

## BACKGROUND COMMENTARY FOR WINTER 2008-09 (CONTINUED)

### BACKGROUND COMMENTARY FOR FEB. 1 1 THESSALONIANS 5:12-28

#### THE BACKGROUND

In his First Letter to the Thessalonians, Paul had devoted a sizeable block of space to the subject of Christ's return (see 4:13–5:11). He had written extensively to assure the believers their loved ones who had died would have a prominent part in Christ's second coming. Believers who were living would have no advantage over Christians who had died. A joyous reunion would occur, and all Christians would live with Christ forever (see 4:13-17). Then, perhaps in answer to a question concerning the exact time of Christ's coming again, Paul reminded the Thessalonians it would come suddenly and stressed believers' behavior as they anticipated the future Day of the Lord (see 5:1-11). Then the apostle addressed life in the fellowship of the church.

#### 1. RESPECT YOUR LEADERS (1 THESS. 5:12-13)

**Verse 12:** Now we ask you, brothers, to give recognition to those who labor among you and lead you in the Lord and admonish you,

With the word now, Paul introduced a new subject: practical matters of life in the Thessalonian congregation. He began with the members' relationship with the church's leaders. The word translated ask also can mean "beseech" or "beg" and conveys the tone of a respectful request. Instead of issuing a demand, Paul tactfully pleaded with the Thessalonian believers. He requested they respond properly to their leaders. He warmly appealed to them as brothers and sisters in the faith and asked that they have the right attitude toward the church's leaders. The phrase to give recognition translates a Greek word that means "to know" and conveys more than the idea of becoming acquainted with the leaders, though it may include that sense. It has the idea of realizing the leaders' value—of respecting and esteeming them. Because of this request, interpreters have theorized that conflict existed between the congregation and the leaders. That some individuals filled leadership positions in the church probably indicates at least the

beginning of organization.

Elsewhere, Paul used the words elders, overseers, and pastors (shepherds) interchangeably to designate church leaders (see Acts 20:17,28; Eph. 4:11). One view is that in 1 Thessalonians 5:12, the apostle had elders in mind. Paul, however, did not use a specific designation. Instead, he described the leaders in terms of three ongoing ministry functions they performed. First, they were laboring in the congregation. The Greek term rendered labor has the sense of toiling to the point of weariness or even when they were tired and conveys continuous action. The leaders habitually worked on the members' behalf and in the process became weary.

Paul's phrase those who . . . lead you indicated the second ministry function. The word lead meant "to stand in front of." It could have the sense of presiding over or superintending people. Interestingly, it could have the further idea of caring for or giving attention to them. The leaders continually or habitually ministered for the other members' benefit. Paul's adding the words in the Lord had strong implications. The phrase could convey the idea that the leaders were under Christ's authority and acted with His authority. It also could indicate they were to exercise their roles with a Christlike attitude, reflecting His character and will. By exercising this kind of leadership, leaders would deserve the other church members' esteem or respect.

Paul's third description of the church's leaders was that they admonished the members. The Greek term translated admonish literally means "to put in mind," thus "to warn" or "to exhort." It may include rebuking members for wrongdoing but it also has the wider thrust of influencing others' thinking to make them more sensible in general. The leaders consistently exhorted and warned the church members, advising them and pointing them in the right direction.

**Verse 13:** and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.

In addition to recognizing their leaders' value and respecting them, the church members were to esteem them very highly. The Greek word rendered very highly also means "superabundantly" or "beyond measure." The church members were to hold their leaders in the highest regard—or as we might say, "think highly of them"—in love. Members were to have Christian love for their leaders—determined good will that consistently acted for the leaders' best interests. This attitude involved attentiveness and

cooperation. The reason for esteeming leaders highly in love was because of their work. The Greek word rendered work is different from the term translated "labor" in verse 12 and may encompass the leaders' three ministry activities Paul described in that verse.

The phrase because of their [the leaders'] work could refer to the ministry activities the individuals had already performed. Their tireless efforts on members' behalf deserved the highest respect. The phrase also could express the idea that the members' esteeming their leaders in love would enable the leaders' work to go more smoothly and to be more effective.

Paul urged all the Thessalonian Christians to be at peace among themselves. Why did he feel the need to write this admonition? Evidently, some degree of conflict or tension existed between leaders and other members. They were to settle their differences so that individually and collectively they would experience spiritual wholeness or well-being under Christ's lordship.

#### 2. REACH OUT TO ONE ANOTHER (1 THESS. 5:14-15)

**Verse 14:** And we exhort you, brothers: warn those who are lazy, comfort the discouraged, help the weak, be patient with everyone.

The words and we exhort you serve as a transition to a new unit of instruction. Rather than asking or pleading with the Thessalonian Christians (see 5:12), Paul here exhorted them. The Greek word he used could have the idea of begging or imploring, but in verse 14 it probably has the force of admonishing or encouraging. Paul strongly urged the whole congregation to follow his instructions. He addressed the members warmly as brothers, a term he used in the letter to include all the believers.

The Thessalonian Christians were to warn ("admonish" or "exhort") lazy church members. The Greek word rendered lazy was a military term for marching out of order or quitting the ranks. The word can mean "disorderly" or "undisciplined." It also can have the idea of deliberate idleness or loafing. In light of 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12, Paul probably referred to idle people who refused to work, depended on others, and hampered others' work. These persons had broken ranks, were AWOL from work, and were disrupting the church's fellowship and ministry. Today, when we warn other Christians, we must do so with great kindness, and our acts of warning must be redemptive in nature.

Paul urged the Thessalonian believers to comfort discouraged church members. The Greek term translated comfort also means “to console.” It can convey attitudes of gentleness and tenderness and can have the idea of encouraging. The word discouraged literally is “little-souled” and means “fainthearted” or “despondent.” Paul may have had in mind believers who were despondent over their loved ones’ deaths or who were wilting under persecution. The Thessalonian believers were to be consistent in encouraging members who needed consolation or cheering up.

Church members also were to help the weak. The Greek word translated help means “to hold firmly to” a person and thus “to exercise a zealous care for” that individual. It had the sense of stationing one’s self directly opposite to another, paying heed to and supporting the person. The word weak could refer to people who were sick but in this context likely designates believers whose faith was wavering; they may have been on the verge of lapsing into former immoral behavior.

A word of caution is in order at this point. Warning or ministering to other believers and then criticizing them to others are inconsistent actions. This behavior damages the church’s fellowship.

Finally, Paul enjoined the believers to be patient with everyone. We could translate the word patient as “longsuffering.” This quality or attitude is a characteristic of God (see 2 Pet. 3:9), is in the cluster Paul called the fruit of the Spirit (see Gal. 5:22), and is a mark of Christian love (see 1 Cor. 13:4). The term everyone is inclusive, but Paul may have had in mind particularly the lazy, discouraged, and weak believers who needed attention.

**Verse 15:** See to it that no one repays evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good for one another and for all.

Human beings’ natural inclination is to counter the evil done to them by repaying the perpetrator in kind: evil for evil. Many quickly take the Old Testament law of “an eye for an eye” (Matt. 5:38; see Ex. 21:22-25) out of its original context, interpret it as giving permission for personal revenge, and exact retribution. Pagans repay evil for evil. Many of them will repay good for good, although some may be callous enough to repay evil for good. Christians, however, are called to a higher and far more difficult standard. We are to return good for any evil done to us (see Rom. 12:17,21; 1 Pet. 3:9). Jesus established this guideline (see Luke 6:27-36), and Paul conveyed this lofty standard to the Thessalonian Christians.

The Greek term rendered see to it meant “to see with the eyes,” then “to perceive.” It could have the force of a warning and mean “take heed” or “beware.” Interpreters have viewed the injunction as directed to the entire congregation but primarily to the church’s leaders. Collectively and individually, Christians were to live by the standard Paul gave. The apostle first stated the standard negatively. No one was to repay evil for evil to any person. The word evil referred to anything detrimental to others—anything that harmed or injured them in any way. The abuse could be verbal or physical. Then Paul added a positive imperative. The believers were to pursue what was good for one another and for non-Christians. In any challenges within the church and in the face of opposition and persecution, believers were to respond consistently with good—what was helpful, beneficial, and ethically and morally right.

### 3. WORSHIP WITH ONE ANOTHER (1 THESS. 5:16-22)

**Verse 16:** Rejoice always!

In verses 16-22, Paul issued eight imperatives in rapid-fire succession. The first three address believers’ response to God. Paul intended that the Thessalonian Christians apply these admonitions corporately, not just individually. The other five have to do with Christians’ ridding themselves of sins and retaining what is good.

First Paul exhorted the Thessalonian believers to rejoice always. Remember they were facing persecution. Life was not easy for them. How could they rejoice? The Spirit’s work in believers’ lives produces joy that is independent of circumstances. Christians rejoice because of an unwavering truth: no matter what happens, we remain securely in God’s care. The term translated rejoice is related to the Greek word rendered grace. A form of the term was used as a salutation. Paul did not expect the Thessalonian believers to exude a giddy euphoria that denied their situation’s difficulty. Rather, the apostle counseled them to celebrate God’s grace in the midst of difficulty.

Paul modeled what he taught. Later in his ministry, he was in prison in Rome awaiting trial. He might well receive a death sentence. In his Letter to the Philippians, written from prison, he declared that even if he were put to death, he would be glad and rejoice with them. He asked that they rejoice and share their joy with him (see Phil. 2:17-18). Later in the letter, he wrote: “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” (Phil. 4:4). Circumstances were never able

to shake Paul’s strong confidence that God’s grace held him securely (see 2 Tim. 4:7-8). Today, no matter what our circumstances may be, as Christians we can rejoice because of our relationship with Christ and His presence with us.

**Verse 17:** Pray constantly.

Paul instructed the believers to pray constantly. A noun related to the Greek verb translated pray can mean “a pouring out.” Thus the term has the idea of expressing wants or needs to God—of pouring our hearts out to Him, as we sometimes say. The word constantly also means “unceasingly” and has the sense of an unvarying practice. No one could—or can—pray all the time. Paul had in mind the habitual, consistent practice of prayer. Christians’ relationship with God should be such that they can and do approach Him any time, any place, with any petition. Our attitude of openness to Him and assurance of His attentiveness to and care for us encourages us to approach Him often. Prayer should be a natural, consistent part of our Christian living. Paul also may have had in mind the ideal of always being in an attitude of prayer or reverence toward God. The apostle may have meant that we need to maintain such a realization of God’s constant presence with us that we allow Him to impact all our thoughts and actions.

**Verse 18:** Give thanks in everything, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.

Paul wanted the Thessalonian believers to give thanks in everything. I, for one, am glad he did not write “for everything.” In every situation—good and bad—believers can be grateful for God’s presence and His working on their behalf. They can give thanks that nothing can separate them from His love (see Rom. 8:35-39). We cannot be grateful for everything that happens to us, but we can be grateful for the One who is with us and for us through every experience.

The words this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus (1 Thess. 5:18) could be connected only with giving thanks. Most likely, however, they refer to all three imperatives to this point. That is, God’s will is that believers “rejoice always” (5:16), “pray constantly” (5:17), and give thanks in everything (5:18). These commands are not the totality of God’s will but facets of it. In our relationship with Christ, we understand God’s will for us and receive the power to do His will.

**Verse 19:** Don’t stifle the Spirit.

Paul warned the believers against stifling the Holy Spirit. The word translated stifle also means “extinguish,” “suppress,” or “quench.” It was used of putting out a fire.

The statement's form in the original language has the force of "stop stifling" or "don't have the habit of stifling." Christians could put out the Spirit's fire by ignoring Him, rejecting His guidance, or failing to heed His conviction of sins. Paul wanted the Thessalonian Christians to allow God's Spirit to work in and through them, individually and collectively as a church, giving them warmth and light.

**Verse 20:** Don't despise prophecies,

Paul's admonition in this verse may indicate at least one way the Thessalonian believers were extinguishing the Spirit's fire. In the New Testament, the word prophecy primarily has the sense of proclaiming the gospel. It may have the secondary element of predicting coming events, but its main thrust is preaching the good news—God's good word—to people who need salvation. It is forthtelling more than foretelling: God-inspired teaching, exhorting, or warning that is clear and understandable. In 1 Corinthians 14:3, Paul gave the purpose of prophecy: to build up, encourage, and console the hearers. The word rendered despise also means "to make light of," "to count as nothing," "to treat with contempt," or "to disregard." Evidently, for whatever reason, church members were disdainfully dismissing their preachers' messages.

**Verse 21:** but test all things. Hold on to what is good.

Paul urged the Thessalonian believers to test everything. The word translated test was used of determining whether a coin was genuine and approving it if it passed the test. The phrase all things may indicate Paul expanded the scope of his instructions. If so, he probably included testing everything presented to them as purportedly coming from the Lord but particularly preachers' messages. The people in Berea "examined the Scriptures daily" to determine whether Paul's message measured up (Acts 17:11).

The Thessalonian Christians were not to be gullible. Not everything presented as truth would stand up under the light of careful scrutiny. They were to hold on to or retain what was good. They were to remember it with the intent of allowing the truth to shape their lives. The Greek word translated good has the ideas of what is sound, beautiful, excellent, noble, or morally good. The term was sometimes used to describe a coin that proved to be genuine rather than counterfeit. Paul knew the Christian life involves a process of sifting to retain spiritual truth and to discard error or falsehood—to identify, keep, and apply what is genuine and to trash what is bogus. Today, in order to carry out Paul's instructions effectively,

believers must rely on God's presence and leadership and must be steeped in His Word.

**Verse 22:** Stay away from every form of evil.

Paul's admonition to avoid every form of evil could refer to prophecy (preaching) that was counterfeit and was to be discarded. On the other hand, the exhortation may be broader and apply to evil wherever Christians encountered it. Either way, Paul cautioned believers to distance themselves from multiple expressions (every form) of evil. The phrase translated stay away from also can mean "abstain from"; if abstaining is the primary emphasis, then this command may have been intended to exhort the Thessalonian Christians not to engage in the pagan practices around them.

#### 4. DEPEND TOGETHER UPON GOD (1 THESS. 5:23-28)

**Verse 23:** Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely. And may your spirit, soul, and body be kept sound and blameless for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul began his closing remarks with a beautiful benediction. As noted in the comments on verse 12, the word now marks a transition to a new subject. The phrase the God of peace may stress peace as a facet of His nature and may indicate that He made possible the Thessalonian believers' wholeness, individually and collectively. On the other hand, the phrase may draw attention to the tensions Paul addressed in verses 12-22: God wanted resolutions to conflicts so the church would be healthy and effective in its ministry.

Paul prayed that God would set the Thessalonians apart for His service. Also included in the word sanctify was His setting them apart from evil, especially immorality. Paul wanted holiness to characterize their lives. He wanted them to be wholly dedicated to God and moral. The word completely means "the whole of each of you" or "every part of each of you." It also has the idea of carrying something through to the finish.

Paul also asked that the believers be kept sound and blameless for Christ's coming. Some interpreters have taken the words spirit, soul, and body to identify three facets of a person's being: the element that communicates with the unseen world, the center of personality, and the physical expression of being respectively. If the words soul and spirit are synonyms, the phrase indicates people consist of two parts: spiritual and physical. Other interpreters, however,

view the three words as each referring to the whole person, not as a technical division into three parts. The word translated sound also means "whole." It can mean "complete in every part." Because the adjective sound and the verb be kept are singular, Paul most likely referred to a person as a unity. The Greek term translated be kept was a military word that had the sense of safeguarding something.

Paul repeated his deep desire that the believers be blameless (see 3:13). He wanted them to live by the lofty Christian standards he had taught them so no one could bring against them a valid charge of wrongdoing. This kind of quality living would help prepare them for Christ's return.

**Verse 24:** He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.

Paul emphasized that God, who called the Thessalonian believers, would keep them sound and blameless as they awaited Christ's return. The form of the word translated calls underlines God's ongoing role in drawing people to Himself. Also implied may be His continuing call to holiness. The apostle stressed God's faithfulness to His people, a ringing affirmation that runs through both the Old and New Testaments. Paul assured the Thessalonian Christians God was present with them to enable them to resist the temptations of their pagan environment and to remain faithful to Him. He would continue to work on their behalf. On their own, they lacked the strength they needed to reject immorality and move toward spiritual maturity. God, however, was able to empower them and to keep them in His grace. They could depend on Him. He would complete the work He had started in them (see Phil. 1:6).

**Verse 25:** Brothers, pray for us also.

In 1:2, Paul assured the Thessalonian Christians he prayed for them. In 3:11-13, he wrote a brief prayer in which he included them. Following his short prayer in 5:23-24, he asked that the Thessalonians pray for him and his coworkers. Paul had a strong sense of intercessory prayer's value and effectiveness. We may not understand completely how intercession works, but the Scriptures assure us it does (see Jas. 5:16b). Christian fellowship must include our praying for one another because we need God's power for living, and we need one another's active care and support.

**Verse 26:** Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss.

To greet others with a kiss was common in Paul's time. A person kissed a superior's hand or foot and a friend's cheek. The designation holy kiss indicated the kiss was motivated by friendship and characterized by purity. The greeting implies

a warm familial relationship among church members. The phrase all the brothers may mean simply “one another” or may be inclusive so that everyone received a greeting when the believers met together. An alternate view is that Paul was sending his own greeting: “Give everyone a kiss from me.”

**Verse 27:** I charge you by the Lord that this letter be read to all the brothers.

Normally, when a church received a letter from Paul, a church leader read the letter aloud to the congregation (see Col. 4:16). The term charge had the sense of exacting an oath. The phrase by the Lord may mean “by the Lord’s authority” or “as Christians.” Because Paul could not speak to them in person, he may have wanted to ensure that all the believers heard the warmth, encouragement, and love in what he wrote. In addition, some and likely many Thessalonian Christians could not read and would need to hear Paul’s words.

**Verse 28:** May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you!

Paul ended his letter by praying that Christ’s grace—His unmerited favor, His love in action—would be with the Thessalonian believers. God’s grace through Christ had saved the believers, and the Lord of the church would continue to give His grace for their living. Paul prayed for the Thessalonian Christians and asked that they pray for him. Today, we strengthen our churches when we join with other believers in praying for one another.

## BACKGROUND COMMENTARY FOR FEB. 8

### 2 THESSALONIANS 1:1-12

#### THE BACKGROUND

Most likely, Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians while he was ministering in Corinth on his second missionary journey. He wanted to revisit the church he had recently established in Thessalonica but had been unable to do so. Thus, the apostle chose the next best option. From Athens, he sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to assess the situation there. Timothy rejoined Paul in Corinth and reported the Thessalonian believers were remaining faithful in the face of persecution. Some tensions and problems existed in the church, and members sought answers to some questions, but overall the church was strong. Joyfully, Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians to assure the believers of his continuing care for them, to encourage them, to address their questions, and to instruct them further concerning Christian behavior.

Shortly after Paul sent 1 Thessalonians, he received word of difficulties the church still faced that he needed to address. He wrote 2 Thessalonians to deal with the problems. Believers were suffering persecution, so Paul encouraged them to remain faithful. Evidently a letter falsely claiming to be from Paul taught that the Day of the Lord had already come (see 2 Thess. 2:1-2), so he corrected that misconception. The problem of people who had stopped working—probably because they expected Christ’s immediate return—was still impacting the church. These idlers were disrupting other believers’ work, so Paul sternly charged those unemployed to labor to provide for themselves. As does 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians shows the depth of Paul’s love and concern for believers who made up an outpost of Christianity in a pagan city.

#### 1. GOD GIVES STRENGTH TO ENDURE (2 THESS. 1:1-4)

**Verse 1:** Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy: To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul began his Second Letter to the Thessalonians almost exactly as he had begun the first letter. He first identified himself as the writer and included his coworkers in the greeting. As was true with the greeting in 1 Thessalonians, Paul did not include Silvanus [sil VAY nuhs] and Timothy to indicate they were cowriters. Rather, they were included

because Silvanus (and probably also Timothy) had labored with the apostle in establishing the church in Thessalonica, and Timothy had been sent to the church as Paul’s emissary. Next Paul specified the recipients: God’s people—the community of faith—in Thessalonica. In 3:17 the apostle indicated he had dictated this letter.

As he did in 1 Thessalonians, Paul stated the believers were in God and Christ. The phrase in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ emphasized Christ’s Deity. It also served as a reminder that God had taken the initiative in their salvation, and Christ had provided it through His atoning death and triumphant resurrection. In a slight change from his first letter, Paul used the phrase God our Father (see 1 Thess. 1:1)—perhaps to identify with the recipients and to stress God was their caring Father who would provide for them. Also, the term our subtly reminded the believers they were related to God and thus to one another. The words in . . . the Lord Jesus Christ stressed that Jesus is Deity, Savior, and Deliverer. The believers lived in the sphere or realm in which God and His Son exercised sovereignty over their lives. Individually and collectively, the Thessalonian Christians were related to the Father and His Son by grace; in that relationship, the believers received power to remain faithful and to grow spiritually.

**Verse 2:** Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

As he did in 1 Thessalonians 1:1, Paul included a benediction in his greeting. He prayed that the believers would continue to experience God’s grace—His lavish goodness or active love. Paul also prayed they would have peace—wholeness, soundness, or well-being under God’s rule. In 2 Thessalonians 1:2 Paul repeated the phrase God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (see 1:1) to stress the source of grace and peace. God through Christ grants the gift of salvation and the wholeness that ensues.

**Verse 3:** We must always thank God for you, brothers, which is fitting, since your faith is flourishing, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.

Following his brief greeting, Paul quickly expressed gratitude for the Thessalonian Christians. The word must literally meant “indebted” in the sense of owing money. It could convey the idea of being obligated by what is due or fitting. Paul felt duty-bound to thank God continuously for his brothers (and sisters) in the faith in Thessalonica. To do so was appropriate or proper because they were worthy of

his gratitude.

Paul stated two reasons he thanked God for the Thessalonian believers. First, their faith continued to flourish. The word faith could refer to their trust in and commitment to Christ as Savior and Lord. If so, their trust and commitment were growing. Or, the term could have the sense of faithfulness—their steadfastness in the face of persecution and their holding fast to the gospel’s truths. In this case, they were persevering in their witness and ministry. The term flourishing means “to increase or grow beyond measure.” The believers were not merely holding their own; they were experiencing rapid spiritual growth beyond expectations. Paul was grateful for their remarkable progress.

Second, Paul felt a continuing personal obligation to thank God for the Thessalonian believers’ love for one another. Every Christian loved every other believer. The Greek word translated love is the term agape, the distinctive word for God’s kind of love that Christians are to demonstrate. This love is not based on emotion but is a determined good will that acts for others’ best interests regardless of feelings. Such self-giving, self-sacrificial love looks for nothing in return and is not discouraged easily. It is not natural; only God can enable His people to love as He does. (See Gal. 5:22). No wonder Paul thanked God! All the Thessalonian believers were demonstrating God’s kind of love toward one another. Moreover, their love was abounding—literally, “superabounding.” It was widely dispersed within the church; it was inclusive.

**Verse 4:** Therefore we ourselves boast about you among God’s churches—about your endurance and faith in all the persecutions and afflictions you endure.

Because of the Thessalonian believers’ rapidly growing faith and abounding, inclusive love, Paul bragged about them to other churches—probably Christian communities in Achaia since Paul most likely was writing from Corinth. The phrase we ourselves boast implies he and his coworkers ordinarily did not boast about converts, but in the Thessalonian Christians’ case they could not restrain their praise. Some interpreters suggest the believers previously had protested they were not worthy of Paul’s compliment in 1 Thessalonians 1:3. In 2 Thessalonians 1:4, he affirmed their worthiness. He expressed sincere and well-deserved praise designed to encourage the Thessalonian believers and to challenge and inspire other communities of faith in Achaia. The phrase God’s churches emphasized the Lord’s

ownership; the churches existed because of His power and grace, and they were His. Individually and as local churches, believers belonged to God.

As Paul had contact with other churches, he habitually praised the Thessalonian Christians' endurance and faith in the difficulties they faced. The word endurance referred to the ability to continue to bear a load or to overcome opposition. It had the ideas of perseverance and resilience. As was the case previously, the term faith could have the sense of unswerving trust in God or of faithfulness in witness and ministry. In this context, both ideas could be present.

The believers were demonstrating endurance and faith in difficult circumstances. The word all indicates multiple persecutions and afflictions. The tense of the term endure expresses continuous action. The opposition was unrelenting. Behind the Greek word rendered persecutions was a verb that meant "to pursue" or "to chase" with the intent to harm. The noun persecutions was used solely for religious persecution. The term translated afflictions came from a verb that meant "to press" or "to squeeze." Our expression "between a rock and a hard place" conveys the idea. The Greek term translated endure differs from the term translated endurance Paul used earlier in this verse. The word endure literally means "to hold up" or "to hold oneself erect and firm" against anyone or anything. The Thessalonian believers stood tall as they faced opposition.

Paul rejoiced over what God was doing in the Thessalonian Christians' lives. The Lord had enabled them to grow in the Christian virtues of faith, love, and endurance; as a result, Paul could use them as models to inspire other churches.

## 2. WORTHY IN RIGHTEOUSNESS (2 THESS. 1:5-10)

**Verse 5:** It is a clear evidence of God's righteous judgment that you will be counted worthy of God's kingdom, for which you also are suffering,

After thanking God for the Thessalonian Christians, Paul sought to encourage them. What did he have in mind in his opening words: It is clear evidence of God's righteous judgment? Most likely, the pronoun it referred to the believers' "endurance and faith in all the persecutions and afflictions" they endured (1:4). God's empowering them not only to withstand opposition but also to grow in faith and love proved they belonged to His people and that He deemed them worthy to be included in His kingdom. Their remaining steadfast did not earn them places in the kingdom but was

evidence they belonged to it.

The word judgment includes reward and punishment and points to the final reckoning at Christ's return. God's verdicts are always right; He is right when He saves or rewards, and He is right when He condemns. The phrase God's kingdom probably refers to the culmination or fulfillment of His kingdom at Christ's second coming. God's kingdom or sovereign rule is present and future; it broke into history with the incarnation, and it will be fulfilled at Christ's return. At present, the Thessalonian believers were suffering for the kingdom's sake. Opponents continued to persecute them. God did not cause the believers' suffering; opposition and persecution were inevitable for Christ's followers. As we might say, "It comes with the territory."

**Verse 6:** since it is righteous for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you,

The flip side of "God's righteous judgment" (1:5) is to recompense the believers' persecutors. To paraphrase Paul's words with a south Mississippi expression, God is right to give the persecutors a dose of their own medicine. The phrase for God means from God's point of view. In His estimation or judgment, He is right to punish the persecutors. The words affliction and afflict are forms of the same Greek term Paul used in verse 4. Christians' afflictions were not merely any sufferings but hardships endured for the gospel's sake. The word repay has the idea of retribution or penalty.

**Verse 7:** and to reward with rest you who are afflicted, along with us. This will take place at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with His powerful angels,

In God's view, He also is right to give His persecuted people rest. Note Paul included his coworkers and himself among God's people who were suffering for the gospel's sake. Four times in verses 3-7, Paul used related forms of the Greek word translated afflicted in verse 7 to convey the intense pressure and hardships opponents inflicted on believers. The word rest comes from a Greek term that means "to loose" or "to slacken." God will loosen the jaws of the vice of persecution and give His faithful people relief or peace.

Relief for God's suffering people and payback for their persecutors will take place at Christ's return and the consummation of God's kingdom. The title Lord Jesus stressed Christ's Deity and role as Savior. The word revelation means "unveiling" or "disclosure." After His resurrection, Jesus ascended to heaven—God's immediate presence. An angel said to the astonished disciples, "This Jesus . . . will

come in the same way that you have seen Him going into heaven" (Acts 1:11). When God removes the curtain and Jesus appears from heaven, His angels will accompany Him (see Matt. 25:31; Mark 13:26-27).

**Verse 8:** taking vengeance with flaming fire on those who don't know God and on those who don't obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

In the Greek text, the phrase with flaming fire comes first in verse 8; thus, it could modify "powerful angels" in verse 7. If so, the phrase describes the splendor and majesty of Christ's return. Fire also could symbolize judgment, an element of His return. In the Old Testament, fire symbolized God's holy, awe-inspiring presence (see Ex. 3:2). If the phrase modifies taking vengeance in verse 8, as in the Holman CSB, it describes the terrible, self-chosen punishment unbelievers will experience at Christ's return. In the background may be Isaiah's depiction of God's judgment (see Isa. 66:15-16).

The Greek term rendered vengeance means "just retribution" or "vindication"; thus "justice" may be a better translation of the Greek word. Christ, who is Deity, is fully qualified to mete out justice.

Paul characterized the people who will receive just retribution at Christ's return. Some interpreters have viewed the phrase those who don't know God as Gentiles and the words those who don't obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus as Jews. Although the Greek construction can indicate two groups, most likely Paul used the two descriptions to identify a single group, non-Christians who persecuted believers. The word know does not indicate the persecutors did not know about Him. That they did not know Him means they refused to acknowledge, respect, and worship Him. They had revelation concerning God but lacked a genuine relationship with Him. In addition, these people had not given heed to the gospel—they had not submitted to or accepted it. The Lord Jesus—God incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth—was both the bearer and the content of good news of salvation by God's grace through faith. People who rejected the gospel and opposed its spread closed their eyes to the light of God's most complete revelation of His redemptive purpose.

**Verse 9:** These will pay the penalty of everlasting destruction, away from the Lord's presence and from His glorious strength,

Unbelieving persecutors would pay a terrible penalty for their willful blindness to the light of God's revelation in Christ. The word these is emphatic and designates quality

or class—literally, “such ones as.” The phrase pay the penalty translates two Greek words that mean to incur a just sentence of punishment. The word destruction also means “ruin”—ultimate, complete, and everlasting (see 1 Thess. 5:3). It carries the idea of deprivation or loss. The term does not refer to annihilation—ceasing to exist. It carries the emphasis of never-ending separation from Christ.

The phrase away from the Lord’s presence literally is “away from the Lord’s face.” “The Lord . . . is patient . . . , not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9); yet people can persist in rejecting God’s grace in Christ, and God will honor their freedom to choose. Stubborn refusal of His love culminates in permanent exile from His loving presence. Unbelievers exclude themselves from Christ’s glorious strength—from His radiant, majestic power or might. They are thrown into the fiery furnace punctuated by weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 13:49-50).

In Revelation 22:4, John declared God’s people “will see His face.” They will enjoy His presence for eternity. In His loving presence, they will experience the “rest” (relief or peace) to which Paul referred in 2 Thessalonians 1:7. “God Himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will exist no longer; grief, crying, and pain will exist no longer” (Rev. 21:3-4). In stark contrast, people who have rejected God’s gracious invitation to salvation in Christ will be separated from God forever. No human language has words to describe the horror of such a self-imposed penalty.

**Verse 10:** in that day when He comes to be glorified by His saints and to be admired by all those who have believed, because our testimony among you was believed.

Christ’s return will be a day of judgment for unbelievers who have opposed the gospel, but it will be a time of celebration for believers. The phrase in that day refers to the Day of the Lord—“the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven” (2 Thess. 1:7). It will be a time of God’s choosing, and only He knows when it will occur (see Mark 13:32). The phrase by His saints can have the idea of agency: believers will glorify Him. The phrase also can be rendered “in (among) His saints,” which can mean “in the sphere of His saints” In this case, Paul indicated the saints will mirror Christ’s glory. All people will recognize believers as new creations by His power and grace, and His redemptive workmanship in them will glorify Him (see 1 John 3:2). What they are—His people who reflect His character—will bring honor to Him. The word

translated glorified also means “praised,” adored,” or “honored.” People cannot add to or enhance Christ’s glory; they only can recognize and honor it.

The phrase His saints refers to Christ’s people—all Christians. Saints are not super Christians; they are people saved by grace through faith in Christ and set apart for His service. They live by His high moral standards and are growing toward spiritual maturity. They are imperfect; they sin and need forgiveness. Yet they remain faithful to Christ and seek to advance His redemptive purpose. Believers who demonstrate Christ’s character praise and honor Him.

Believers will admire their returning Lord. The phrase to be admired translates a Greek word that also means “to be wondered at” or “to be marveled at.” It can convey the ideas of reverence and adoration. The description all those who have believed most likely applies to people who have taken the decisive step of placing their faith in Christ for salvation. Christians will respond to Christ in amazement, reverence, and adoration at His return, as they celebrate His coming. His glory will far exceed believers’ expectations.

Paul added a parenthesis to assure the Thessalonian believers they would participate in Christ’s glorious return. They will offer praise and adoration as they marvel at their Lord’s splendor. They will take part because they believed Paul’s testimony when he came to them. The word testimony also can be rendered “witness” and refers to the gospel Paul preached in Thessalonica. In response to the good news of God’s grace in Christ, the Thessalonians placed their faith in Him. They trusted Him for salvation and committed their lives to Him. Thus, they will be among Christ’s people who will celebrate His return.

In verses 5-10, Paul maintained God’s dealings in judgment with both the righteous and the wicked will be just. In adoration and wonder, believers will join in celebrating His return. People who have rejected Him will be separated from God forever. Both the righteous and the wicked will receive the just outcome of their choices.

### 3. WORTHY OF GOD’S CALLING (2 THESS. 1:11-12)

**Verse 11:** And in view of this, we always pray for you that our God will consider you worthy of His calling, and will, by His power, fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith,

Paul followed his expression of thanksgiving in verses 3-10 with a brief reference to his prayer for the Thessalonian

Christians. The apostle assured them he constantly prayed for them (see 1 Thess. 1:2). The phrase in view of this also can be translated “for this purpose” or “to this end” and refers to verses 5-10. At Christ’s return, the Thessalonian believers would be included in God’s kingdom, would receive their reward of rest, and would join all believers in celebrating Christ’s coming. In the meantime, they were to continue persevering in the face of persecution.

Paul’s prayer for the believers included two petitions. First, he consistently asked that God would consider them worthy of His calling. Paul already had assured them they would be worthy of God’s kingdom (see 2 Thess. 1:5). Did his statement in verse 11 express doubt about their salvation or faithfulness? Certainly not! Paul knew their perseverance depended on God’s power working in them; their being deemed worthy or deserving of God’s calling would come by God’s grace. However, Paul elsewhere wrote that God’s extension of His grace and a resultant growth in Christlikeness were inseparable (Eph. 2:8-10). The Thessalonian believers’ lives were demonstrating their worthiness to be God’s people; Paul wanted them to continue to do so.

The second facet of Paul’s prayer for the Thessalonian Christians was that God would fulfill their every resolve for goodness and the work of faith. The word rendered desire also means “purpose” or “intention.” Paul prayed that their good intentions would issue in the proposed outcomes. He also asked God to make their faith productive. The word work can convey the idea of purposeful activity. The term faith has the force of trust in and commitment to Christ. Paul prayed that the believers’ continuing commitment to the Lord would go on producing good deeds. The key phrase is by His [God’s] power. Paul knew that following through on good intentions and having faith issuing in good works depended on God’s activity in the believers’ lives (see Phil. 2:13).

**Verse 12:** so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified by you, and you by Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 12 picks up the theme of glorifying Christ from verse 10. Paul wanted God’s power to cause the Thessalonian believers’ good resolves to issue in actions produced by faith so the Christians would glorify Jesus. The phrase the name of our Lord Jesus referred to His Being or Person. To glorify Him as Deity and Savior would be to make evident His dignity and worth so people would acknowledge His lordship. Paul wanted the believers to bring honor to their

Lord by their faithfulness, moral purity, and perseverance.

In turn, Paul prayed that Christ would glorify the believers. Interpreters have identified Christians' glory as (1) being Christ's people, (2) growing in Christlikeness, (3) sharing in Christ's honor, (4) enjoying close spiritual union and fellowship with Christ, and (5) receiving honor because of Christ's work in them. I prefer a combination of (1), (2), and (4). Believers' glory is enjoying a redemptive relationship with Christ in which they increasingly demonstrate His character and thus give evidence they are His people.

Believers' continuing transformation into Christlikeness depends totally on grace—God's generous goodness, His love in action on our behalf. The title Lord expresses the Deity of Jesus, the Messiah. Paul emphasized the Father and the Son as Sources of the grace that transforms believers in the salvation experience, continues to shape them into Christ's likeness (see Eph. 4:13), makes them effective in service, and sustains them in the face of opposition. Grace begins and fuels the entire Christian journey, from the moment of salvation to entrance into God's immediate presence.

## BACKGROUND COMMENTARY FOR FEB. 15

### 2 THESSALONIANS 2:1-17

#### THE BACKGROUND

During Paul's stay in Thessalonica on his second missionary journey, he and his coworkers had taught the new believers basic truths of Christianity. One foundational instruction concerned Christ's return. When opponents forced Paul to leave the city, he eventually went to Athens. Circumstances would not allow him to revisit the Thessalonian Christians, so he sent Timothy to them. Later, Timothy joined Paul in Corinth and reported on the situation in Thessalonica.

Timothy's news was mostly positive, but some problems needed Paul's attention. In 1 Thessalonians, Paul dealt with the issues Timothy reported. One item of concern was a misunderstanding about Christ's return. Evidently many believers expected His immediate return; yet some Christians had died, and the grieving church members wondered whether their dead loved ones would take part in Christ's return. In addition, some believers had stopped working and were depending on other believers for necessities. In 1 Thessalonians 4:11–5:11, Paul urged believers to labor for a living and gave assurance and further instructions concerning Christ's return.

Shortly after Paul wrote his first letter, word reached him that problems persisted in the Thessalonian church. Opponents of the gospel continued to persecute believers. Some Christians still refused to work. In spite of Paul's teaching in his first letter, confusion and alarm still existed concerning Christ's return. In 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17, Paul gave further instructions about the Lord's coming, encouraged the believers to hold on to his teachings, and prayed they would receive divine encouragement and strength.

#### 1. REJECT TEACHINGS THAT ARE NOT BIBLICAL (2 THESS. 2:1-4)

**Verses 1-2:** Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to Him: we ask you, brothers, not to be easily upset in mind or troubled, either by a spirit or by a message or by a letter as if from us, alleging that the Day of the Lord has come.

Paul opened his letter with a greeting and a lengthy

expression of gratitude for the Thessalonian believers. He stressed God's justice to encourage them as they faced persecution. God would reward them with rest and would punish the persecutors (see 2 Thess. 1:1-12). Then Paul turned to the matter of Christ's return. The phrase now concerning likely indicates Paul was responding to the report he had received that believers were confused about Christ's return.

The Greek word translated coming is *parousia* [puh ROO zhee uh], which became a technical term for the Lord's return. Paul's full reference to our Lord Jesus Christ was his way of emphasizing the Savior as God incarnate, the promised Deliverer (see comments on 1:1 on p. 109). The Thessalonian Christians may have had lingering questions about the time and manner of Jesus' coming. Also, the words and our being gathered together to Him probably indicate the believers still were uncertain about what would happen to them at Christ's coming and about reunion with loved ones who had died (see 1 Thess. 4:16-17). This gathering together has been termed the rapture (believers' being snatched away or caught up). Some interpreters believe the rapture occurs separately from the Lord's return. Others maintain Christ's coming and gathering His people are two facets of one event.

Paul again addressed the believers warmly as brothers and made a tactful request. He pleaded with them not to be easily upset in mind. The word translated easily basically means "quickly." The term rendered upset means "shaken," "agitated," or "disturbed." It was used for the effects of winds, storms, or waves. The form of the word conveyed the idea of an unexpected jolt. The phrase in mind literally is "from the mind" and conveys what we mean when we say, "Don't lose your head." The mind's being agitated would affect the person's ability to reason or to think clearly. The word troubled also can be rendered "alarmed" and describes a continuing condition. Paul cautioned the believers against quickly becoming disturbed and remaining alarmed.

Paul identified three possible sources of the believers' agitation and alarm—their confused state of concern. They were not to let a spirit disturb them. With this term Paul may have referred to a person who claimed to have a new revelation from God. The phrase by a message (literally, "by a word") may have referred to a report someone gave, claiming Paul's authority; an allusion to a sermon Paul purportedly preached; or someone's claim to have had a private conversation with the apostle.

The third possible source of agitation among the believers was a letter. The Holman CSB translation as if from us implies a letter forged in Paul's name. Based on the rendering "as by us" (the Greek text), other interpretations are: (1) Paul referred to a misunderstanding of statements he had made in 1 Thessalonians; (2) the apostle alluded to another letter he had written to the church, a letter we don't have; or (3) some individuals were claiming to have received a letter from the apostle. A number of Bible scholars prefer the view that Paul referred to a letter that had been forged in his name.

What had upset the Thessalonian believers—whether it had come by a supposed revelation, a false report, or a forged letter—was the claim that Christ's return already had occurred. Paul had written about the Day of the Lord in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11. He had stressed Christ would come again suddenly, and believers were to live in expectation of that event. Someone had falsely claimed the event already had taken place. The Greek word rendered has come also can be translated "is close at hand." Thus, some interpreters have identified the bogus teaching as asserting Christ's return was immediate. In this view, God had set in motion the events surrounding the Day of the Lord; thus, that day was dawning. Most likely, the Holman CSB translation is the proper rendering. In 1 Thessalonians, Paul had taught that believers who had died would come back with Jesus; the dead in Christ would rise first; and living believers would join the Lord and the returning loved ones in the air (see 1 Thess. 4:13-18). Imagine the anxiety, perplexity, and confusion the Thessalonian believers experienced in light of the false teaching. If Christ already had come, why had the event not unfolded as Paul described? Not only had believers who had died missed Christ's coming, but living Christians also had been left out!

**Verse 3:** Don't let anyone deceive you in any way. For that day will not come unless the apostasy comes first and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction.

Paul urged the Thessalonian Christians to reject the false teaching that Christ had returned. They were to let no one delude or beguile them—in any of the ways he mentioned in verse 2 or in any other way. Before Christ's coming, three events must occur. These events are: (1) the apostasy or rebellion must take place (2 Thess. 2:3); (2) the man of lawlessness must be revealed (2:3); and (3) the restraint or restrainer must be removed (2:6-7). These things could be three separate events, three facets of one event, or any

combination among them. In addition, Paul did not indicate when the events would take place or the length of the process. His emphatic point was that none of the events had occurred; thus, Christ had not returned.

First, the apostasy must take place. The Greek term translated apostasy means “falling away” or “defection” from the truth. The verb means “to withdraw from,” “to go away from,” or “to stand off from.” The noun was used of political or military revolt or rebellion. Paul did not explain what he meant by the revolt, and he did not indicate who the rebels will be. Interpreters have offered several views: (1) Believers will fall away from the faith. (2) People will revolt against their government officials. (3) Humans in general will rebel against God. (4) The powers of evil will launch an all-out attack on God through unsaved people. The last suggestion is most likely correct: Non-Christians will oppose God. Thus, Christians will not rebel against or stand off from God and His purpose; they will not defect from the faith and lose their salvation. “All true believers endure to the end. Those whom God has accepted in Christ, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall persevere to the end. . . . they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.” (The Baptist Faith and Message, 2000, p. 12)

Second, the man of lawlessness will appear on the scene, either concurrent with or after the rebellion. Paul also described this person as the son of destruction. The term lawlessness indicates his disdain for God’s law and perhaps all law. The word revealed means “disclosed” or “unveiled.” The phrase son of was a Hebrew expression that characterized a person by the following word. The word destruction also means “perishing” or “ruin.” This person will experience ultimate ruin (not annihilation) because he has chosen the path to everlasting ruin.

**Verse 4:** He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he sits in God’s sanctuary, publicizing that he himself is God.

The man of lawlessness or son of destruction will be hostile to Christ. Also, he will elevate himself above all other so-called gods and the true God as well as objects of worship. He will be the epitome of idolatry in that he exceeds all else in his claims for people’s worship. Thus, this individual will be totally evil. He will sit in the holy of holies, God’s sanctuary or temple. One view is that this description refers to the Antichrist’s sitting in a restored temple in the

end times. Another approach is that this language is a way of expressing the imposter’s rash attempt to dethrone God. The phrase publicizing that he himself is God expresses his arrogant claim to have replaced God as sovereign and his demand that people worship him.

## 2. GOD IS SOVEREIGN OVER THE LAST DAYS (2 THESS. 2:5-10)

**Verse 5:** Don’t you remember that when I was still with you I told you about this?

This verse is key in interpreting verses 3-12. Evidently, when Paul was in Thessalonica he had taught the new converts fairly extensively about Christ’s return. Much of what he wrote to them built on the earlier foundation. We do not have the teaching of which he reminded the believers in verse 5. Our knowing what he told them when he was with them would enhance our understanding. Because we do not have that background information, we must be cautious in interpreting Paul’s words.

**Verse 6:** And you know what currently restrains him, so that he will be revealed in his time.

Verses 6-7 record the third event that must take place before Christ comes: the restraint or restrainer must be removed. Verse 6 begins with an example of our disadvantage in interpretation: you know what currently restrains the man of lawlessness. Evidently, the believers knew because Paul had told them. We do not know, so we theorize. The Greek text has “the thing (one) holding back.” Paul may have had in mind: (1) the Roman government, specifically the emperor; (2) the principle of law and government; (3) an unspecified angel; (4) the gospel and Paul as its foremost spokesman; or (5) the Holy Spirit of God. If Paul referred to an evil restraining force, he likely indicated Satan, “the spiritual forces of evil” (Eph. 6:12), or the pagan Roman Empire. Although many Bible scholars view the restrainer as the Holy Spirit, I prefer the suggestion that Paul referred to the principle of law and government through passing periods of time. Whether the restrainer is a principle or a person, however, the man of lawlessness will be held back until the proper time for him to be disclosed. The phrase so that he will be revealed in his time implies God will choose the appropriate time.

**Verse 7:** For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; but the one now restraining will do so until he is out of the way,

The word mystery refers to something secret that humans

cannot figure out but that God must reveal. The phrase the mystery of lawlessness may refer to evil’s once hidden activity against God that the gospel now has brought out into the open. Evil’s active opposition to God already is operative in the world, working toward the goal of dethroning Him (see 2 Thess. 2:4). The restrainer, however, will hold back the man of lawlessness until he (the restrainer) is removed. Note that Paul changed from “what . . . restrains” (2:6) to the phrase the one . . . he (2:7). Some interpreters have suggested Paul here personalized the principle of law and order to which he referred in verse 6. Many have viewed the person as the Holy Spirit of God. At any rate, the restrainer will be effective until God removes him.

**Verse 8:** and then the lawless one will be revealed. The Lord Jesus will destroy him with the breath of His mouth and will bring him to nothing with the brightness of His coming.

When God chooses to remove the restrainer, the lawless one will appear on the scene. For the third time Paul stated the man of lawlessness (son of destruction) will be revealed (see 2:3,6). This lawless one will be the ultimate embodiment and expression of evil.

Paul gave no details about the lawless one’s activities but immediately moved to his destruction. The Lord Jesus (Sovereign Savior) easily will destroy (consume or overthrow) the supreme personification of evil. The phrase the breath of His mouth could refer to Jesus’ words or to truth that overcomes falsehood. In addition, Jesus will bring [the lawless one] to nothing. The Greek word translated bring . . . to nothing means “render inoperative” or “render useless,” with the further ideas of doing away with or abolishing. The Lord will put an end to the lawless one and his actions by His glorious return in power. The phrase the brightness of His coming includes two Greek terms for Jesus’ return—a deliberate technique for emphasis. The word brightness means “appearing” in a glorious display. The term coming is the usual word for Jesus’ coming to be present with His people. Christ’s return will mark the end of evil’s opposition to God.

**Verse 9:** The coming of the lawless one is based on Satan’s working, with all kinds of false miracles, signs, and wonders,

The word coming is the same term used of Christ’s return to be present with His people. The lawless one will come as Satan’s instrument with his power. The word working occurs in the New Testament only for superhuman energy

or operation, God's or Satan's. The lawless one will be able to perform false (pseudo) miracles, signs, and wonders. The word miracles literally is "power." We get our word dynamite from this Greek term. The word signs refers to acts of power that will seem to authenticate the lawless one. The term wonders points to the false miracles' and signs' effects on people. They will respond in awe to the lawless one's acts. Because his acts falsely mimic Christ's miraculous deeds, some interpreters view the man of lawlessness as a bogus or counterfeit Christ.

**Verse 10:** and with every unrighteous deception among those who are perishing. They perish because they did not accept the love of the truth in order to be saved.

The lawless one will use every trick of his evil trade. The word translated unrighteous is comprehensive for evil of every kind. The lawless one's efforts to delude people arise out of wickedness and are characterized by wickedness. Paul described the lawless one's receptive audience as people who are perishing. The word perishing means "lost," "destroyed," or "ruined" and has the sense of losing eternal life. The process was continuing as Paul wrote. People were forfeiting eternal life because they had not accepted the love of the truth. The word truth refers to the good news of Christ. The term translated accept also means "receive." The phrase did not accept the love of the truth was an unusual way of stating that the people in the process of perishing refused to receive God's love offered to them in Christ. Placing their faith in Christ would have resulted in their salvation (deliverance or rescue from sin; wholeness). Because they rejected the truth, their only option was to accept the lawless one's lies. They were responsible for their fatal choice.

Paul presented evidence that the Day of the Lord could not have occurred. He adamantly declared certain events associated with it had to take place first. Today, when we encounter unbiblical or diverse teachings about Christ's return, recalling basic biblical truths about His coming helps us remain calm. Among these basic truths are: He will return as Victor and Judge; He will gather His own; and He will condemn forever Satan, all the forces of evil, and all who belong to Satan.

### 3. STAND FIRM IN GOD'S WORD (2 THESS. 2:11-17)

**Verse 11:** For this reason God sends them a strong delusion so that they will believe what is false,

Because people will fall for the lawless one's deception,

they will perish (see 2 Thess. 2:9-10). Satan's working through the lawless one will deceive them. They will reject the truth of the gospel and will refuse God's offer of salvation. Verses 11-12 show that the statement God sends them a strong delusion (literally, "a working of error") expresses His judgment on the unsaved, using their error to punish them. The present tense of the verb translated sends has a future sense. It expresses certainty. God will subject to the power of their sin people who reject the gospel and choose sin (see Rom. 1:24-28). He will not cause them to be deceived. However, He will honor their choices, and they will experience the consequences of those choices. The consequence is that they will believe what is false—the lawless one's claim to replace God. Having rejected God's truth in Christ (see 2 Thess. 2:10), they will swallow the lawless one's lie hook, line, and sinker.

**Verse 12:** so that all will be condemned—those who did not believe the truth but enjoyed unrighteousness.

All the people who exchange "the truth of God for a lie" (Rom. 1:25) will be condemned. The word condemned means "separated," "judged," or "sentenced." God, the just Judge, will hand down the sentence for stubborn, willful rejection of His saving love. Condemnation is the inevitable outcome of not accepting as true the good news of God's grace in Christ—of not accepting as true God's truth. What is more, people who will fall for the lawless one's deceptions and will be in the process of perishing actually will revel in unrighteousness or wickedness. The Greek term rendered enjoyed also means "delighted in" or "took pleasure in." These people will be so thoroughly deceived that unrighteousness will seem good to them.

**Verse 13:** But we must always thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God has chosen you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and through belief in the truth.

With the word but, Paul introduced a sharp contrast between people the lawless one will deceive—those he described as perishing—and the Thessalonian believers. Again the apostle expressed his indebtedness or obligation to thank God for them consistently (see 2 Thess. 1:3). He felt constrained to express gratitude for God's work in them. He owed them as much. They were his brothers and sisters in Christ; he felt a warm and close relationship with them. Various times in the two letters, Paul used the term brothers to emphasize his deep affection for the believers. In addition,

he reminded them God (or Christ) loved them—they lived in His love.

Paul was grateful to God that the Lord had taken the initiative to call the believers to salvation. The phrase from the beginning can mean "from creation." If so, Paul stressed God's eternal redemptive purpose. The phrase also could refer to Paul's arrival in Thessalonica with the gospel, that is, the Thessalonian believers had responded readily to Paul's proclamation of the good news. The phrase God has chosen you for salvation does not indicate God selects some to be saved and does not choose others. The Greek word translated chosen conveys the idea of God's initiative in summoning people to redemption. He chooses to offer salvation. He invites all people to salvation, but they must choose to be chosen—they must accept His invitation.

The Holy Spirit is able to do His work of regeneration when people believe in the truth. The phrase belief in the truth is the polar opposite of the phrase "did not believe the truth" in verse 12. The Thessalonian believers had accepted as true God's truth expressed in the gospel. They had accepted Christ as Savior. The term belief here carries the further idea of trust in and commitment to the Christ of the gospel.

**Verse 14:** He called you to this through our gospel, so that you might obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God had called the Thessalonian believers to "salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and through belief in the truth" (2:13) by means of the good news of God's grace in Christ that Paul had proclaimed to them. The phrase our gospel refers to God's message He had commissioned Paul to preach (see 1 Thess. 1:5; 2:8-9). The purpose of God's calling the believers to redemption was to enable them to gain or acquire Christ's glory. The word translated obtain can convey the idea of earning, but the context rules out that meaning here. We can do nothing to merit Christ's glory. The word glory looks forward to Christ's victorious return and the consummation of believers' salvation as they enter heaven—God's immediate presence. Christians will share their Lord's majesty and splendor. In one sense, however, believers begin to share in Christ's glory when they respond positively to the gospel and progressively exhibit His excellence of character. The full title Lord Jesus Christ was Paul's characteristic way of stressing Jesus as the divine, promised Deliverer who saves people from their sins. With the word our, Paul emphasized his and the believers' relationship with Christ and with one another.

**Verse 15:** Therefore, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions you were taught, either by our message or by our letter.

In light of God's initiative in calling the believers to salvation so they would share in Christ's glory (see 2 Thess. 2:14) or perhaps as a conclusion drawn from verses 1-14, Paul urged them to stand firm. The Greek word he used can have the idea of persevering. In spite of the opposition they faced and their perplexity about Christ's return, Paul urged them to remain steadfast. He specified the area in which they were to remain resolute. The term rendered hold to has the sense of having a firm grip on something or of keeping something carefully and faithfully. Both imperatives—stand firm and hold to—are present tense, which conveys continuous action. Paul exhorted believers to go on being solidly grounded in and having a firm grasp of the traditions he had taught them rather than to become “upset in mind or troubled” (2:2). The term traditions refers to something delivered or transmitted. Paul had taught the believers the basic Christian doctrines that had their source in Jesus and thus were authoritative. The phrase by our message refers to Paul's oral instructions while he was in Thessalonica. The words by our letter likely refer to 1 Thessalonians, although some interpreters have suggested Paul indicated 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

**Verse 16:** May our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal encouragement and good hope by grace,

Following his strong exhortation in verse 15, Paul expressed a prayer for the believers. Note the word our before both the Son and the Father. Paul and the Thessalonians enjoyed fellowship with Christ and God, and they were related to one another in the family of faith. The phrase eternal encouragement may refer to assurance believers will share Christ's glory at His return (see 2:14). This confidence also offers comfort in the present. In addition, God has given His people good hope. Paul used the word hope in the sense of total confidence concerning the future—confidence based on God's faithfulness and power, not on human abilities. Believers' hope is good because it is a certainty based on our Father's love. Eternal encouragement and good hope are God's gifts to His people—gifts not based on believers' merit but on His love. His disposition is to give generously what we cannot earn. Salvation and assurance of life with Him are gifts of sheer grace.

**Verse 17:** encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good work and word.

Paul prayed that God would encourage the Thessalonian believers' hearts. The word encourage has the ideas of comfort, support, and strengthening. The believers faced unrelenting persecution (see 1:3-12), and a false teaching that Christ already had returned troubled them (see 2:1-12). Paul prayed God would give them inner strength and comfort in these crises.

After rehearsing wicked people's condemnation, Paul expressed gratitude for the Thessalonian Christians, their salvation, and their future. He urged them to stick with what he had told them and prayed that God would help them remain calm.

## BACKGROUND COMMENTARY FOR FEB. 22

### 2 THESSALONIANS 3:1-18

#### THE BACKGROUND

Paul had written 1 Thessalonians to commend the believers for their faithfulness and to encourage them as they faced persecution. He exhorted them to live by high moral standards in the context of an immoral society. He instructed them further concerning Christ's coming, urged industrious Christians to warn believers who were refusing to work, and gave guidance about living as Christians.

When Paul received news that in spite of his first letter, the Thessalonian Christians still struggled with three major problems, he wrote 2 Thessalonians. In chapter 1, he encouraged the persecuted believers by assuring them God is fair; He would punish the persecutors and give His people rest. In chapter 2, Paul attempted to correct a misunderstanding concerning Christ's return and encouraged the believers to persevere and to keep a firm grip on the Christian doctrines he had taught them. In chapter 3, after asking that his brothers and sisters in Christ pray for him, Paul addressed the persistent and evidently growing problem of believers who not only would not work but also disrupted other Christians' work.

#### 1. PRAY FOR MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL (2 THESS. 3:1-2)

**Verse 1:** Finally, pray for us, brothers, that the Lord's message may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you,

The word finally serves as a transition to a new subject. Another possible translation of the term is "for the rest." Paul moved from his prayer for the believers in 2:16-17 to a request they pray for him. The term brothers again pointed to his strong, affectionate feelings for them and to their relationship with one another in God's family of faith. A mutual privilege and responsibility of their relationship was prayer for one another. The Greek word translated pray is the most common word for prayer in the New Testament. It basically has the idea of asking for something from God. The present tense used in this verse conveys continuous action. Paul wanted the believers to keep on praying for him.

Paul asked that the believers' ongoing prayers for him focus on two elements, and the order of those elements gives us insight into his priorities. First, he wanted the

believers to pray that the Lord's message would spread quickly and would be triumphant. The phrase the Lord's message (literally, "the Lord's word," see 1 Thess. 1:8) likely is a synonym for "the gospel of God" (1 Thess. 2:2; see also 2:8,9,13). God is the Source of the good news of salvation in Christ. Paul was God's spokesman, proclaiming the message of amazing grace available to all people. The words spread rapidly translate one Greek term that means "run." Applied to the gospel, it has the sense of progressing freely. Paul may have recalled the psalmist's words, "[God's] word runs swiftly" (Ps. 147:15).

The word rendered be honored can convey the idea of being victorious or of winning in this context. The gospel wins when people accept it and place their faith in Christ. The form of both terms in the original language express continuous action: "go on spreading rapidly" and "keep on winning." The two phrases may reflect a Greek athletic contest in which a runner who sped to the finish line first received the victor's garland. The words just as it was with you likely refer to the Thessalonian believers' positive response to the gospel when Paul brought it to them. The gospel had won in Thessalonica, and Paul wanted it to go on winning. He well may have had his work in Corinth specifically in mind; he wanted the gospel to win in that city as it had in Thessalonica.

**Verse 2:** and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not all have faith.

The second item of Paul's prayer request was that believers ask God to rescue him from wicked and evil men. The imagery is that of drawing or dragging him out of their clutches. The word translated wicked means "perverse," "unreasonable," and "outrageous." The word translated evil also means "bad"; people who actively opposed the gospel were "the bad guys" in the deepest sense of the phrase. In the Greek text, the article "the" comes before the words wicked and evil men. This fact has led to the view that Paul had a definite group in mind.

The next words cannot capture in writing the sadness Paul's tone doubtless expressed as he stated, probably with a sigh, that not all people had faith. The word faith conveys the senses of trust and commitment. Paul wanted all people to trust Christ for salvation—to commit their lives to Him. Sadly, not only did many refuse to do so but also opposed Paul's missionary efforts.

#### 2. OBEYING SCRIPTURAL COMMANDS (2 THESS. 3:3-5)

**Verse 3:** But the Lord is faithful; He will strengthen and guard you from the evil one.

In a play on words, Paul contrasted some people's refusal to place their faith in Christ (2 Thess. 3:2) to God's faithfulness to His people in verse 3. The last word in verse 2 is "faith"; in the Greek text, the first word in verse 3 is faithful, from the same root term. The term faithful also means "trustworthy" or "reliable." The verb strengthen also means "make stable" or "set fast." The term guard means "protect" or "keep safe." We might have expected Paul to refer to the Lord's establishing and defending his coworkers and him in the opposition they were facing. Instead, the apostle assured the Thessalonian Christians of God's activity on their behalf. The missionaries and the believers shared the experience of opposition from people who rejected the gospel. Then, Paul identified the enemy as the evil one—literally, "the evil." He could have referred to evil as the malignant force expressed in the persecutors or to Satan, the evil one. Most likely, Paul had the latter in mind. Either way, the Thessalonian believers could count on God, for He is dependable. They could trust Him to take care of them.

**Verse 4:** We have confidence in the Lord about you, that you are doing and will do what we command.

I cannot imagine the effect Paul's expression of confidence concerning the Thessalonian Christians had on them. The word rendered we have confidence has the idea of being convinced or firmly persuaded. Literally, Paul wrote, "We have been convinced." The tense of this verb in Greek conveys the sense that the settled conviction began in the past, existed in the present, and would extend into the future. The Greek word translated faith in verse 2 is derived from this verb. The phrase in the Lord could designate the basis of Paul's confidence. His confidence in God gave him confidence in the believers. On the other hand, the phrase could indicate the sphere of God's faithfulness in which the Christians lived. God would empower them to obey Paul's directives.

Paul was firmly convinced the believers were doing and would continue to do what he instructed them to do. The word translated command can mean "declare" or "announce." It also can have the stronger meaning of "order" or "charge." Likely, Paul was exerting his authority as an apostle. The phrase what we command may refer to prior directives Paul had given or to the commands beginning in verse 6. He may have had both in mind.

**Verse 5:** May the Lord direct your hearts to God's love and Christ's endurance.

Before moving to a new subject, Paul expressed a brief prayer for the believers. In 2:16–3:5, he included two prayers for them and asked them to pray for him. He wanted them to know of his petitions to God for them, and he wanted their prayer support as he continued his work. Prayer was an essential part of their partnership in the spread of the gospel and of their relationship with God.

In 3:5, Paul asked that the Lord direct the believers' hearts to God's love. The Greek term translated direct presents the image of a smooth, straight road or path. Paul used the word hearts for the believers' inner selves—the center of intelligence, will, and emotions. The term could have the sense of “you.” The phrase God's love could refer to love as a mark of God's character (God's love for them) or as a ruling principle in the believers' hearts (their love for God and for one another). Paul probably had the former idea in mind. He wanted the believers' lives to be centered on God's love (agape), with no obstacles to hinder their experiencing His love.

Paul also prayed that the believers' lives would be focused on and would reflect Christ's endurance. The Greek word translated endurance is the term we first encountered in 1 Thessalonians 1:3, where Paul commended the Christians' “endurance of hope.” The term has the sense of persevering. It presents the picture of an athlete or soldier being able to take a blow and having the strength to press forward to victory. Paul held up the model of Christ's endurance—His persevering through opposition, suffering, and crucifixion to fulfill His goal of providing salvation. Paul wanted the Thessalonian believers to have the same focused determination in their Christian living.

### 3. BEHAVING IN A RESPONSIBLE MANNER (2 THESS. 3:6-12)

**Verse 6:** Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from every brother who walks irresponsibly and not according to the tradition received from us.

With the word now, Paul signaled a shift in subject. He turned his attention to the third problem he addressed in his second letter. He had encouraged the believers as they endured persistent persecution (see 1:3-12) and had given instructions to correct a false, alarming teaching that Christ

already had returned (see 2:1-12). In 3:6-12, he tackled the problem of believers who refused to work to support themselves. He had given a brief instruction on this subject in 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 and 5:14, but evidently the problem had persisted and grown.

As Paul did elsewhere in his two letters to the Thessalonian believers, he here addressed them as brothers in Christ, but he also exerted his apostolic authority. The word translated command has the strong thrust of “order” or “charge.” It was often used of a general giving orders to his troops. The situation the apostle addressed was grave and disturbing, and he wanted the believers to know how seriously he took it. The phrase in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ expressed the basis of Paul's authority. The term name stood for the Person. Paul's authority for what he directed the believers to do was the divine Savior/Messiah in whom they had placed their faith, in whose grace they lived, and whose return they awaited.

Paul's first stern command may seem strange and even unchristian on the surface. He ordered faithful believers to separate themselves from every Christian who walked irresponsibly. The Greek word translated keep away from meant “withdraw from” or “avoid” with the idea of withholding fellowship. To walk irresponsibly was to live in a disorderly manner. The Greek term translated irresponsibly was a military word for disorderly conduct—for breaking ranks. (See comments on 1 Thess. 5:14 in the Feb. 1 lesson.) The term can mean “idleness,” which fits Paul's words in the following verses. Paul further described the disorderly believers as those who were not living by the tradition they had received from him. Paul referred to the Christian doctrines he had taught them that were commonly accepted in churches. (See 2 Thess. 2:15 and comments in the Feb. 15 lesson.) Some believers were not living by those teachings on the Christian manner of life.

We need to be clear on the purpose of withdrawing fellowship from errant Christians. Paul called such people brothers; they remained Christians who needed correction. The aim was for the isolated believers to repent of their sins, correct their behavior, see the need for the church, and return to the fellowship. The overriding purpose was redemptive: to reclaim Christians who had strayed from the proper course.

**Verse 7:** For you yourselves know how you must imitate us: we were not irresponsible among you;

Paul pointed to the example he had set while he was

with the Thessalonian Christians. In his first letter, he complimented them for becoming imitators of him and of the Lord in enduring persecution (see 1 Thess. 1:6). He also reminded them he had worked to support himself as he proclaimed the gospel and ministered to them (see 1 Thess. 2:9). In 2 Thessalonians 3:7, he reemphasized they were well aware that when he was with them, he was not idle. The Greek phrase rendered were not irresponsible includes a form of the same term Paul used in verse 6 of believers who lived irresponsibly and from whom faithful Christians were to distance themselves. In light of the following verses, the disorderly conduct Paul sought to correct was idleness—a refusal to work for a living (see 1 Thess. 4:11; 5:14). Paul had modeled hard work to provide for himself, and all Thessalonian believers should follow that model. They ought to imitate him in the area of gainful employment as they had in enduring persecution. The Greek word rendered must means “it is necessary” or “it is fitting” and expresses a moral necessity.

**Verse 8:** we did not eat anyone's bread free of charge; instead, we labored and toiled, working night and day, so that we would not be a burden to any of you.

Paul had not accepted handouts while he was in Thessalonica. As we might say, he neither expected nor received any free lunches. The phrase eat . . . bread referred to more than food; it had the idea of livelihood, of upkeep or overall provision (see 1 Thess. 2:9). Rather than accept free gifts, He had worked long and hard to provide for his needs. He had not wanted to impose on anybody or to add to anybody's expenses.

**Verse 9:** It is not that we don't have the right to support, but we did it to make ourselves an example to you so that you would imitate us.

Paul could have asked the Thessalonian believers to contribute to his living expenses. Teachers commonly received pay for their services. He asserted he had the right (authority, power) as an apostle to expect them to provide room and board (see Gal. 6:6). In Matthew 10:10, Jesus had said, “The worker is worthy of his food.” Paul may have echoed these words in 1 Corinthians 9:14: “The Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should earn their living by the gospel.” Paul had not claimed that right, however, and purposely had worked to meet his needs so he could provide an example for the believers. The word translated example first meant “a blow” and then the imprint

or mark of a blow. It came to mean “a model” or “a pattern.” Paul had modeled for the Thessalonian believers hard work to make a living as he also ministered among them. He expected them to follow the pattern he had given them. As was pointed out earlier (see comments on 1 Thess. 1:5 in the Dec. 7 lesson), Paul was not arrogantly touting himself as the perfect example; he and his coworkers were the best available models the Thessalonian believers had.

**Verse 10:** In fact, when we were with you, this is what we commanded you: “If anyone isn’t willing to work, he should not eat.”

Evidently the problem of idlers who refused to work had begun while Paul was in Thessalonica. He reminded the believers of his command that Christians who worked to provide for themselves were not to support those who would not work. The form of the Greek word translated commanded conveys repeated action: “We used to command you.” The phrase isn’t willing expresses willful refusal. These people could work but declined to do so. As in verse 8, the word eat has the broad sense of provision in general. Whether this was an existing proverb or Paul coined it, its purpose was remedial, not punitive. In today’s terminology, working believers were not to enable lazy, idle Christians to continue their lifestyles of mooching off others.

**Verse 11:** For we hear that there are some among you who walk irresponsibly, not working at all, but interfering with the work of others.

Paul had received word that the problem he addressed while he was with the Thessalonian believers and in 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 and 5:14 was persisting and growing. The tense of the word translated hear indicates more than one report. The term some may indicate a minority; if so, a small group was causing a large problem. The phrase walk irresponsibly has the sense of leading idle lives (see 2 Thess. 3:6-7). As if not doing a lick of work (a south Mississippi phrase for loafing for a living) was not enough of a problem, the idlers were disrupting industrious believers’ work. Literally, the spongers were being busybodies, bustling around uselessly—“doing nothing but doing around.” They were busy but certainly not productive. The phrase “Christian deadbeats” was and is an unacceptable paradox—an outright denial of the Christian work ethic and a horrific example for many people in our society who feel the world owes them a living.

Paul did not state the reason some Thessalonian believers

were idlers who interfered with others’ work. Interpreters have suggested a number of possible reasons: (1) They expected Jesus’ imminent return and thus saw no reason to work. (2) They comprised a small group whose members were content to live off the church. (3) They disdained manual labor as being beneath their dignity. (4) They were part of the lower-class poor who had grown accustomed to and comfortable with accepting handouts from the church. (5) To help maintain their status in the city wealthy Christian patrons might have been supporting poorer believers, and this practice created a problem for the church. Many interpreters prefer the first possibility.

**Verse 12:** Now we command and exhort such people, by the Lord Jesus Christ, that quietly working, they may eat their own bread.

Paul addressed the believers who would not work to support themselves. The word translated command carried the note of authority. The term exhort can have the ideas of beseeching and encouraging; thus one suggestion is that Paul commanded as an apostle and pleaded as a minister. More likely, however, the word exhort has the sense of admonishing in this context. The two words strengthened the force of Paul’s demand. The phrase by the Lord Jesus Christ indicated the authority behind Paul’s directive and at the same time indicated his relationship to the believers in the community of faith. The phrase also reminded the idlers they lived in the sphere of Jesus’ lordship and were to conduct themselves by His high standards.

Paul’s command was that the idlers get jobs. The phrase quietly working contrasts to disrupting or interfering with other believers’ work (see 2 Thess. 3:11). By earning wages, the newly employed could provide for themselves. The Greek terms translated working and may eat convey continuous action. They were to work steadily so they could go on eating their own food.

#### 4. PERSEVERING IN DOING GOOD (2 THESS. 3:13-18)

**Verse 13:** Brothers, do not grow weary in doing good.

Paul turned from charging idle believers to work to provide for themselves to address either the whole church or the industrious, responsible Thessalonian Christians. Either way, he addressed the intended audience with his characteristic warm and inclusive term brothers. The Greek word translated grow weary can have the idea of becoming emotionally tired as well as physically exhausted. The church

members were not to become physically or emotionally drained in doing good deeds. Ministry to genuine needs could be taxing and even discouraging at times, but the believers were to continue serving others.

**Verse 14:** And if anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take note of that person; don’t associate with him, so that he may be ashamed.

Paul knew the possibility existed that some believers would not obey his written instruction. After all, some had not heeded the oral warning he had issued (see 3:10). The word instruction could refer to the letter in general. Most likely, however, the instruction to which Paul referred was his command that idle, disruptive believers begin to work for a living and settle down to a quiet lifestyle. If someone stubbornly refused to do as Paul directed, other believers were to take note of that individual. The Greek word rendered take note meant “distinguish by marking,” then “mark for oneself.” A paraphrase of Paul’s words might be, “Put a label or tag (of disapproval) on that person.”

Paul charged responsible believers not to associate with a church member whom they marked as refusing to obey his instruction. The word translated associate literally means “mix together with” in the sense of companying with someone. Paul may have meant withdrawing close fellowship from the person, not excluding him totally.

As was the case with the directive in verse 6, Paul’s command in verse 14 was redemptive in purpose. In the face of the larger group’s disapproval, the disobedient believer might be made ashamed of his stubbornness, idleness, and disruptive behavior. The aim was to lead him to repent, heed Paul’s instruction, and be restored to usefulness.

**Verse 15:** Yet don’t treat him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

Paul was careful to ensure the disciplined believer did not become alienated from the church. The responsible members were not to have close association with him, but they were not to regard him as an enemy. He still was a Christian brother who was well worth the effort of correction. Paul’s concern for the erring individual’s well-being is evidence the apostle’s directive was not primarily punitive in nature but redemptive. Responsible believers were to warn the brother so he would change his ways and become a productive member of the church.

**Verse 16:** May the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord be with all of you.

Paul began his closing remarks with a benediction that included two requests. First, he prayed that the Lord would give the believers peace. The term translated peace expresses much more than the absence of conflict. In Paul's Jewish heritage the term has the sense of wholeness, soundness, and well-being under God's rule. The phrase the Lord may refer to God or to Jesus, the Prince of peace. Paul could have had either or both in mind. Both are characterized by peace and are the Sources of peace. In experiencing persecution, confusion, and alarm about Christ's return, and the problem of idle, disruptive church members, only the Lord could give the individual and corporate soundness the Thessalonian Christians desperately needed. Paul's prayer was comprehensive: He asked the Lord to give them peace always in every way. They needed personal and corporate well-being at all times and in every circumstance, not merely in difficulties.

The second part of Paul's prayer for the Thessalonian believers was that the Lord would be with all of them. Again, whether Paul had in mind Jesus' promised presence with His people (see Matt. 28:20) or God's presence, he recognized that only divine power could enable them to have peace, to grow spiritually, and to minister effectively. The phrase all of you is significant in light of the church's problem members. Paul was careful to assure all the believers of his love and concern for them. He valued and loved each believer.

**Verse 17:** This greeting is in my own hand—Paul. This is a sign in every letter; this is how I write.

At this point, Paul took the stylus from the person to whom he was dictating and penned a greeting. He signed his name as evidence the letter was genuine, perhaps because at least one forged letter had surfaced (see 1 Thess. 2:2).

**Verse 18:** The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you.

Paul closed his second letter in almost the same manner he ended the first one—with one significant difference. He prayed that Christ's grace—His active love and generous, unmerited favor—be with the Thessalonian believers. The significant addition to Paul's closing benediction is the little word all. Again, Paul wanted the hardworking, responsible church members and the idle, disruptive believers to know they were all included in his prayer. Paul directed the Thessalonian Christians to keep on doing good, and he gave one specific example related to assisting disobedient believers.