

“Grace to the End” (1 Thessalonians 5:23-28)

Two years ago, my wife (Lori) received a strand of pearls from some dear friends of ours. Since that time, I have been intrigued with pearls. So this past week I did some research on how a pearl becomes a pearl. To ensure that I was not falling for any urban legends, I asked Russ McMillan, our resident Marine Biologist, for assistance. Russ explained that a beautiful pearl begins as a fragment of broken shell, a sand grain, or even a parasite. Such an object enters an oyster’s shell and irritates its soft tissue. The irritant then gets covered and strengthened with layers of mother-of-pearl or nacre (NAY-ker). Over the course of time, a beautiful pearl develops. Similarly, the Bible teaches that every human starts out as an irritant. We are enemies of God, dead in our trespasses and sins.¹ Yet, by God’s amazing grace, those of us who believe in Christ are declared positionally righteous. Slowly but surely, God then envelops us in Himself and practically transforms us into beautiful followers who reflect His beauty.

Paul closes 1 Thessalonians the same way that he began, by emphasizing God’s grace and the need to be prepared for Christ’s coming.² In view of these important themes, Paul urges us to, “*Get a grip on grace.*” In 1 Thess 5:23-28, Paul provides two instructions to strengthen our grip.

1. Pray for spiritual dependence (5:23-24). In this first section, Paul prepares to wrap up his book with a closing prayer³ affirming our security in Christ.⁴ In 5:23 he prays, “**Now⁵ may the God of peace Himself⁶ sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved⁷ complete,⁸ without blame⁹ at¹⁰ the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.**” Interestingly, the first word in the Greek text of 5:23 is the word “Himself” (*autos*). This is a significant point because Paul is emphasizing that the peaceful qualities of life that he discussed earlier in 5:13 come from God and God alone. Here is the truth: Only God can make you better. Think about that for a moment. Exercise improves your body, therapy helps your soul, a friend lifts your spirit, good fortune improves your circumstances, but only God can make you better. God is the author and source of all spiritual progress. It is impossible to overstate the importance of this fundamental truth. In contrast to all our feeble efforts at moral betterment and self-improvement, Paul simply says, “God Himself, the God of peace.”¹¹ The “God of peace”¹² is the *only* one capable of sanctifying us.

This word “sanctify” simply means “set apart for God’s exclusive use.”¹³ There are at least three different ways this term is used in the New Testament. First, there is *positional* sanctification. When you believed in Christ as your Savior, you were instantaneously, once-for-all set apart for God (Heb 10:10). Second, there is *progressive* sanctification. This refers to your daily growth in holiness (2 Cor 7:1). Third, there is *perfective* sanctification. This takes place when you see Christ and become eternally like Him (1 John 3:2).¹⁴ It is this last meaning of sanctification that Paul has in mind here. He prays that God will “entirely”¹⁵ sanctify the Thessalonians. He prays that their entire person¹⁶ will be preserved. The word translated “preserved” (*tereo*) is a word that typically means “to watch over, keep.” God Himself will ensure your salvation and Christian growth. It is God who does this work! This morning, I noticed that before going to bed last night I forgot to lock the back door of our house. A thief could have easily walked in. I immediately said, “Lord, thank you that You always protect my family and me, even when I fail to be wise or faithful.” The word translated “without blame” comes from the legal arena. It means to be acquitted in a court of law. You are “blameless” if no one can bring any charge against you. That’s not true of most of us now. Those who know us best know our weaknesses and could testify against us. God’s goal, however, is that when we stand before Him, He will say, “Does anyone in the whole universe know any reason why this person should not enter heaven?” At that point there will be a loud silence as no one in the entire universe will be able to bring any charge against God’s elect. Interestingly, archaeologists have discovered tombstones from Thessalonica marked with the inscription “blameless.” This indicates the impact God’s Word had upon the early church in the first century. I can’t think of a better way to die than to be able to place on our tombstone “blameless.”

Perhaps you've heard the expression "good enough for government work." That's a sarcastic way of saying, "Don't worry about the details. The joints don't have to fit, the margins can be crooked, and we don't need to worry about the budget. We don't have to be perfect; we don't even have to be close." Mark it down plainly: God does not do government work. Everything He does is perfect. But many of us feel like our lives are "government work." We look inside and see lots of good and bad mixed together, a whole bunch of loose connections, and a lot of parts that don't seem to work right. That's the way it is in a fallen world. We're stuck with what seems to be "government work" in this life. But it won't be that way forever. God has promised that when Jesus Christ returns, we will be sanctified through and through.¹⁷

Paul concludes this first section in 5:24 by esteeming God further: "**Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.**" The adjective "faithful" (*pistos*) is the first word in the Greek text. The NASB is the one English version I could find that reflects the emphatic position. Paul is saying, "Above all else, God is faithful. You can trust Him. You can depend upon Him." This is confirmed by the fact that God "calls"¹⁸ believers. The present tense verb "calls" stresses that God does not merely call Christians once and then leave them on their own. Instead, God continues to call the followers of Christ.¹⁹ God's call mirrors the assertion in 1:4—God has chosen me. How do I know God has chosen me? First and foremost, His Word tells me so. Second, He is experientially calling me with His still small voice. His Spirit is at work in me all the time, prompting me to an increase in faith, love, and hope.²⁰

You understand this. We hear cell phones all around us: at work, at church, at the mall, and at home. There's no escape. Someone always seems to be trying to track us down. This is also true of God. When you hear a cell phone, let it be a reminder to yourself that God is calling you. He wants to have a dynamic relationship with you. But you must answer His call. Don't screen His call and let it go to voicemail. Instead, respond to God's call upon your life for continual growth and intimacy in Him.

Paul continues to emphasize God's preservation of the believer by stating: "He also will bring it to pass." Think of those seven words: "He also will bring it to pass." They are simple and direct. No qualification, no hesitation, no doubt of any kind. Not "He may bring it to pass," "He could bring it to pass," or "He'll bring it to pass if He feels like it." Not even "He will bring it to pass if we do our part." There is just a simple declarative statement—"He also will bring it to pass." When everything is said and done, it is not our grip on grace but God's grip on us (John 10:28-29). Salvation is assured because it begins and ends with God (Rom 8:28-39).

Let me suggest six ways²¹ these verses should affect us:

- **First, God's grace should give us enormous confidence in God.** If you have doubted God, doubt no longer. He is faithful to keep His promises. He has ordained that some day you will be like the Lord Jesus inside and out. And He is working even now to make you a better person. Don't doubt His purposes, even though you can't always see His hand at work.
- **Second, God's grace ought to give you assurance of salvation.** Sometimes believers struggle with assurance because we don't "feel" saved. But feelings have nothing to do with it. If you feel saved that's good, and you should be grateful. But if you don't "feel" saved, trust God to keep His word anyway. Salvation rests not on your fickle feelings but on the unchanging promises of a God who cannot lie.
- **Third, God's grace ought to give you motivation to grow.** After all, if God has said He is going to sanctify you, you can rest assured that you will be sanctified—whether you want to be or not! Your only choice is whether or not you will cooperate with God. Some of us get better slower than necessary because we fight against God's purposes. We harbor wrong attitudes—lust, bitterness, pride, sloth, envy, and all the rest—and then we wonder why it's taking us so long to get better. A little cooperation goes a long way in the area of sanctification.

- **Fourth, God's grace ought to give us perseverance in prayer.** Sometimes I think we stop praying two days before the answer is about to come from heaven. I know many Christians who have struggled for years with certain behavior patterns and then given up simply because they were so discouraged. But Paul tells us that God is always at work, moving us toward a time when we will be perfect in every respect. Even in this life we can make huge progress as Christians. It's just that the progress often comes slowly and in small increments. So we ought to keep on praying precisely because we believe God is at work in us even when we don't see it.
- **Fifth, God's grace ought to develop patience toward others.** After all, if God is not finished with you yet, He's not finished with them either. And if you want them to be patient with your weaknesses, they should expect the same in return from you.
- **Finally, God's grace ought to teach us gratitude for every tiny step in the right direction.** Some people want to fly before they run, run before they walk, and walk before they crawl. But that's rarely what happens. More often, our spiritual progress comes in one tiny baby step after another. It's "little by little, day by day" that we grow into the image of Jesus. Therefore, let us take heart in every tiny step we take and in every tiny bit of progress our friends and loved ones make. For each baby step forward comes directly from the hands of a loving Father who is at work in ways we cannot see and probably couldn't even imagine.

In order to maintain spiritual health we must remember where our spiritual strength lies. We cannot work out our salvation on our own (Phil 2:12-13). We cannot make ourselves holy by our own strength. The only way to develop and maintain spiritual strength is to depend entirely on the power of God's Spirit at work in our lives. Today, will you prepare for Christ's coming by *getting a grip on grace*? Will you rest in the promises of God? C.S. Lewis (1898-1963) noted that our problem isn't trusting God; it's in trusting God only.²² Will you completely trust in your faithful God?

[We are called to pray for spiritual dependence. This is especially important because our Christian growth ultimately depends upon God's work in and through us.]

2. Respond for spiritual growth (5:25-28). In this second section, Paul concludes 1 Thessalonians with three requests and a final prayer.

- **Request #1: "Brethren,²³ pray for us" (5:25).** Paul asks the church to pray for him and his coworkers.²⁴ The present tense verb "pray" indicates that Paul wants the Thessalonians to "pray without ceasing" (5:17). This means throughout the day, Paul yearns for the church to remember him in prayer. Interestingly, Paul seldom focuses on his own needs; however, he always acknowledges his need for prayer. Typically, Paul's prayer requests focus on the need to be faithful to the Lord in sharing the gospel (e.g., Eph 6:19-20). The fact that Paul requests prayer demonstrates his humility and dependency upon the Lord. Paul rightly believes that prayer releases the power of God for effective ministry. Of course, we believe this as well, but it is often difficult to intentionally apply our knowledge. So allow me to share three opportunities.

First, consider becoming a member of my prayer shield. Eight years ago when I came to EBF, I raised up a prayer shield. A prayer shield is a team of prayer partners that commits to faithfully pray for their pastor. I recruited the team and started well, but failed to keep my team updated on prayer requests. The team dissolved, and then a few years later, I recruited another team. Sadly, I again quickly neglected to keep my prayer shield updated on how they could pray for me. I regret this and would like to believe that "the third time is the charm." So if you are interested in praying for me, would you please indicate this on your communication card? Feel free to hold me accountable as well. I need it. In my busyness, it is all too easy to put my need for personal prayer last on my to-do list.

Second, consider becoming one of our Sunday morning prayer warriors. One of our pressing needs is to recruit prayer warriors who will pray during our three worship services. I believe that this is an incredibly fruitful ministry. “The Prince of Preachers,” Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892), had hundreds of faithful people pray in his church’s basement boiler room before he preached. He used to say, “This is where the power falls!” He was so right! Great preaching and a great response to preaching is the result of great prayer. I would cherish your commitment to pray for our church and me during one of our worship services. Whenever someone asked Spurgeon the secret to his ministry his reply was simple: “My people pray for me.” Would you be willing to sign up today to serve as one of our Sunday morning prayer warriors?

Finally, consider becoming a member of our prayer chain. If you have a heart for brothers and sisters in our church and beyond, we would love to have you join our prayer chain. It would simply require you praying when you receive a request and then calling a couple of other people. Perhaps one of these three opportunities is tailor-made for you. If so, please join our prayer ministry as we pray for our leaders and one another.

How strong is your supportive tie to those in your church? Can they depend on your prevailing prayer for them? We fulfill God’s purpose in our lives through the prayers of our fellow Christians. Living the Christian life depends on teamwork. If we play on a team, we depend on our teammates to fulfill their role. Soldiers depend heavily on other soldiers in their company. Their lives are at stake if others fail to fulfill their function. Every area of life needs teamwork. This is no less true in the church. Part of our teamwork is praying for one another. This is something that everyone can do.²⁵ *Get a grip on grace* means you pray for other believers.

- **Request #2: “Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss” (5:26).** This is one of five such exhortations in the New Testament.²⁶ The “holy kiss” was not a sensual thing. The kiss was intended to break down potential barriers of gender, race, and social rank.²⁷ It was meant to be a symbolic expression of love, support, unity, and community.²⁸ The holy kiss acknowledges our spiritual oneness. Christians have come into the family of God, which knows even closer ties than those of any human family (Matt 12:46-50).

A proper understanding of our Christian oneness requires understanding that fellowship is a part of worship. This means you shouldn’t make a mad dash for the door at the close of the service. I know we joke about this, but after (or during) the closing prayer, some members escape like rats leaving a sinking ship. This isn’t God’s will. Rather, He wants us to intentionally and strategically seek people out for the purpose of encouragement. This means I must look for ways to express affection to my fellow brothers and sisters.²⁹ Although several people (including one complete stranger) have given me a holy kiss, there are other ways to express love. You can give a hug. You can put your arm around someone’s shoulder. You can give someone a double-handed shake, expressing warmth. The method is not that important, but the motive certainly is.³⁰ *Getting a grip on grace* means you love your brothers and sisters in Christ.

- **Request #3: “I³¹ adjure you by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brethren” (5:27).³²** The word translated “adjure” is a little strange since we rarely use the word. “Adjure” occurs only here in the New Testament and means “to put someone under an oath.”³³ Paul is saying in effect, “I obligate you with an oath before the Lord.” The “you” refers to the leadership of the church (see 5:12-13). Paul puts them under a solemn oath to have the Word read and explained.³⁴ He calls them to do so by the authority of the Lord. The written Scriptures must be read and explained. Without God’s Word, the church falters. There is a buzz right now that is downplaying the role of preaching. Some would suggest it is enough to have community and do outreach. That is fallacious! The church apart from the Word is anemic.

This past Sunday, a new Christian, Maura O’Leary, wrote this on her communication card: “Thank you for calling the sermon “Worship through the Word” for that is what it truly is— worshipping God by honoring His Word. Worship is everywhere at EBF. Thank you also for praying for other local churches every week. It is truly powerful. I was gone for two weeks on a family vacation and the thing that I missed most about home was by far this church. Thank you all for making this so dear to my heart and the hearts of so many others. This church is an incredible example of devotion to Christ. Thank you for being my example. I only pray that those who have not yet come to trust in Christ can do so with help from strong believers like those here at Emmanuel.” Maura has a *grip on grace*. Even as a new believer, she understands what God’s grace can do. Today, as your leader, I commit myself to reading and teaching God’s Word. Will you commit yourself to responding to God’s Word as we worship the Lord? Will you also make it your practice to come to church prepared to hear from God? You can do this by reflecting on the passage you know is scheduled to be preached. You can ask the Lord to clear your mind and help you to focus on His Word. *Getting a grip on grace* means you take God’s Word seriously.

Paul closes the book of 1 Thessalonians with a final prayer: **“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ³⁵ be with you”** (5:28).³⁶ The epistle began with the note of grace (1:1) and ends with the same note. Paul begins and ends all of his thirteen letters with a mention of grace. The reason for this repetitious emphasis is Paul wants us to know that we cannot live apart from God’s grace. The life-changing grace of God saves us. It also sustains us and never fails to strengthen us. Paul’s longing is that the unmerited favor of God would continue to be his readers’ experience and source of joy. It is the grace of the Lord Jesus that makes our salvation and sanctification possible from start to finish.

This natural lead-in begs the question, “Have you received God’s grace in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ?” If you haven’t, would you please do so today?

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Scripture References

1 Thessalonians 5:23-28
2 Corinthians 1:12
2 Corinthians 7:1
Hebrews 10:10
1 John 3:1-3
2 Peter 3:14
1 Corinthians 1:9

Study Questions

1. How have I matured spiritually since I became a Christian (5:23a)? In what specific area have I grown most? What tangible difference has my growth made in my life? How is God sanctifying me this month? If those who know me best were asked these same questions about me, how would they respond? Would I be pleased or embarrassed by the growth or lack thereof that others see?
2. If Jesus returned today, would I be ready to meet Him (5:23b)? Why or why not? Am I struggling with a particular sin that would bring me shame if Jesus appeared today? Read 1 John 2:28 and 2 Corinthians 5:10. Who can help me overcome this sin? Will I contact this person today?
3. How has God proven Himself faithful in my Christian life and growth (5:24)? Do I have complete assurance that God loves me and is working in my life? If not, why? When do I lack security and confidence? How do I respond when I am plagued by doubts about my salvation and sanctification?
4. Am I committed to praying for the spiritual leaders God has placed in my life (5:25)? How can I pray for these individuals? How can I stretch myself in greeting my brothers and sisters in Christ (5:26)? Am I committed to hearing and responding to God's Word in my local church (5:27)? In which of these three areas do I need the most growth? Will I ask God to help me in this area?
5. How would I define "grace" (5:28)? How does "grace" distinguish Christianity from all other world religions and cults? What has God's grace meant to me personally? Am I able to share with another person how God has manifested His grace in my life?

Notes

¹ See Rom 5:8-10 and Eph 2:1-4.

² G.K. Beale, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*. IVP New Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 157.

³ In a prayer expressing Paul's wishes for the congregation, two of the basic themes of the letter are again highlighted: sanctification (chs. 4-5) and the preservation of the church (chs. 1-3). D. Michael Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians*. The New American Commentary series (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 188.

⁴ Paul concluded the first main section of 1 Thessalonians with a prayer referring to the Lord's return (3:11-13).

⁵ Keathley writes, "The 'now' (Greek *de*) of verse 23 is slightly transitional and moves the reader to another point, though not totally unrelated to the preceding. In the preceding verses there has been one admonition after another relating to the spiritual walk corporately and individually. Each of these commands embrace the believer's sanctification. How is it possible for us to accomplish such commands with any sense of consistency? Paul has already related the process of sanctification to the Holy Spirit in 4:1-8, but with this final petition, he again points us to the only true source of spiritual growth and change—the awesome sanctifying work of God Himself to whom we must all turn." Hampton Keathley III, "Final Instructions and Exhortations" (1 Thess 5:12-28): *An Exegetical and Devotional Commentary on First Thessalonians*: (www.bible.org).

⁶ The phrase "May the God of peace Himself" is a common phrase in the closings of Paul's letters (Rom 15:33; 16:20; 2 Cor 13:11; Phil 4:6; and 2 Thess 3:16).

⁷ Paul uses the verb *tereo* ("preserved") in 1 Cor 7:37; 2 Cor 11:9; Eph 4:3; 1 Tim 5:22; 6:14; and 2 Tim 4:7. The verbs "sanctify" (*hagiasai*) and "preserved" (*terethein*) are both aorist optatives, which is the mood of wishing or praying. Paul prayed that believers be sanctified and preserved by God.

⁸ The word *holokleros* ("complete") is emphatic. *Holokleros* only occurs elsewhere in Jas 1:4: "And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete [*holokleros*], lacking in nothing." The adjective "complete" is used in the Greek Old Testament of stone for the altar (Deut 27:6) and Philo in Josephus use it of sacrificial victims. It is thus possible that Paul is thinking of the presentation of the whole person as a complete sacrifice (cf. Rom 12:1). Leon Morris, *The Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians*. Tyndale New Testament Commentary series (London: Tyndale, 1984), 111.

⁹ The only other NT occurrence of the noun *amemptos* ("without blame") is in 1 Thess 2:10, where Paul speaks of his "blameless" behavior toward the Thessalonians.

¹⁰ The coming of the Lord has been the focus of this entire book. Paul is seeking a good showing for the Thessalonians at the judgment seat of Christ. Eaton argues, "Paul prays that they might be this way 'for' the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The translation done is surely not 'at' the coming. We shall certainly be sanctified 'at' the coming. We do not need to pray about that! The sense is 'so as to be blameless in the coming.'" It is simplest to translate it, "for" the coming." Michael Eaton, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*. Preaching Through the Bible (Kent, England: Sovereign World, 1997), 88.

¹¹ Ray Pritchard, "God Finishes What He Starts" (1 Thess 5:23-28):

<http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/1996-12-08-God-Finishes-What-He-Starts/>.

¹² Paul begins his prayer with an appeal to the God of peace. Paul also mentions God's attributes of faithfulness and grace in 1 Thess 5:24 and 28.

¹³ Paul uses the verb *hagiazō* ("sanctify") in Rom 15:16; 1 Cor 1:2; 6:11; 7:14; Eph 5:26; 1 Tim 4:5; and 2 Tim 2:21.

¹⁴ Henry Holloman, *The Forgotten Blessing* (Nashville: Word, 1999), 6.

¹⁵ The adjective *holoteles* ("entirely, wholly") is only used here in the NT.

¹⁶ The phrase "spirit and soul and body" has generated a great deal of controversy in theological circles over the concepts of dichotomy versus trichotomy. That's basically a debate over whether man is basic two-part or three-part in his essential nature. 1 Thess 5:23 is a key verse for those who favor the trichotomy point of view. Yet, I doubt that Paul intended to give us some kind of definitive treatment of human psychology. I think the reference to spirit, soul, and body simply means "the whole person in all his parts." Beale favors the dichotomist position and suggests that 5:23 "clearly restates and develops 3:13, where God is said to strengthen their hearts, which is either a reference to the entire person, or more likely, an allusion to the noncorporeal aspect of the believer (equivalent to spirit and soul in 5:23)." Beale, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 177. For a good summary of the theories of humankind as trichotomous, dichotomous, or a unity, see Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 538-57.

¹⁷ Pritchard, "God Finishes What He Starts."

¹⁸ Paul uses the noun *kaleo* ("call") in 1 Thess 2:12 (God calls believers into His own kingdom and glory) and 4:7 (God has not called believers for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification). Weima writes, "The reassurance that

‘the one who calls you is faithful and he will do it’ recalls the language of election and calling found in the letter (1 Thess. 1:4; 2:12; 4:7; 5:9)—language that comforts the Thessalonians in the midst of the persecution they are currently enduring.” Jeffrey A.D. Weima, “1 Thessalonians,” *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 428.

¹⁹ Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians*. New International Greek Testament Commentary series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/Exeter, England: Paternoster, 1990), 207.

²⁰ David Jackman, *The Authentic Church* (Great Britain: Christian Focus 1998), 172.

²¹ See Pritchard, “God Finishes What He Starts.”

²² Dwight Edwards, *Releasing the Rivers Within* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 2003), 97.

²³ The word *adelphoi* (“brethren”) is emphatic in the Greek. Paul strongly pleads for the church to pray for him.

²⁴ Paul routinely requested prayer (e.g., Rom 15:30; Eph 6:18-19; Phil 1:19; Col 4:3-4; 2 Thess 3:1; and Phlm 22).

²⁵ Grant C. Richison, *1 Thessalonians* (<http://www.gracenotes.info/> 1997), 137.

²⁶ See also Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; and 1 Pet 5:14.

²⁷ Beale, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 177.

²⁸ Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 208.

²⁹ The Phillips paraphrase “Americanizes” this verse with this rendering, “Give a handshake all around among the brotherhood.” I don’t think this catches Paul’s intent.

³⁰ Sam Gordon, *Hope and Glory*. Truth for Today (Greenville, SC: Ambassador International, 2005), 223.

³¹ The first person singular may suggest that this is the point where Paul himself took up the pen. F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*. Word Biblical Commentary series (Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 135; Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 208.

³² A great OT example of this is Nehemiah 8:5-8: “Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. Then Ezra blessed the LORD the great God. And all the people answered, ‘Amen, Amen!’ while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, explained the law to the people while the people remained in their place. They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading.”

³³ BDAG s.v. *enorkizo* provides this definition: “to put someone under oath, adjure.”

³⁴ The exhortation to have a letter read is found elsewhere only in Col 4:16. Beale, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 177.

³⁵ Whenever the Lord Jesus is presented as the source of grace His deity is being affirmed.

³⁶ This benediction is identical to the ones in Rom 16:20 and 1 Cor 16:23.