

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

### BACKGROUND COMMENTARY FOR JAN. 4 1 THESSALONIANS 4:1-12

#### THE BACKGROUND

Paul did not want the Thessalonian Christians to interpret his extended absence from them as a lack of care for them. After his forced departure, he had continued his missions work. He had wanted to return to them and had tried to do so, but each time he encountered an obstacle that barred his way. He esteemed the Thessalonian believers highly and was greatly concerned that they remain faithful as they continued to encounter persecution.

Because Paul could not go to them, he sent Timothy to evaluate their situation and to support and encourage them. When Timothy returned to Paul at Corinth with a glowing report of the Thessalonian believers' faithfulness, Paul not only felt relief but also encouragement and gave thanks to God for them. He expressed a prayer in which he asked God to enable him to visit them, to cause the Thessalonian Christians to overflow in love for one another and for everyone, and to make them blameless and holy at Christ's return.

#### 1. PLEASING GOD: PRINCIPLE (1 THESS. 4:1-2)

**Verse 1:** *Finally then, brothers, we ask and encourage you in the Lord Jesus, that as you have received from us how you must walk and please God—as you are doing—do so even more.*

Paul's frequent use of the word finally (see 2 Cor. 13:11; Eph. 6:10; Phil. 3:1; 4:8) has given rise to humor at his expense. The apostle has been compared with preachers today who indicate they are winding down their sermons but continue as though they have received their second wind and show no signs of quitting. The Greek term Paul used can mean "for the rest." It also can mean "moreover" or "besides." The word served as a transition to a new subject. Paul moved from praying for the believers to issue a call for Christian living that pleased God. Some interpreters view the term finally as a transition to ethical and moral instructions and appeals in chapters 4–5.

The word brothers identified Paul with the Thessalonian

Christians in continuing to develop and demonstrate a Christian lifestyle. Paul pleaded with them to live by Christ's lofty standards. The Greek word translated ask meant "request" or "petition." It may have conveyed a note of urgency. The word encourage probably has the sense of exhortation here. Taken together, the two terms approach the force of a directive. The phrase in the Lord Jesus could have the idea of with Jesus' authority. At any rate, Paul was a master at knowing when to command pointedly and when to appeal tactfully and kindly to converts who needed reinforcement and additional instruction in guidelines for Christian conduct.

When people in Thessalonica had responded positively to Paul's proclamation of God's good news concerning salvation in Christ, he had instructed them in the basics of behavior expected of Christ's followers. The word walk was a synonym for "live" and implied the need for consistent progress in spiritual growth. The Greek term rendered must conveyed the idea of moral necessity; literally it means "it is necessary." Paul stressed that his readers were under moral constraint to demonstrate a distinctive, godly lifestyle. He quickly affirmed they were behaving as he had taught them and urged them to greater effort; literally, he wanted them to "abound more" in behavior that pleased God.

In his teachings, Paul had emphasized believers' first priority: to please God. Previously in his letter, he asserted that he preached to please God, not people (see 1 Thess. 2:4) and stated that people who opposed the gospel displeased God (see 2:15-16). The apostle's primary goal was to please God, and he taught that this aim was to be all believers' first goal. Later, in Colossians 1:10, he would spell out ways Christians please God: "bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God." The writer of Hebrews urged his readers to "continually offer up to God a sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of our lips that confess His name. Don't neglect to do good and to share, for God is pleased with such sacrifices" (Heb. 13:15-16). Pleasing God in these and other ways should be the first item on our daily agendas.

**Verse 2:** *For you know what commands we gave you through the Lord Jesus.*

Paul was convinced the instructions he had given his readers when he was with them were ingrained in them. The Greek word rendered know conveys the idea of processing knowledge until it becomes a settled conviction. (See comments on 2:1 in the Dec. 14 lesson.) Paul did not identify the commands he had transmitted orally to the believers during

his time in Thessalonica. The word commands was a military term and had the thrust of orders or charges. Most likely, Paul referred to directives concerning Christian living in a pagan environment—positive actions to take and pitfalls to avoid.

The phrase through the Lord Jesus can refer to agency or authority. Either way, the commands were not Paul's but were the Lord's directives through him. Paul was the teacher, but the directives originated with Jesus; or God may have given them through Jesus.

Paul stated the principle to guide Christians' behavior: pleasing God. Jesus gave the specific requirements for doing so. Our goal as believers is to please God with all our behavior.

#### 2. PLEASING GOD: PURITY (1 THESS. 4:3-8)

**Verse 3:** *For this is God's will, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality,*

Sexual immorality was rampant in the pagan environment in which the Thessalonian believers lived. Worship in pagan temples involved religious prostitution, and moral standards in the pagan world were practically nonexistent. When Gentiles became Christians, they needed moral guidelines and constant encouragement to be morally pure. Repeatedly in his letters, Paul urged his readers to guard against sexual immorality—a constant temptation that exerted a pull to the converts' former pagan lifestyles.

Paul emphasized one aspect of God's will was the Thessalonian Christians' sanctification. The word sanctification conveys the ideas of being separated for God's service (dedication, consecration) and of being morally pure. (See comments on 1 Thess. 3:13 in the Dec. 28 lesson.) It has the further idea of growing toward spiritual maturity. God's will includes believers' serving Him, growing spiritually, and being morally pure. In 4:3, the emphasis is on moral purity; one aspect of God's will for the readers was that they abstain from sexual immorality. The word immorality referred to illicit sexual activity in general. Our English word pornography is related to the Greek term translated sexual immorality. The Thessalonian Christians were separated to God's service and thus were to separate themselves from the immorality around them. People separated to God's service were to reflect His character.

**Verse 4:** *so that each of you knows how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor,*

Another aspect of God's will for the Thessalonian believers was that they know how to possess their own vessels in sanctification and honor. Their new life in Christ involved a new perception of and adherence to Christian moral guidelines. What did Paul mean by the phrase possess his own vessel? The term translated possess can mean "to get under control," "to win mastery over," and "to gain." The word vessel could mean "body" or "wife." Thus, Paul could have meant that each person should exercise moral discipline, control himself or herself, and remain sexually pure. The idea could have been that every man was to gain or acquire his wife while remaining sexually pure. Paul may have meant that everyone was to be faithful to the marriage covenant. Many interpreters believe he had in mind getting a wife and being faithful to her. If so, the apostle stressed moral purity in courtship and marriage. Faithfulness in marriage reflected a person's separation to God and was honorable, showing respect for oneself and valuing the marriage partner. Whatever interpretation we adopt, Paul's point was that believers' lives are to be characterized by moral purity.

**Verse 5:** *not with lustful desires, like the Gentiles who don't know God.*

Paul's readers were not to give in to lustful desires—literally, "passion of lust." The words passion and lust can have either positive or negative meanings. Positively, a passion for the poor and hungry indicates strong feelings translated into actions to help. A lust for living is a zest for a full life. In verse 5, however, the words are used in a negative sense. The term passion refers to strong feelings wrongly directed. The word lust has the idea of a craving or a longing for what is forbidden. The term Gentiles referred to non-Christians. Pagan Gentiles engaged in gross immorality, giving vent to their passions (overmastering urges) with no thought of faithfulness in marriage or to sexual purity outside marriage. They did not know God; they had access to revelation from Him, but they had not responded positively to the light they had (see Rom. 1:18-25). They knew about many so-called gods, but they viewed those idols as notoriously immoral. Unsaved Gentiles rejected the one true God and His moral demands.

**Verse 6:** *This means one must not transgress against and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger of all these offenses, as we also previously told and warned you.*

The result of abstaining from sexual immorality (1 Thess.

4:3) and possessing one's own vessel in sanctification and honor (4:4) would be to avoid transgressing against and defrauding a brother. Although one interpretation is that in verses 3-6 Paul addressed two subjects, sexual purity and business ethics, he probably was consistent in stressing moral purity. The word transgress (4:6a) means "to overstep the proper limits," thus "to do wrong" or "to sin." The term defraud means "to take advantage of" or "to overreach." It can carry the ideas of covetousness and greed—wanting what someone else has. It also has the sense of violating a trust. The word brother refers primarily to another Christian, but by extension to any other person. The phrase in this matter most likely refers to the sanctity of marriage. A believer is not to overstep the bounds of marriage and take advantage of another person through sexual misconduct with that individual's marriage partner. Committing adultery was to sin against oneself, one's spouse, the other person in the liaison, that person's marriage partner, and—most importantly—God.

Paul emphasized the seriousness of overstepping the marriage bounds and the severity of the consequences. The word Lord could refer to God or to Christ. The term avenger indicates God or Christ judges people's sins—either in the present or in the future—and not even His own people escape. While believers do not lose their salvation, they nevertheless suffer the consequences of sinful living. The phrase all these offenses probably refers to expressions of immoral behavior. While Paul had been with the Thessalonian Christians, he had emphasized strongly God's judgment on His people's sins—specifically immorality—as his words told and warned attest.

**Verse 7:** *For God has not called us to impurity, but to sanctification.*

Today, Christians have a tendency to associate God's calling people almost exclusively with calls to church-related vocations. In reality, God calls people outside the circle of His grace to salvation; He takes the initiative to redeem them. The call to salvation is, at the same time, a call to service and to moral purity. Paul stated the call to moral cleanliness negatively and positively. Stated negatively, believers are not called . . . to impurity. The Greek word translated impurity means "uncleanness"; God does not intend for His people to be morally impure. The term but draws a sharp contrast between uncleanness and sanctification. Stated positively, God calls believers to growth toward spiritual maturity that

includes living by His high moral standards. He does not call people to immorality. Note the pronoun us; Paul included himself and his associates in God's call to advance toward spiritual maturity and to be morally pure.

**Verse 8:** *Therefore, the person who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who also gives you His Holy Spirit.*

In light of verses 3-7, and especially God's calling believers to moral cleanliness (4: 7), Paul emphasized the seriousness of rejecting or ignoring God's moral guidelines. The Greek word translated rejects has the force of treating something as of no account or of disregarding it. It indicates a settled attitude, not merely a single act of rejection. The person who brushed aside the admonitions to morally pure living did not merely discount or disregard the teacher—Paul or whoever might deliver the moral principles. That individual also treated God as being of no account. Paul stressed that God gave His Holy Spirit to the Thessalonian believers as an ongoing presence. The Greek text literally has "God, the One also giving His Spirit the holy to you." Paul's point was that God's Spirit was always present with the Thessalonian Christians to help them resist the repeated temptations to immoral acts. To refuse or ignore His assistance was to sin against the Spirit.

### 3. PLEASING GOD: LOVE (1 THESS. 4:9-10A)

**Verse 9:** *About brotherly love: you don't need me to write you because you yourselves are taught by God to love one another.*

Wherever a community of faith is located, its members must have two strong characteristics: moral purity and love for one another. In verses 3-8 Paul had exhorted his readers to maintain moral cleanliness. In verse 9 he moved to the subject of their love for other believers. The Greek word translated brotherly love written in English as philadelphia conveyed friendship love that included the elements of warmth and affection. This kind of love issued in acts of kindness. Outside the New Testament, the Greek noun almost always described the bond of love between children in a family. In the New Testament it consistently has the sense of love that binds Christians together. Believers living in a context of paganism and facing persecution needed the unity that brotherly love created and strengthened.

Paul complimented the Thessalonian Christians for their brotherly love. He felt no need to instruct them further in this area. The second term translated love in this verse is

the verb from which is derived the noun agape, God's kind of love. Using the term agape, Paul previously had acknowledged their "labor of love" (1:3) and their "love" probably for Paul and his coworkers in this context (3:6). He also had prayed that God would enable the Thessalonian believers "to increase and overflow with love for one another and for everyone" (3:12). They were demonstrating love for people in general and especially for other members of God's family of faith.

The reason Paul did not need to belabor his readers with the demand to love one another as brothers and sisters in Christ is that God taught them to have that kind of love. Evidently, Paul coined a word to indicate the source of the believers' instruction about love. Literally, they had been "God-taught." The word occurs only here in the New Testament and appeared in no other Greek writings to the time Paul wrote. What did Paul mean by the phrase taught by God? Suggestions include: (1) God's activity in believers' lives through His indwelling Holy Spirit; (2) Old Testament teachings such as Leviticus 19:18; (3) teachings of Jesus He had passed on concerning love for other believers (John 13:34), neighbors (Mark 12:29-31), and even enemies (Matt. 5:43-44). Commentators favor the first suggestion. In verse 8, Paul had emphasized the Spirit's presence as God's continuing gift to believers. The Spirit continued to teach Christians.

Specifically, the Spirit within believers taught them to love one another with God's kind of love (agape)—a determined good will that is not based on merit and that acts for others' benefit. Such love goes on seeking others' best interests even when they reject it. Why did Paul not repeat the word rendered brotherly love with which he began the verse? The Greek words philadelphia and agape could be used as synonyms, but Paul probably included the two different words to make a point. God was teaching the Thessalonian Christians to exercise their wills in extending good will to one another—the same kind of love they had received from Him. Under that umbrella, they were to add genuine affection and warmth toward one another; they were to value one another and treat one another kindly. In fact, only because they had experienced God's love could they love one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.

**Verse 10a:** *In fact, you are doing this toward all the brothers in the entire region of Macedonia.*

Paul acknowledged the Thessalonian believers were extending brotherly love and God's kind of love not only to

one another but also to others. The present tense are doing indicates they consistently expressed their love. To do so had become their habit. The word brothers referred to other Christians. The phrase the entire region of Macedonia referred to the Roman province of which Thessalonica was the principal city. The Book of Acts informs us of three churches Paul founded in the province, but others may have been started by the time he wrote. Did the Thessalonian believers demonstrate their love for other Christian communities by ministering to their needs? Because both kinds of love Paul mentioned include active care, we can assume they did.

#### **4. PLEASING GOD: LIFESTYLE (1 THESS. 4:10B-12)**

**Verse 10b:** *But we encourage you, brothers, to do so even more,*

One of the clichés you and I have heard many times is, "There's always room for improvement." That may be trite, but it continues to be true for most of us in most areas of our lives. We may do a lot of things well but we must seek to improve daily. As believers we reach a dangerous place when we think we have arrived in any facet of our Christian living.

Paul paid the Thessalonian Christians a glowing compliment when he said he had no need to instruct them further about brotherly love because God was teaching them to love one another. Furthermore, they were demonstrating love for Christians throughout the province of Macedonia. Paul knew, however, that Christian love that does not grow diminishes. Thus Paul encouraged his readers to develop in demonstrating love. This verse constitutes the first of four admonitions in one lengthy sentence that extends through verse 12.

**Verse 11:** *to seek to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you,*

In verse 10b, Paul exhorted the Thessalonian believers to grow in expressing love for others. Verse 11 continues the directives with verb forms that indicate they already were doing what Paul prescribed and were to persist in their efforts. His second admonition was for the believers to seek to lead a quiet life. The Greek word translated to seek literally means "to be ambitious" or "to make it one's aim." The Greek word rendered to lead a quiet life means "to be still," "to be at rest," or "to live peaceably." Among suggested reasons for Paul's directive are restless talk about Christ's second coming and interference with church leaders. The believers were to be ambitious to foster tranquility, not to disturb the peace

that should characterize the church.

Paul's third admonition was that the Thessalonian Christians mind their own business. He may have referred to busybodies who refused to work and who interfered with others' work (see 1 Thess. 5:14; 2 Thess. 3:10-13).

Paul's final directive to work with your own hands reinforced a command he had given the Thessalonian believers during his stay with them. They were to set an example of hard work to support themselves. Paul had modeled honest work for them; he had done manual labor for a living rather than burden them with his upkeep. Thus they were not to be idle but were to work to supply their own needs rather than to sponge off others. Many interpreters suggest these believers who were lazy saw no reason to work in light of their anticipation of Christ's immediate return.

**Verse 12:** *so that you may walk properly in the presence of outsiders and not be dependent on anyone.*

Paul gave his rapid-fire admonitions so the Thessalonian believers would give a positive witness to pagan unbelievers. The phrase walk properly means to live so as to exert a positive influence. The word outsiders referred to non-Christians. If believers were to have an impact for Christ on their pagan neighbors, they would need to go on demonstrating love and tranquility, attend to their own matters, and demonstrate industry. In doing so, they would exhibit a Christian lifestyle and would not depend on others to meet their needs. Their lifestyle would commend the gospel to people who needed God's grace.

## BACKGROUND COMMENTARY FOR JAN. 11

### 1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18

#### THE BACKGROUND

Beginning in 1 Thessalonians 4:1, Paul gave practical admonitions for the Thessalonian Christians' conduct in their pagan environment. He called them to sanctification. Separated to God's service through faith in Christ, they were to grow toward spiritual maturity and they were to be morally pure (4:1-8). The believers already were exercising brotherly love. God was continuing to teach them how to relate to one another in the community of faith, and their love extended through the whole province of Macedonia. Paul encouraged them to continue to grow in expressing brotherly love (4:9-10).

The apostle also exhorted the Thessalonian Christians to exhibit lifestyles that fostered tranquility, respected others' activities, and modeled manual labor as a means of making a living (4:11). The overriding reason for Paul's admonitions was to encourage them to live in such a way that they might influence unbelievers positively for Christ and might not be dependent on others for their livelihoods (4:12). Then he turned to a matter that evidently was causing the Thessalonian believers great confusion and concern.

#### 1. HOPE BASED ON INFORMED UNDERSTANDING (1 THESS. 4:13)

**Verse 13:** *We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, concerning those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve like the rest, who have no hope.*

When people responded positively to the gospel, Paul and his coworkers taught the new converts the Christian faith's basic doctrines. One of those doctrines was Christ's return, which would ring down the curtain on history. After jealous Jews forced Paul to leave Thessalonica, some believers there had died. Their deaths raised questions for the remaining Christians. Would believers who died before Christ returned have any part in His coming? What had happened or would happen to them? Where were these Christians who had died? Likely, the Thessalonian Christians expressed their concern to Timothy, who included it in his report when he returned to Paul in Corinth.

In his letter, Paul offered the Thessalonian believers assurance, comfort, and encouragement as they dealt with

death. Seemingly, some of the Thessalonian believers had expected that all Christians would witness Christ's return. Thus, at least some of them were not prepared for death and the grief it caused. Believers' deaths after Paul's departure from Thessalonica had created perplexity and anxiety in the church. Also, church members faced the prospect of their own deaths. Paul wrote to calm and assure the Thessalonian believers.

In verse 13 in the Greek text, the word *not* comes first for emphasis. Paul wanted to allay the believers' fears quickly and strongly with pertinent information. He wanted to encourage them with basic truths involved in Christ's return and Christians' participation in it. His purpose, however, was not to give a detailed blueprint of Christ's return but to comfort grieving Christians. Certain details, including the judgment of unbelievers, were outside the apostle's purpose; thus he did not mention them here.

Paul employed the words we do not want you to be uninformed to focus attention on what followed. (See Rom. 1:13; 11:25; 1 Cor. 10:1 for similar statements.) The words also may have signaled a review of information Paul had given when he was with them. As he repeatedly did in the letter, Paul used the word *brothers* to convey the warmth and affection he felt for the Thessalonian believers.

Paul referred to the Christians who had died as those who are asleep, using a word that also can be translated "the ones sleeping." We get the English word *cemetery* (literally, "a place of sleep") from the Greek term the apostle used. Jews, Greeks, and Romans used the term for death. Christians also adopted it as a softer allusion to death, perhaps because to people who are living, the dead seem to be asleep. Jesus used the terminology to indicate His friend Lazarus was dead (see John 11:11-13).

The word *asleep* (1 Thess. 4:13) does not refer to what has been called *soul sleep*—a kind of spiritual coma that extends from a person's death to Christ's return. The Christian dead are not sleeping in graves, waiting to be awakened. For Paul, to die was "to depart and be with Christ" (Phil. 1:23; see also Luke 23:39-43). In 1 Thessalonians 4:13, he used the phrase *those who are asleep* to refer to believers who had died since the time he had left Thessalonica.

Paul did not forbid grief; rather, he encouraged believers to realize that in the midst of their grief they had a hope the pagans did not have. The words *the rest* indicated non-Christians of Paul's time. Some pagans considered death to

be the end of life; a person simply ceased to exist. Others had various concepts of an afterlife but to Paul they were equally hopeless because their concepts were not based on faith in Christ and in God's power to give life. They did not possess the Christian hope that Christ validated by His resurrection. In contrast, when believers' Christian loved ones die, we grieve because of the separation, but we do not despair; our hope (assurance, confidence) is that because of God's love and faithfulness, they are with Him.

Paul wanted to be sure the Thessalonian believers understood that Christian hope should have a positive impact on how they faced other believers' deaths. Christians have a hope that is certain and that unbelievers do not have.

#### 2. HOPE BASED ON CHRIST'S RESURRECTION AND RETURN (1 THESS. 4:14)

**Verse 14:** *Since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, in the same way God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus.*

Two bases of Christian hope (confident certainty based on God's love and power) are Jesus' resurrection from the dead and His second coming. Paul considered belief in Jesus' atoning death and victorious resurrection to be the Christian faith's nonnegotiable centerpieces. Jesus actually died; contrary to false theories that claim He experienced only near death and resuscitation or that His death was a cleverly conceived hoax, Jesus truly died. He gave His life willingly to provide forgiveness for sins. The means of His death was execution by crucifixion, the cruelest and most agonizing form of capital punishment in the ancient world. His body was prepared for burial and placed in a tomb (see Mark 15:33-46).

God's sovereign power raised Jesus to life, thereby defeating sin and death (see Mark 16:1-6). The resurrection is the heart of the Christian faith, for without the resurrection, Jesus would have been a martyr for a lost cause. Because of the resurrection, He lives to redeem sinners and to sustain His people. From the beginning of the Christian movement, the heart of the gospel was Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection.

Later, Paul would write to the Corinthian Christians: "I passed on to you as most important what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4). God raised Christ from the

dead (see Rom. 8:11; 10:9). In 1 Corinthians 15:12-23, Paul emphasized that Christ's resurrection is essential to the Christian faith and guarantees believers' resurrection. In 1 Thessalonians 4:14, Paul stated Christians' unqualified conviction that Jesus died and arose.

The God who did not abandon Jesus to death will not abandon believers to death. The form of verse 14 in the original language conveys the idea that even as the Thessalonian believers were convinced Jesus died and was raised, they also could be sure death did not end the Christian's relationship with God.

The Thessalonian believers could be certain God would bring with Jesus Christians who had died. Paul again used the softer phrase those who have fallen asleep to refer to believers who had died.

Bible scholars hold differing opinions on the interpretation of the phrase through Jesus. One view connects the phrase with the words those who have fallen asleep and holds that it refers to believers who have died in Christ (with a saving relationship to Christ). The Holman CSB translation reflects this interpretation. An alternate view is that the phrase through Jesus connects to the words will bring. In this view the phrase is interpreted to mean that at Jesus' return, God will bring with Jesus believers who have died. The first approach seems preferable. Through Jesus and His redemptive work on believers' behalf, those believers who have died will share in His second coming. Either way, however, Paul's point is clear. Believers who have died will take part in Jesus' return. The Thessalonian Christians needed that assurance, for the certainty of reunion with their Christian loved ones who had died would comfort the believers who were still living.

Paul emphasized that believers' hope is based on the conviction that God raised Christ from the dead and that Christ will return at the end of the age. Today, Christians also have that hope as a confident expectation.

### 3. HOPE BASED ON CHRISTIANS' RESURRECTION AND REUNION (1 THESS. 4:15-17)

**Verse 15:** *For we say this to you by a revelation from the Lord: We who are still alive at the Lord's coming will certainly have no advantage over those who have fallen asleep.*

Paul related a revelation the Lord had given Him. He did not indicate how the revelation came. The phrase the Lord could refer to God or Jesus. The repetition of the phrase al-

most immediately to refer to Jesus' return argues for Jesus as the revelation's source. With either interpretation, however, Paul clearly received a divinely-given revelation.

Some Bible scholars hold that Paul here referred to a saying of Jesus not reported in the Gospels. Others believe that under the Spirit's guidance, Paul reached this conclusion after meditating on truth he already had. Yet others view the revelation as coming directly to Paul from Jesus. In any case, Paul received the truth that believers who are living at Christ's second coming will have no advantage over believers who have died.

The Greek word translated coming also can mean "presence." It is derived from a verb that means "to be alongside." The Greek word rendered coming came to be used as a technical term for Jesus' second advent or return; He will be present bodily a second time.

Did Paul expect Christ's return to occur during his lifetime? Some interpreters have viewed the phrase we who are still alive at the Lord's coming to indicate Paul's belief in an imminent return, while he was still living. Yet Paul made no attempt to date Christ's second coming (see 5:1-2), and in 1 Corinthians 6:14 and 2 Corinthians 4:14 he seems to have expected to be dead. Most likely, Paul lived in the expectancy that Christ could return at any moment, as Jesus instructed His disciples (see Mark 13:32-37). Paul assured the Thessalonian Christians that whenever Jesus comes again, living believers will . . . have no advantage over those who have fallen asleep. The Greek term rendered have . . . advantage literally means "to come before" or "to precede" in the sense of having a head start in blessedness over believers who have died.

The Greek words translated certainly . . . no are double negatives. They also can be translated "not at all" or "by no means." Thus Paul stated emphatically the truth that when Christ returns, living believers will have no advantage or not take precedence over Christians who have died.

**Verse 16:** *For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the archangel's voice, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.*

The word for, which also can be translated "because," links Paul's assertion in verse 15 with the description of the Lord's return that follows. Verses 16-17 constitute the fullest description of Christ's return in the New Testament, which means we must be cautious about being dogmatic concerning what will take place. Paul's emphasis is on the fact that it

is the Lord Himself who will come. Paul referred to the revelation he received regarding Christ's second coming in three parts.

First, Christ will descend from heaven. The phrase the Lord Himself emphasizes that Jesus who willingly gave His life to provide salvation, who rose from the grave, and who is present in His people to sustain them will come again to bring history to its conclusion. The New Testament consistently affirms that Christ is seated at God's right hand—the place of majesty, honor, power, and authority. Heaven is presented spatially as above, beyond the realm of this world, so Christ will come down to earth.

A shout will accompany Christ's descent. The Greek word translated shout was a military term and had the sense of a command—of orders an officer gave soldiers or a shipmaster issued to oarsmen. It carries the notes of authority and urgency. Who gave the command—God, Christ, or the archangel? Who received the command—the dead, Christ, or all believers? We could wish for more details but we must be content knowing the authoritative nature of Christ's return. God will be in command of all elements involved in this climactic event.

Christ will descend to the sound of the archangel's voice. This voice indicates the heavenly host's participation in Christ's return. Paul did not identify the archangel, but interpreters have theorized that he will be Michael, the only archangel named in the New Testament (see Jude 9). In Jewish tradition, Michael assembled God's people and blew a trumpet to signal God's coming to judge. Other interpreters point out that in the Greek text the word archangel lacks the definite article the, so they believe God will designate an unnamed archangel. Or, Paul may have meant the voice would resemble an archangel's voice. In any case, the emphasis seems to be the regal nature of Christ's return.

The blast of God's trumpet will accompany Christ's return (see 1 Cor. 15:52). In the Old Testament, the shophar or ram's horn was mentioned most frequently; its sound announced festivals, warned of danger, and signaled an important person's death. Its purpose was not to make music but to make noise. Another instrument—a straight metal tube flared at one end—had a similar function. It probably had a high, shrill sound and accompanied priestly functions. In 1 Thessalonians 4:16, Paul may have had in mind the ram's horn.

In any case biblical writers in both the Old and New Testaments associated the trumpet or horn with God's activity. In Joel 2:1, it signaled the coming of the Day of the Lord. In

Matthew 24:31, Jesus said a trumpet's blast would start the angels' gathering His people from all parts of the earth. At Christ's return, the trumpet's sound will signal God's great climactic act: Christ's return and God's gathering His people.

Some Bible scholars view the authoritative shout, the angelic voice, and the trumpet blast as a sequence of occurrences. Others believe the sounds are three ways of stating the same truth. Either way, the emphasis is clear. Jesus will return in power, majesty, and glory as Lord; and everyone will know that an event of stunning proportions is occurring.

The second element Paul mentioned in regard to Christ's return is the resurrection of deceased believers. Paul had stated that living believers "will certainly have no advantage over" (or "definitely will not precede") Christians who have died (1 Thess. 4:15). In verse 16, the apostle emphasized that the dead in Christ will rise first. At first glance, this statement seems to contradict Paul's words in verse 14, where he stated God will bring with Jesus believers who have died. We need to acknowledge at the outset that we don't have all the answers related to events associated with the second coming. What follows is one attempt to reconcile the truths of these two verses. According to this view, the meaning of verse 16 becomes clearer if we consider the apostle had in mind believers' receiving glorified bodies. While believers are with the Lord upon death and are not without some kind of body, they have not yet received their final glorified bodies. When Christ returns believers who have died will receive those glorified bodies and be joined by living believers whose bodies will be changed instantly (see 1 Cor. 15:35-57). Being raised at Jesus' coming places the deceased Christians on the same level as the living believers. Believers who have died before the second coming are first raised and then along with living Christians join Christ "in the air" (see 1 Thess. 4:17).

As we reflect on this viewpoint, we need to keep the following truths in mind. First, we must honestly acknowledge that we do not have all the answers about Christ's second coming and last things. Second, we need to remember that Paul and the New Testament as a whole affirm that believers are with the Lord when they die, and they are not in some disembodied state. Finally, we must recognize Paul's primary purpose in writing these words. The Thessalonian Christians were concerned that fellow believers who had died would miss out on Christ's second coming. Paul wrote

to assure them those believers who die before Christ comes again will not lose out on the blessings of the second coming. These words were written to comfort or encourage believers (4:18), not to create confusion. We miss the primary purpose of Paul's teaching when we allow these verses to divide us as Christians.

**Verse 17:** *Then we who are still alive will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will always be with the Lord.*

At Christ's return, believers who are still living will join the resurrected Christian dead to meet Christ in the air. Paul sounded the glad note of reunion to encourage and comfort the Thessalonian Christians. Their dead loved ones were not gone and forgotten; one day believers would be reunited with other Christians who had died. The Greek word translated caught up means "to snatch away" or "to transport hastily." The term is the basis of the word rapture, which does not appear in the Scriptures but which is sometimes used to refer to believers' being taken up to be with Christ. Paul stressed the words caught up together to assure the Thessalonian believers that those who were still alive at the second coming will have no advantage over those who have preceded them in death.

Believers will meet Christ in the clouds. In the Old Testament, clouds symbolized God's glory (see Ex. 19:16; 24:15-18). Jesus assured His disciples He would come "in clouds with great power and glory" (Mark 13:26). In Luke's account of Jesus' ascension, "a cloud received Him out of [the disciples'] sight" (Acts 1:9). The angels told the stunned disciples that Jesus "will come in the same way that you have seen Him going into heaven" (1:11).

The phrase to meet the Lord (1 Thess. 4:17) literally is "to a meeting of (with) the Lord." The Greek term rendered meet could describe a city's public welcome to a visiting dignitary. A delegation would meet the visitor outside the city and accompany him as he entered. Paul's use of the phrase in the air to designate the point of meeting refers not only to location but also to the Lord's sovereignty. In Paul's time, a general belief was that evil spirits inhabited the atmosphere. Christ's meeting His people there expressed His supremacy.

After all believers are caught up together . . . in the clouds to meet the Lord, they will be with Christ forever. Paul could offer the Thessalonian believers—and us—no stronger encouragement or greater assurance. Our faith in Christ

enables us to have fellowship with Him now and through eternity; the companionship we enjoy now will never end. Together with all other believers, we will live in His presence. I do not know everything about heaven I would like to know, but I know enough. I know that heaven is being in the Lord's presence and I could not ask for more.

Verses 16-17 play important roles in all views concerning Christ's second coming and the end of the age. Interpreters, however, differ on the verses' meaning and the sequence of events. One view is that Jesus' gathering His people to Him (the rapture) is one facet of a single event; it is part of the Day of the Lord when Jesus will return to end history and act as Judge. Another view of the verses separates the rapture and the Day of the Lord. Some proponents of this view believe a seven-year period of tribulation will follow Jesus' snatching the church (His people) out of the world; He will remove believers so they will not undergo the tribulation. Others place the rapture at the midpoint of the tribulation.

Paul emphasized a basic affirmation of the Christian faith—believers will always be with the Lord. Nothing will be able to separate us from Him. The word always stresses endless life in Christ's presence for all His people. Paul did not go on to give details of events following believers' reunion with one another and their meeting Christ in the air. The apostle, however, had achieved his purpose. He wrote to encourage, assure, and comfort despondent believers—and he did so effectively and beautifully.

Paul gave the Thessalonian believers hope concerning their loved ones who had died. In the process, he extended that hope to us. Our hope as Christians is certain because it is based on the certainty of our resurrection and of our reunion with other believers.

#### **4. HOPE BRINGS GENUINE COMFORT (1 THESS. 4:18)**

**Verse 18:** *Therefore encourage one another with these words.*

Paul stated clearly and emphatically his purpose in describing Christ's return in verses 15-17. He wanted the Thessalonian Christians to encourage one another continually with the truths he wrote. The word encourage can mean "strengthen," "exhort," "comfort," or "cheer." It has the idea of offering support. The believers were to stand beside one another as encouragers. Whether they lived or died, God held them securely in His grace and power. On the other side of death lies life with Him. The Thessalonian

Christians needed hope as they dealt with death. Today, we can find comfort in the face of death because our hope as Christians is secure.

We need to note some important factors in verses 13-18: (1) Paul did not give a detailed blueprint of Christ's return. He did not write an exhaustive description. (2) He did not teach an intermediate state of soul-sleep in which believers who have died exist in an unconscious state. (3) Paul lived in expectancy of Christ's return but did not set an immediate date. (4) He was concerned not so much about the sequence of events surrounding the return as he was with comforting the Thessalonian Christians. He wanted to assure believers that Christians who had died would participate in the return. (5) We should be cautious about building elaborate scenarios of Christ's second coming that lose sight of Paul's purpose of encouraging and reassuring the Thessalonian believers.

Paul not only wrote about facing death with confident assurance of resurrection to life with Christ, but he also later modeled his teaching. As he wrote 2 Timothy, he was looking death squarely in the face. Without flinching, he wrote: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. In the future, there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me, but to all those who have loved His appearing" (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

## BACKGROUND COMMENTARY FOR JAN. 18

### THE SANCTITY OF LIFE

#### THE BACKGROUND

With 10 mighty strokes or plagues, God had demonstrated His infinite superiority over Egypt's so-called gods and had gained the Israelites' release from slavery. Under Moses' leadership, God guided the people to Mount Sinai, where He made a covenant with them. The Lord gave Moses "two tablets of the testimony, stone tablets inscribed by the finger of God" (Ex. 31:18). The tablets contained the Ten Commandments, an integral element of the covenant (see Ex. 20:1-17).

Why were the Ten Commandments necessary? The Israelites had been slaves for centuries and still retained a slave mentality. They needed basic guidelines on relating to the Lord who had chosen them as His people, had freed them, and was forming them into a nation. In addition, they needed instructions on how to relate to one another. The first four Commandments address relationship with God; the other six focus on interaction with others. Taken together, the Ten Commandments provide the framework for a godly, just, and healthy society. They are as valid and needed today as they were when God first gave them. The Sixth Commandment's purpose is to protect human life.

A passage often identified as the Book of the Covenant (Ex. 20:22-23:33) presents the first of three law codes in the Pentateuch—the first five books of the Old Testament (see Deut. 5:1-28:68 and the Book of Lev. for the other two law codes). The Exodus and Deuteronomy passages elaborate on the Ten Commandments. These law codes contain practical applications of the Commandments, and those applications include directives concerning the protection of human life.

During Jesus' earthly ministry, He addressed religious people who kept the letter of the law but denied the spirit of it. He taught that outward observance was not enough; people should give attention to their attitudes, thoughts, and emotions, for these are the origins of sinful acts. We must guard our hearts, the centers of our lives, because our behaviors begin there.

#### 1. HONOR THE SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE

(EX. 20:13; MATT. 5:21-26)

Exodus 20:13: *Do not murder.*

Camped at Mount Sinai, the Israelites received words from the Lord that were to be the center of their religious and social lives. God gave Moses ten guidelines by which the people were to live—Commandments that were absolute, nonnegotiable laws. The first four concerned the people's relationship with God: they were to worship Him alone; they were not to make and worship idols; they were not to misuse God's name; and they were to observe the Sabbath. Beginning with the Fifth Commandment that directed children to honor their parents, God gave commands that addressed people's interactions with one another.

The Sixth Commandment is emphatically terse in Hebrew. It consists of only two words in the original language: a negative preceding the verb. The form indicates strong prohibition. Cain committed the first murder when he killed his brother Abel (see Gen. 4:8). God's severe judgment on Cain emphasized human life's value and murder's seriousness. In His covenant with Noah following the flood, God warned against taking human life because every person is made in His image (see Gen. 9:6). In Exodus 20:13, God explicitly prohibited murder. With this Commandment, murder was termed a moral transgression rather than a natural privilege.

The Hebrew word translated murder was a rather rare term that Old Testament writers used of violent killing. Also, they sometimes used it of unintentional killing. Another Hebrew word, however, occurs much more often and means "to kill." In addition, the case law God gave Israel through Moses clearly distinguished between premeditated murder and unintentional killing (see Ex. 21:12-14). Most likely, the term murder in Exodus 20:13 carries the idea of unlawful taking of human life, not accidental. Often such acts may be premeditated. The Sixth Commandment also prohibited taking another person's life in an act of personal revenge. In other words, it barred people from "taking the law into their own hands" rather than following the legal process. In fact, one suggestion is that the Commandment prohibited all acts that endangered life, whether those acts arose out of carelessness, malice, hatred, or anger. In the Old Testament, the Sixth Commandment did not prohibit capital punishment (see Ex. 21:14) or war (see 2 Sam. 8:1-14).

The Sixth Commandment's clear intent is to reveal how God views human life: it is sacred. It is God's gift, and as such we are to value and protect it. In its original context, the Commandment may have prohibited murdering another

member of the covenant community, but its application extends to all other humans because it established human life's sacredness. Every person is made in God's image and has intrinsic worth.

**Matthew 5:21:** *"You have heard that it was said to our ancestors, Do not murder, and whoever murders will be subject to judgment."*

Matthew 5-7 presents extensive teachings of Jesus we commonly call the Sermon on the Mount. These teachings were addressed to His disciples and to the crowds who gathered to hear Him (see Matt. 5:1; 7:28). Jesus began by describing the characteristics of a citizen of God's kingdom—a believer, His follower (see 5:3-12). Then He emphasized His followers' functions with the illustrations of salt and light (see 5:13-16). In verse 17, Jesus declared He had come to fulfill the Law and the Prophets (the Old Testament Scriptures), not to destroy them. He emphasized the law's validity and the importance of practicing and teaching the commandments embodied in it (5:18-19).

Then Jesus stunned His hearers with the assertion that unless their righteousness surpassed the Pharisees' righteousness, they could not "enter the kingdom of heaven" (5:20). The Pharisees' righteousness was based on keeping the law, including the Ten Commandments and the oral tradition (a mass of rules and regulations defining the Commandments) that had grown up around them. If the law was in effect, and if people were to practice and teach it, how could anyone hope to be more righteous than the supreme lawkeepers, the Pharisees? Jesus gave His interpretation of the law's spirit and intent, and in doing so, He warned against mere external religion.

Jesus cited six elements in the Commandments and gave His commentary on them to drive home the kind of righteousness demanded of His people. The phrases "you have heard that it was said" (5:21,27,33,38,43) and "it was also said" (5:31) expressed the hearers' familiarity with the laws to which Jesus referred. They knew the letter of those laws. The phrase to our ancestors (5:21) also may be rendered "to the ancients," a reference to former generations. Through the centuries since God had given the Commandments to Moses, religious leaders had taught the people both the Commandments and the traditions attached to them. The people of Jesus' time had heard the law and its interpretations read in synagogue services. Some Bible scholars prefer the translation "by the ancients" and view it as a direct

reference to the scribes and Pharisees, who taught people who no longer could read the Hebrew language and thus depended on these teachers for instruction in the law. Either way, Jesus' point was the people were aware of the items of the law to which He referred.

Jesus cited first the Sixth Commandment that prohibits murder. Anyone who committed murder faced a local Jewish court's judgment, and the penalty was death (see Ex. 21:14).

**Matthew 5:22:** *But I tell you, everyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Fool!' will be subject to the Sanhedrin. But whoever says, 'You moron!' will be subject to hellfire.*

Jesus' hearers—and particularly any religious leaders present—hardly could miss the emphatic assertion of His words, but I (literally, “but I Myself” for emphasis) tell you. Jesus clearly was claiming the authority to interpret the law accurately. His boldness must have shocked His hearers—He, not the long line of Jewish interpreters, offered the correct and superior insight into the law's intent and application.

Likely, most if not everyone in the crowd around Jesus had kept the Sixth Commandment; they had never killed anyone. Jesus, however, went beyond the overt act of murder to the disposition, attitude, intention, or motive behind it. In this verse He gave three illustrations that are polar opposites of recognizing the sanctity of human life and protecting it.

First, Jesus declared that anger at a brother made a person subject to judgment. Jesus did not have in mind the anger that sometimes flares up in our interactions with others. Anger is one of the emotions in our makeup that can be positive or negative. The problem is that many of us do not harness anger and make it productive; we allow it to be destructive. For example, anger at wrongs committed against helpless and vulnerable people can motivate us to do something to correct the abuses. Anger that lashes out because of perceived hurts and slights has negative effects on us and on the objects of our anger.

The Greek word translated angry in verse 22 carried the idea of a deep-seated, smoldering, settled anger. The noun form of the verb conveys God's settled opposition to sin (see Rom. 1:18 where the term is translated “wrath”). The designation brother may have referred to another believer; if so, it pointed to the seriousness of a believer's anger toward another follower of Christ, but it did not give believers per-

mission to be angry with unbelievers. The word brother also could have the sense of another human being—believer or unbeliever. At any rate, Jesus warned that anger is the well-spring of violence that results in murder. A person whose anger issues in murder would be brought before a seven-man tribunal that existed in sizeable communities in the land of the Bible or before a local court of 23 people.

Second, Jesus pointed to the attitude of contempt as a root of murder. The meaning of the Greek term rendered fool may have meant “empty-headed.” One suggestion is that by its sound the word (hraka) attempted to produce the effect of a person clearing his or her throat in preparation to spit on someone. To spit in someone's face was—and is—a major insult. The term was viewed to some extent as an Aramaic swear word. Whatever its exact meaning, the word expressed utter contempt, which easily could give rise to murder. A person guilty of this degree of contempt could be brought before the Sanhedrin, the Jews' highest court. This court could hand down the death sentence but required the Romans' permission to carry it out.

Third, Jesus warned against calling a person a moron. The Greek term translated moron has overtones of immorality and godlessness as well as dullness or stupidity. One suggestion is that the word fool expressed contempt for a person's intelligence, while the term moron expressed contempt for the individual's character. Calling a brother a moron made a person subject to hellfire, literally “the gehenna of fire.” Gehenna was the Valley of Hinnom south of Jerusalem where garbage was burned and where animal carcasses and bodies of executed criminals were left to decay. Because of the continuing fires burning in the valley, Gehenna became a term for hell, eternal separation from God that people choose by rejecting God's love and grace in Christ.

One view is that as a person's wrong attitude or disposition escalates from anger to insult to contempt and the severity of judgment escalates from tribunal to supreme court to Gehenna. An alternate view is that all three judgments are metaphors for eternal judgment. Jesus' point was that inward attitudes of anger or contempt are as dangerous as outward crimes for which people are hauled into court.

Jesus did not say that anger, hostility, and contempt toward people are as bad as murdering them. We all would rather be hated or treated with contempt than be killed! Rather, Jesus emphasized that murder begins when people view others as less than human. It begins with loss of respect

for life and loss of a sense of every life's infinite worth.

How can we prevent attitudes of anger, insult, and contempt from escalating into literal murder? Jesus stressed that the key is reconciliation. Our relationships with others are inseparable from our relationship with God. Before we can truly worship Him, we must be right with others. If we are preparing to worship and remember that someone feels we have wronged him or her, we need to go immediately and make things right. Then we can worship acceptably (see Matt. 5:23-24).

Jesus drew an illustration from daily life (5:25-26). If two people were on the way to court, the debtor would do well to reach an agreement with the creditor before they stepped before a judge, who would decide the case. If they did not reach an agreement, the debtor would face imprisonment. Jesus' point was the seriousness of facing God with unrec- onciled differences with others.

God's commands and Jesus' teachings both make clear each human life's value and call for actions based on this value. When we truly understand how much God values human life, we recognize we must protect it and have no right to attack, harm, or destroy others.

## **2. RESPECT WOMEN AND THEIR UNBORN CHILDREN (EX. 21:22-25)**

**Verse 22:** *“When men get in a fight, and hit a pregnant woman so that her children are born prematurely, but there is no injury, the one who hit her must be fined as the woman's husband demands from him, and he must pay according to judicial assessment.”*

Verses 22-25 are part of a broader section of Exodus known as the Covenant Code or Book of the Covenant (Ex. 20:22–23:33). This section of Exodus deals with case law—descriptions of specific conditions and the penalties involved. God communicated to Moses a practical framework for the people's relationship with and behavior toward one another.

Verse 22 recognizes that in any society, people typically interact daily, disagreements arise, and anger sometimes escalates into physical violence. When men fight, innocent people must be protected. A case in point was a situation in which men fighting struck a pregnant woman—either an on-looker or one who had intervened to stop the fight—so that her children were born prematurely. The phrase born prematurely could refer either to a live birth or to a miscarriage. If

the woman and the children were not injured, the woman's husband was to set an amount of monetary compensation. Then judges would rule on the fair amount to be paid. The reason for penalty even though no injury resulted was that the blow might have endangered life.

Some proponents of abortion on demand point to this verse as evidence that the fetus was not considered to be a person because only a monetary penalty was levied if the woman miscarried. The verse's point, however, is the woman's well-being. Nothing is implied about the unborn fetus's personhood; the penalty involved was imposed because of potential injury to the woman, not to the fetus. In fact, however, the Israelites viewed killing unborn children as inhuman cruelty that deserved God's judgment (see 2 Kings 8:11-13; 15:16-18; Amos 1:13). The prophet Hosea declared that the people of the Northern Kingdom would experience such cruelty because of their rebellion against God (see Hos. 13:16). In all cases, killing unborn children was a heinous, barbaric act.

**Verses 23-25:** *If there is an injury, then you must give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, bruise for bruise, wound for wound.*

If a man involved in a fight struck a woman and injured her, the lex talionis [LEKS-tal ih OH niss]—the law of retribution—applied. This law called for retribution in kind: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, and an extremity for an extremity. A burn was to be inflicted for a burn, a bruise for a bruise, and a wound for a wound. An injury that resulted in death called for the death of the person responsible.

The law of retribution represented an advance in human's treatment of one another because it limited a person's retaliation to injury or death. No one could take unlimited vengeance (see Gen. 4:24). Moreover, in light of context of the judicial assessment mentioned in verse 22, the law of retaliation did not sanction acts of personal vengeance; it did not give free rein to individuals to impose it on others. Community judges were responsible for dispensing justice, and the legal process determined the law's application.

In Matthew 5:38-39, Jesus referred to "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," but He did not use the law with reference to pregnant women and their unborn children. He mentioned the concept in a context of believers' response to evil treatment. Jesus taught His followers their response to evil treatment is to be much more gracious than that required by the law of retribution.

God's commands emphasize the protection we must extend to pregnant women and unborn children. We are to protect, not attack or abuse, vulnerable and innocent people such as pregnant women and unborn children.

### 3. PROVIDE FOR ALIENS, WIDOWS, AND ORPHANS (EX. 22:21-24; DEUT. 24:17-22; LUKE 20:45-47)

**Exodus 22:21:** *"You must not exploit a foreign resident or oppress him, since you were foreigners in the land of Egypt.*

Through Moses, God gave laws that protected the vulnerable people among the Israelites. The Hebrew word translated foreign resident also means "sojourner," a temporary or permanent non-Israelite dweller who had no inherited rights. The individual was not a native to the area where he or she lived and did not belong to the people there; thus the person did not have the protection and benefits that birthplace and family provided. The foreign resident, however, had certain rights of hospitality as a guest. The Hebrew word translated exploit means "to treat wrongly," and the term oppress literally means "to press" or "to squeeze." As former foreign residents in Egypt, the Israelites knew firsthand what being mistreated and oppressed was like (see also Ex. 23:9). Their experience was to motivate them to treat temporary residents among them well.

**Exodus 22:22:** *"You must not mistreat any widow or fatherless child.*

In a patriarchal society, women and children depended totally on their husbands/fathers. When the head of the household died, family members became especially vulnerable and often were in great need. God through Moses warned His people against taking advantage of widows and the fatherless or of mistreating them. The Hebrew word translated mistreat also can carry the ideas of "to afflict," "to frustrate," "to do violence to," or "to oppress." It has the idea of putting someone down. One suggested meaning is "to humiliate," not merely in the sense of mistreatment but also by coldness and contempt. Rather than ignoring or refusing to help the unfortunate individuals among them, the Israelites were to treat underprivileged people with consideration and compassion. Israelites with the means to do so were to extend care to the needy. One suggestion is that this requirement and other guidelines designed to protect helpless members of the covenant community were basic to the law God gave His people, not deductions from it. These directives were primary, not secondary.

**Exodus 22:23-24:** *If you do mistreat them, they will no doubt cry to Me, and I will certainly hear their cry. My anger will burn, and I will kill you with the sword; then your wives will be widows and your children fatherless.*

How serious was God about provision for needy widows and fatherless children? Verses 23-24 leave no room for doubt. Destitute and desperate, these unfortunate people doubtless would call out to God for help. He would hear their anguished cries and would respond to them. The intensity of the language, the immediacy of God's response, and the severity of the punishment inflicted emphasize the Lord's care for helpless people.

In the New Testament, James stressed God's concern for vulnerable, helpless people. James defined "pure and undefiled religion" that is acceptable to God: "to look after (care for; help or provide for) orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unstained by the world" (Jas. 1:27). God continues to work through sensitive, caring Christians to meet vulnerable people's needs.

**Deuteronomy 24:19:** *"When you reap the harvest in your field, and you forget a sheaf in the field, do not go back to get it. It is to be left for the foreign resident, the fatherless, and the widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.*

In Deuteronomy 24:17-18, God through Moses re-emphasized directives He had given earlier in Exodus 22:21-22 to protect and provide for people who were most helpless. Although in Israelite society a lender often required a borrower's outer garment as collateral on a loan (see also Ex. 22:26-27), a widow was not to be included in this practice.

In Deuteronomy 24:18 God repeated the reason the Israelites should feel compassion for the vulnerable, helpless people among them (see Ex. 22:21). The Egyptians had held the Israelites captive and had used them as slave labor, but God had redeemed them. They were to remember what being oppressed and helpless was like, and this memory was to spur them to care for needy people among them.

When the Israelites entered Canaan, they would move from being nomadic herdsmen to settling into a more agriculturally-based society. Always among them, however, would be people too poor to own fields. Thus God made provision for needy and helpless individuals. When a farmer harvested his crop and failed to pick up a sheaf of grain, he was not to retrieve the overlooked sheaf. Foreign residents,

widows, and fatherless children were free to pick up sheaves left behind. God promised to bless the work of people who extended compassion in the manner He prescribed.

Verses 20-22 expand God's commands to provide for poor and helpless members of society. When they settled in Canaan, many of the Israelites would own olive trees and vineyards. When they shook the olives off the branches to gather the fruit, they were not to persist until all the olives were gathered. Fruit remaining on the branches was to be left for poor people to gather. Likewise, when vineyard owners gathered their grapes, they must not pick the vines clean. Needy persons were to have access to what was left. Again, God hammered home the point that the Israelites had experienced abject poverty and gross mistreatment in Egypt; thus, they should have compassion for helpless persons among them. Their helping those less fortunate was not an option; the Lord commanded compassionate sharing to meet basic needs.

The right of needy persons to follow reapers and glean in the fields played a vital role in the beautiful account in the Book of Ruth. Ruth, a young Moabite widow, gleaned in the field Boaz owned. Eventually, she married him and took her place in the family line that produced David, Israel's great king. Even more importantly, she was among the ancestors of Jesus, the King of kings.

**Luke 20:47:** *They devour widows' houses and say long prayers just for show. These will receive greater punishment."*

On Sunday before the approaching Passover, Jesus had entered Jerusalem riding on a young donkey to symbolize His coming as the King of peace. The time had come for Him to confront His people with a decision concerning His identity as the Messiah. Jerusalem was thronged with pilgrims who had come to celebrate Passover, so the moment was right. One day, while He was teaching in the temple, the chief priests and the scribes challenged His authority and tried to discredit Him.

A crowd had gathered to witness the exchange between Jesus and His opponents. At one point, Jesus warned His disciples to be wary of the scribes. The amazement His words generated in members of the crowd who heard did not begin to compare with the shock that registered on the scribes' faces. They were among the respected religious elite of their day. They copied the law and in the course of doing so became experts in it. However, the disciples were to be

wary of the scribes because they coveted public recognition, claimed front-row seats in the synagogues, and loved places of honor at banquets. They craved the spotlight.

Jesus unleashed a scathing indictment against the scribes: They took advantage of widows. The phrase devour widows' houses could refer to the scribes' serving as administrators of widows' estates and cheating the women out of them. More likely, the phrase refers to scribes' encouraging and accepting gifts that went beyond widows' means. Scribes could not charge fees for their teaching, but they could receive gifts; evidently some scribes played on the generosity of impressionable widows to the widows' detriment. The scribes knew the law, but they did not live by it. They compounded their hypocrisy with long public prayers for show. Their dishonesty and hypocrisy would receive greater punishment because they knew the Scriptures but did not live by them.

God's commands explicitly declare the protection and care that we are to offer to foreigners, widows, and orphans—representative of the poor, powerless, and needy persons among us. Jesus' teachings explicitly condemn people who take advantage of widows.

Instead of exploiting or otherwise mistreating vulnerable people such as foreigners, widows, and orphans, we are to protect and care for them. We who are blessed have an obligation to help unfortunate people.

## BACKGROUND COMMENTARY FOR JAN. 26

### 1 THESSALONIANS 5:1-11

#### THE BACKGROUND

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Paul had addressed a concern the Thessalonian believers likely had conveyed to him through Timothy (see 1 Thess 3:1-2). In the time since opponents had forced Paul to leave the city, church members had died. Evidently at least some believers had understood Christ would return immediately and that all Christians would participate in His coming.

Believers' deaths raised questions in the minds of the remaining Christians. Would Christians who had died have a part in Christ's return? What would become of them? Paul wrote to comfort and encourage the Thessalonian Christians. He assured them that believers who had died would take part in Christ's return (4:14); living believers would have no advantage over Christians who had died. Christ's return would include a great reunion of the living and the dead, and together all believers would be with the Lord forever. Paul urged the church members to encourage one another with the glorious truth he expressed.

#### 1. KNOWING THE TRUTH (1 THESS. 5:1-3)

**Verse 1:** *About the times and the seasons: brothers, you do not need anything to be written to you.*

As he did in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, in 5:1-11 Paul discussed Jesus' second coming. In the latter passage, however, he focused on how Christians are to live as they anticipate the Lord's return. Paul moved from offering assurance, comfort, and encouragement concerning believers who had died to instructing the living concerning their readiness for Christ's second coming.

In the Greek text, 1 Thessalonians 5:1 begins with the words that also can be translated "but concerning" or "now concerning" as well as about. Through Timothy, the Thessalonian believers may well have asked for information concerning the date of Christ's return. An alternate view is that the words "now concerning" are a formula Paul used to signal a change in emphasis. Most likely, Paul was addressing a concern the believers had conveyed to him. They may have wondered what their status would be when Christ came. Would they be among the living?

Paul stated he did not need to write extensively about

Christ's return. Doubtless, he and his coworkers had taught the new converts the basic doctrines of the Christian Way, one of which was the certainty of Christ's coming again. The Thessalonian believers knew about the times and the seasons. The Greek word translated times refers to the succession of hours, days, weeks, and so on—time in the sense of duration or an extended period. It denotes time as quantitative. Our word chronology is related to this term. The word rendered seasons carries the idea of quality, suitability, and appropriateness. It can refer to a divinely-appointed period or epoch. Thus a season is a special time of any duration during linear time. One such season or special time was God's taking on human flesh in Jesus to provide salvation. Another season was the Spirit's empowering the early church for its mission. Paul stated he did not need to write about a sequence of events leading up to God's final appointed event—Christ's return. Why?

**Verse 2:** *For you yourselves know very well that the Day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night.*

Paul did not need to write about "the times and the seasons" (5:1) because the Thessalonian Christians already were well aware Christ would return suddenly and without warning. The Greek word rendered very well means "accurately," "precisely," or "exactly." Paul may have meant he had nothing further to add at this point to what the believers already knew. They had the information they needed because Paul previously had impressed it on them. Evidently, his stay in Thessalonica had been long enough for him to instruct the new converts fairly extensively.

Interestingly, Paul referred to Christ's return with the phrase the Day of the Lord. In 4:15, he had used what became a technical term for Christ's return. The Greek word *parousia*, translated "coming" in the Holman CSB, could mean either "presence" or "coming" and became a designation for the Lord's return. The change in terminology in 5:2 does not point to two different occurrences but to a shift in emphases. Both passages deal with the second coming of Jesus. However, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 deals with resurrection, while 5:1-11 focuses on judgment. In the former passage Paul sought to comfort believers whose loved ones had died; in the latter passage the apostle instructed believers on how to live in light of Christ's return.

The phrase the Day of the Lord had a rich Old Testament background. As early as the eighth century B.C., the general belief was that God would intervene and assert His sover-

eignty on His people's behalf. His intervention would mark the end of the present age and the beginning of the age to come. The Lord's people generally held that this event would bring disaster and judgment on God's enemies and would bring deliverance and blessings for His people. The eighth-century prophet Amos appeared on the scene, pronounced judgment on God's people as well as on surrounding nations, and declared the Day of the Lord would not be all blessing and light. It would be a time of deliverance for His faithful remnant, but for those unfaithful to Him it would be a time of darkness—judgment on their sins (see Amos 5:18-20). Prophets such as Isaiah, Joel, and Zephaniah warned God's people of the approach of the Day of the Lord in which judgment in the form of disaster would be a prominent feature.

In the New Testament, the Day of the Lord refers to Jesus' return and the final judgment. This day will be a time of punishment for the wicked and of deliverance for the righteous. This judgment day will include individuals. Various terminology is used to designate that momentous event. In Luke 17:24, Jesus spoke of the Son of man's "day." Paul wrote of "the Day of the Lord" (1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:2), "the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:8), "the day of our Lord Jesus" (2 Cor. 1:14), "the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:6), and "the day of Christ" (Phil. 1:10; 2:16). Paul's various references point to Jesus' climactic return when history will end. Believers will be with their Lord forever, but people who have rejected God's love and grace in Christ will face eternal judgment. On that day, all people will recognize Him as sovereign Lord and ultimate Judge.

Paul emphasized what he had taught the Thessalonian Christians previously, that is, the Day of the Lord will surely come. The phrase will come also can be translated "is coming"—a vivid way of expressing absolute certainty. Christ came the first time to provide salvation. All who place their faith in Him experience that gift. He will come again as King of kings and Lord of lords.

In a context of discussing His return and the need for His followers to be ready, Jesus had said: "If the homeowner had known what time the thief was coming, he would have stayed alert and not let his house be broken into" (Matt. 24:43). Had the disciples relayed this teaching to Paul? Based on what he had heard or under direct inspiration, Paul used a dramatic analogy in 1 Thessalonians 5:2 to describe the arrival of the Day of the Lord: It will come like a thief in the night. Paul was not the only New Testament writer to employ

this figure. Peter declared that “the Day of the Lord will come like a thief” (2 Pet. 3:10). In Revelation 16:15, John quoted Christ as saying, “Look, I am coming like a thief.” Of course, the analogy’s point is a thief’s sudden and unexpected intrusion. Jesus had told His disciples His return would be as sudden as a flash of lightning (see Matt. 24:27). In Luke 17:26-30, He had emphasized His second coming’s unexpected timing: people will be going about their business as usual. The phrase like a thief in the night captures vividly the surprise element in Christ’s return.

**Verse 3:** *When they say, “Peace and security,” then sudden destruction comes on them, like labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.*

To whom does the word they refer? Based on the contrast introduced in verse 4, Paul had unbelievers in mind in verse 3. The phrase peace and security conveys a false sense of well-being. Even as unbelievers will be in the process of saying the words, they will receive a shocking surprise: sudden destruction will befall them. The Greek word translated destruction can mean “ruin.” It conveys the idea of eternal separation from God, not annihilation (see 2 Thess. 1:9).

Paul used a second analogy to emphasize another impact Christ’s return will have on unbelievers. Not only will His coming be sudden, but judgment on people who have rejected Him will be inevitable. Once a pregnant woman begins to have genuine labor pains, a birth will follow. Elsewhere in the Scriptures, the analogy conveys pain and anguish (see Isa. 13:8; 21:3; 37:3; Jer. 4:31; John 16:21). In 1 Thessalonians 5:3, however, Paul not only stressed the certainty of judgment on unbelievers, but he also added a somber note—by no means will unbelievers escape the inevitable judgment they have chosen for themselves. They will not be able to avoid the consequences of their choices.

Paul reminded the Thessalonian Christians they already had learned the basic truths about Jesus’ second coming. As Christians, we also know Jesus will come at God’s chosen time. We have the assurance He will return and will do so suddenly.

## 2. BEING IN THE LIGHT (1 THESS. 5:4-7)

**Verse 4:** *But you, brothers, are not in the dark, so that this day would overtake you like a thief.*

The word but draws a sharp contrast between believers and unbelievers. Christ’s sudden return will shock and surprise non-Christians. Believers, on the other hand, are to

live in expectancy of His coming again. As in the case of the Thessalonian Christians, we do not know the precise time of Christ’s return, but we know it will take place.

Paul’s cherished brothers and sisters in the faith were not in the realm of darkness. Because of their faith in Christ, they no longer lived in the sphere dominated by evil and willful disobedience that results in spiritual blindness. Therefore, the Day of the Lord would not take them by surprise as would a thief’s unexpected breaking and entering. They would not experience “sudden destruction” (1 Thess. 5:3) as a result of judgment.

**Verse 5:** *For you are all sons of light and sons of the day. We’re not of the night or of darkness.*

Paul stated the Thessalonian Christians’ identity both positively and negatively. Positively, in contrast to unbelievers, who were “in the dark” (5:4), Christians are sons (children) of light. Most likely Paul used the word sons in an inclusive sense to refer to all believers. In the Old Testament the phrase sons of has the sense of likeness; the object of the phrase characterized the people or things described. Thus believers were characterized by light—understanding, insight, goodness, and a personal relationship with God. In response to the good news Paul had preached to them, certain individuals in Thessalonica had placed their faith in Christ. As a result, they were genuine children of God who lived in the sphere of moral and spiritual enlightenment.

Paul also characterized the Thessalonian believers as sons or children of the day. The apostle may have used the phrase sons of the day as a synonym for the words sons of light; in contrast to unbelievers who lived in spiritual night and darkness, believers lived in the light and the day of a right relationship with God. Some interpreters view the words the day to refer to the Day of the Lord; believers belong to that day and will participate in the triumph of Jesus’ return. Either way, the point is essentially the same—believers are ready for Jesus’ coming again because of their relationship with Him.

Paul emphasized the radical difference between unbelievers and Christians. He switched from the pronoun you to the word we. He included himself with the Thessalonian Christians in the admonitions he gave in the following verses. All believers need to make the preparations he outlined. Paul identified himself and the Thessalonian Christians as not belonging to the sphere of spiritual night or darkness; sin no longer ruled them. Sin and disobedience did not character-

ize their lives. Instead of being opposed to God, they were related to Him through Christ and were serving Him.

**Verse 6:** *So then, we must not sleep, like the rest, but we must stay awake and be sober.*

Paul drew the logical and inescapable conclusion of believers’ being children of the light and of the day. The words so then connect what Paul had written in verses 4-5 with what follows. Because of believers’ identity as God’s spiritually enlightened children, their way of living is to be distinctively different from unbelievers’ behavior. Christians are not to go on sleeping as do non-Christians, who are indicated by the phrase the rest.

Here the Greek word rendered sleep could have the sense of indifference to salvation or moral indifference. Instead of being diligent in growing spiritually, believers can nod off to the sleep of inattentiveness to their relationship with Christ. They can become spiritually lazy, and insensitive. Part of the implication of this verse may be the fact that holiness should characterize believers’ lives, but it also warns against living as though Christ’s return will not occur.

In contrast to unbelievers who reject the truth of Christ’s return, Christians are to stay awake and be sober. The phrase stay awake translates a Greek term that also means “to watch,” “to give strict attention to,” or “to be vigilant.” The word rendered sober could have the idea of not being intoxicated or of being calm and collected or vigilant. Paul may have enjoined believers to be alert and to avoid all excesses—to exercise self-control—as they awaited Christ’s return. Both admonitions, however, may reflect the image of a sentry at his post. A sentry had to concentrate on his task with utmost seriousness. Of course, he could not be intoxicated and still perform his duty. With watchfulness and calm confidence—and self-control—believers are to expect Christ’s return.

**Verse 7:** *For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night.*

Nighttime is the usual time for sleeping. The phrase those who sleep, sleep at night refers to unbelievers who go on sleeping in the night of their sin and disobedience to God. They habitually live in spiritual darkness, indifferent to or unconcerned about Jesus’ return. In addition, nighttime afforded leisure from the day’s work—a time when people could drink and become intoxicated. Paul’s analogy depicted immoral behavior and spiritual dullness that marked unbelievers’ lives.

Paul pointed out to the Thessalonian Christians that the difference between them and unbelievers was similar to the difference between day and night. Believers were ready for Jesus' return and were to behave in a way that demonstrated their anticipation of it. Today, because Christians are ready for Jesus' return, we are to anticipate it and are to control our behavior in light of it.

### 3. BEHAVING AS BELIEVERS (1 THESS. 5:8-10)

**Verse 8:** *But since we are of the day, we must be sober and put the armor of faith and love on our chests, and put on a helmet of the hope of salvation.*

Paul repeated his emphasis that he and the Thessalonian Christians were of the day—spiritually enlightened, living in right relationship with God, and ready to take part in Jesus' triumphant return identified as the Day of the Lord. The word but drew the sharp contrast between Christians and unbelievers who lived in and were characterized by darkness and night. Because of their identity as children of light and the day, believers were to be sober—vigilant, self-controlled, calm, and composed.

Then Paul used the familiar items of a Roman soldier's equipment to exhort the believers to prepare for Jesus' return. Although Isaiah's description of the Lord's armor may be in the background (see Isa. 59:17), Roman armor likely is the immediate image. Perhaps the idea of vigilance brought to mind the Roman sentry outfitted for duty. The instruction to put on armor has the sense of a decisive, one-time action. Believers were to don the armor and keep it on. The breastplate protected the soldier's vital organs. It consisted of leather strips faced with metal and two shoulder pieces, forming a kind of sleeveless coat that was laced at the back after being put on. The word translated faith could refer to belief or trust in and commitment to Christ or to faithfulness in living for Him and serving Him. The term rendered love is agape [ah GAH PAY], a term referring to God's kind of love—determined good will that seeks others' best interests and is not easily discouraged. Believers are to extend such good will to one another, to unbelievers, and to enemies. Outfitted with faith and love, Christians confidently can engage in spiritual warfare.

The Roman soldier's helmet protected his head and face from blows or lethal objects. It consisted of a protective cap, two cheek pieces, and a hinged visor. The phrase the hope of salvation expresses believers' confident assurance of

their redemption because of God's grace and forgiveness extended to them through Christ. Their salvation was sure because of God's ability to hold them in His grace and to love them with a love that would not let them go. The hope to which Paul referred may have been the fulfillment of believers' salvation at Christ's return.

With the spiritual armor of faith, love, and hope, a favorite triad to which Paul referred in his letters, believers could triumph over evil in the spiritual warfare in which they were engaged. (See comments on 1 Thess. 1:3 on pages 14-15; also see 1 Cor. 13:13.) In addition, the apostle used the analogy of armor in Romans 13:12. He developed it more fully in Ephesians 6:14-17, where he described "the full armor of God" (Eph. 6:13) that Christians are to take up as they wage war against evil.

**Verse 9:** *For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,*

The word for connects the phrase "the hope of salvation" in verse 8 with what Paul wrote in verses 9-10. Because of God's initiative in reaching out to us in Christ, we as believers are not appointed to wrath. The word wrath carried the sense of God's settled opposition to sin and of sin's working its way out to its inevitable consequence: judgment. Willfully rejecting God's love and grace results in eternal separation from Him. Conversely, believers are appointed to obtain salvation—in this context a reference to the consummation or fulfillment of their salvation at Christ's return. When He comes again, both judgment and fulfillment of salvation will occur. The word obtain does not convey the idea that we somehow merit salvation or receive it as a result of our efforts. Paul made this truth clear with the phrase through our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul's use of Jesus' full title emphasized that He is Deity (Lord), Savior (Jesus), and Messiah (Christ). We receive salvation through faith in Him. It is a gift of sheer grace.

**Verse 10:** *who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him.*

Most of us are so thoroughly familiar with Paul's next words that we often pass over them without reflecting on them. We have heard, sung, and read them many times: Christ died for us. The word for means "for the sake of," "in the place of," or "instead of." Interestingly, the Greek term also can have the sense of being on one's side, of being for one. Christ's voluntary death on our behalf demonstrates that God is for us, not against us or indifferent to us.

Christ died. He really died; He did not merely swoon or lose consciousness for a period of time. Not only did He die, but He also died the cruelest, most excruciating death ever devised: He was crucified. His death not only involved physical pain beyond description but also a depth of emotional and spiritual pain no other person has ever experienced. He came to deliver people from their sins, but opponents rejected Him because He did not deliver them from the Romans. Furthermore, He threatened the Jewish leaders' cherished religion and its carefully constructed framework of rules. In His death, He felt totally alone. The people He came to save rejected the love He offered and ridiculed Him as an imposter who lacked even the power to save Himself. Paul's phrase who died for us packed a wealth of meaning and implications into a few words.

Paul stated the purpose and result of Christ's vicarious death. He gave Himself on our behalf in order that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live with Him. One understanding of the words awake or asleep is that they allow for human frailty. Paul had admonished believers to be alert and self-controlled as they awaited Christ's return (see 1 Thess. 5:6). Yet even if their vigilance and spiritual perseverance lagged, they were secure because of Christ's death for them and their appropriation of His atoning sacrifice. An alternate approach is that the phrase awake or asleep means "alive or dead" (at Christ's return). In either state, believers would live with Him. In this view, in verse 6 Paul used the term awake in the sense of alertness in light of Christ's return; in verse 10 it has the idea of being alive in contrast to having died.

Although Paul did not couple Jesus' death with His resurrection in verse 10 as he did elsewhere, believers' living with Him clearly implies His resurrection. Paul's statement we will live together with Him expresses one of the apostle's primary emphases: union with the living Christ. Our acceptance of His atoning death on our behalf unites us with Him, and not even death can sever that union. He holds us securely in His love and grace; physical death marks our transition into His immediate presence. The word together could convey the sense that because Christ lives, believers will live with Him beyond physical death. It also could carry the idea that all believers will enjoy fellowship with one another as they live with Christ. Either way, Paul's words again gave the Thessalonian Christians comfort, encouragement, and assurance concerning loved ones who had died (see 4:13-18).

#### **4. ENCOURAGING ONE ANOTHER (1 THESS. 5:11)**

**Verse 11:** *Therefore encourage one another and build each other up as you are already doing.*

In light of the assurance that believers will live together with Christ, the Thessalonian Christians were to encourage one another. The Greek word translated encourage is the same term Paul used in 4:18. The word means “to strengthen” or “to comfort.” It conveys the idea of coming alongside another person to offer support. In light of 5:10, the idea of comfort is present and reinforces the comfort Paul extended to the Thessalonian believers in 4:13-18.

The Greek word rendered build . . . up conveys the idea of promoting growth in Christian wisdom, affection, grace, virtue, and holiness. It can have the further sense of giving someone strength and courage. The Thessalonian believers already were comforting one another and were promoting one another’s spiritual growth, and Paul wanted them to continue to do so.