action to a conclusion.” Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 559.

<sup>23</sup> This exact phrase is found in Gen 15:16 of the LXX.

<sup>24</sup> Although the wrath spoken of here is eschatological, Paul uses the aorist to stress the certainty of its coming—a “prophetic” aorist.

<sup>25</sup> The phrase *eis telos* may either mean “to the uttermost” (i.e., fully, completely) or it may mean “at last,” “finally.”

<sup>26</sup> Bruce says, “From...Moses (Deu 32) onward, some of the most scathing denunciations of Jews...have been made by fellow-Jews.” F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*. Word Biblical Commentary series (Waco, TX: Word, 1982).

<sup>27</sup> In view of the eschatological emphasis of the letter, it is possible that Paul is alluding primarily to the judgment coming on unbelievers during the Tribulation. Ernest Best, *A Commentary on the First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*. Black’s New Testament Commentaries series. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Black, 1977), 119; Robert L. Thomas, “1 Thessalonians,” In *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*. Edited by Frank E. Gaebelein and J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 259-60; D. Michael Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians*. The New American Commentary series (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 95.

<sup>28</sup> Morris comments, “Paul’s anger is the anger of a man with his own nation, his own people. He is very much part of them, and he sorrows at their faith. He is not gleefully invoking dire disasters on them, but grieving over the effects of their misdeeds.”

<sup>29</sup> This is the only time the NT uses the word *orphanizo*.

<sup>30</sup> Gene A. Getz, *Standing Firm When You’d Rather Retreat: Based on 1 Thessalonians* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1986), 87.

<sup>31</sup> Exactly what did Paul mean and how did Satan stop him? It is likely that Paul is referring to some kind of ongoing problem that kept him from returning to Thessalonica. We can’t be sure of the precise details, but we know that Jewish opponents followed him from city to city openly opposing him and spreading lies about his ministry.

<sup>32</sup> E.g. Rom 1:13; 15:22.

<sup>33</sup> Constable writes, “How can we tell if Satan is opposing us or if the Spirit is directing us? It seems to me that the New Testament writers viewed God’s sovereign control of all things on different levels at different times. Sometimes, as in Acts, they spoke of the One who is in ultimate charge and focused on His direction. At other times, as here, they spoke of the instruments that God uses. God permitted Satan to oppose Paul’s return to Thessalonica, but this was all part of God’s sovereign will. In Acts the emphasis is on the One responsible for the expansion of the church, but here the emphasis is on the instrument God used in this situation. Satan can only oppose us as God gives him permission to do so (Job 1-2).” Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on 1 Thessalonians,”

<http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/1thessalonians.pdf>, 2007 ed. 15-16. See also Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 58.

<sup>34</sup> Elsewhere, Paul says, “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers...powers...world forces of this darkness...spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12).

<sup>35</sup> “Who is our...” introduces us to Paul’s reason which is presented in the form of a rhetorical question. It is designed to stress the reason more forcefully and to get the reader to think. “Who” refers to the believers of Thessalonica.

<sup>36</sup> The word “our” (*humon*) reminds us this was a team effort.

<sup>37</sup> Paul uses boasting or exultation to describe the Christian’s delight in being commended for faithful service by the Lord at his return.” The Thessalonians are the crown, and the result at the Bema will be rejoicing or exultation. But what did he mean by this? In view of Paul’s use of “crown” (*stephanos*, the victor’s crown) in other places, and the fact believers will cast their crowns before the Lord (Rev 4:10), Paul undoubtedly had in mind a personal crown or reward that believers will receive because of their presence at the return of the Lord for faithful ministry. Though, in this passage the apostle does not say he would receive a crown, this is suggested, if not here certainly in other passages.

<sup>38</sup> The term *emprosthen* (“presence”) is a preposition meaning “before, in front of” (cf. 1 Thess 3:13). It clearly portrays the idea of being before the judgment seat of Christ, the Bema.

<sup>39</sup> This is the first use of the term *parousia* (“coming”) in the NT. It was used in secular Greek literature in the first century for a royal visit by a king. *Parousia* is a very important word used of the return of the Lord. It comes from a verb *pareimi*, which means “to be present” as in Luke 13:1, John 11:28, and Acts 10:33. It refers to a stay, a presence that follows an arrival or a coming.

<sup>40</sup> Ray Pritchard, “Heavenly Rewards” (1 Thess 2:17-20):

<http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/1996-09-15-Heavenly-Rewards/>.

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<sup>41</sup> Paul uses boasting or exultation to describe the Christian's delight in being commended for faithful service by the Lord at His return (1 Cor 9:15-16; 2 Cor 1:12-14; 10:13-18; Phil 2:16; and 1 Cor 3:15; 4:5). NET Study Notes.

<sup>42</sup> Elsewhere in the NT we read of other crowns: the crown of righteousness (2 Tim 4:8); the crown of life (Jas 1:12; Rev 2:10) the crown of glory (1 Pet 5:4)—all of them incorruptible (1 Cor 9:25).

<sup>43</sup> BDAG s.v. *doxa* 3.

<sup>44</sup> Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*. Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 156.

<sup>45</sup> Benware writes, "On that day, believers and holy angels alike will be glad to see those who have come to know the Lord Jesus, but those who have had a part in the spiritual birth of individuals will experience an even greater joy. A woman may be pleased that have a major of joy when her sister has her baby, but nothing rivals the joy that is hers when she becomes the mother of her own baby. There will be an incredible fullness of joy at the judgment seat for those who are spiritual parents." Paul N. Benware, *The Believer's Payday* (Chattanooga: TN: AMG, 2002), 126.

<sup>46</sup> Richison, *1 Thessalonians*, 69.

<sup>47</sup> See Fred R. Lybrand, "Corporate Rewards: Does the Church You Attend Matter to God?" *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 11:1 (Spring 2005): 11-