

A Study Commentary on 1 & 2 Thessalonians

Robert J. Cara



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Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are the author's own translation.

To Emmy Cara,
a mother who greatly influenced her son

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Abbreviations

1QS	<i>Serek Hayahad</i> or <i>Rule of the Community</i>
AB	<i>Anchor Bible</i>
ABD	David N. Freedman, ed., <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> (6 vols, 1992)
ABRL	<i>Anchor Bible Reference Library</i>
ANF	<i>Ante-Nicene Fathers</i>
Ant.	Josephus' <i>Jewish Antiquities</i>
ASV	American Standard Version
AthR	<i>Anglican Theological Review</i>
Bar.	Baruch (<i>Syriac Apocalypse</i>)
BDAG	W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (3rd edition, 1999)
BDF	F. Blass, A. Debrunner and R. W. Funk, <i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (1961)
BETL	<i>Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologiarum lovaniensium</i>
BJ	Josephus' <i>Bellum judaicum</i> (<i>Jewish War</i>)
BNTC	<i>Black's New Testament Commentaries</i>
B Sac	<i>Bibliotheca sacra</i>

<i>BT</i>	<i>The Bible Translator</i>
<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
<i>CTR</i>	<i>Criswell Theological Review</i>
<i>Did.</i>	<i>Didache</i>
<i>DPL</i>	G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin, eds., <i>Dictionary of Paul and his Letters</i> (1993)
<i>EDNT</i>	H. Balz, G. Schneider, eds., <i>Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament</i> (1990–1993)
<i>EKKNT</i>	<i>Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament</i>
<i>ESV</i>	English Standard Version
<i>Ev Q</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
<i>Exp Tim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
<i>Genesis Rab.</i>	<i>Genesis Rabbah</i>
<i>GKC</i>	E. Kautzsch, ed., A. E. Cowley, trans., <i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i> (2nd edition, 1910)
<i>ICC</i>	International Critical Commentary
<i>Ign. Magn.</i>	Ignatius, <i>To the Magnesians</i>
<i>Ign. Pol.</i>	Ignatius, <i>To Polycarp</i>
<i>Ign. Trall.</i>	Ignatius, <i>To the Trallians</i>
<i>LCL</i>	<i>Loeb Classical Library</i>
<i>L&N</i>	J. P. Louw, E. A. Nida, eds., <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains</i> (2nd edition, 1969)
<i>LEC</i>	<i>Library of Early Christianity</i>
<i>LSJ</i>	H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, H. S. Jones, <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> (9th edition, 1996)
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JSNTSup</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series</i>
<i>KJV</i>	King James / Authorized Version

<i>Life</i>	Josephus' <i>The Life</i>
<i>m. Abot</i>	<i>Abot (Mishnah)</i>
Macc.	Maccabees
NAB	New American Bible
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NEB	New English Bible
<i>NICOT</i>	<i>New International Commentary of the Old Testament</i>
<i>NIBCNT</i>	<i>New International Biblical Commentary on the New Testament</i>
<i>NICNT</i>	<i>New International Commentary on the New Testament</i>
<i>NIDNTT</i>	C. Brown, ed., <i>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i> (4 vols, 1975–1985)
<i>NIGTC</i>	<i>New International Greek Testament Commentary</i>
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NKJV	New King James Version
NLT	New Living Translation
<i>Nov T</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
<i>Nov T Sup</i>	<i>Supplements to Novum Testamentum</i>
<i>NPNF1</i>	<i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 1</i>
<i>NPNF2</i>	<i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 2</i>
<i>NRSV</i>	New Revised Standard Version
<i>NTC</i>	<i>New Testament Commentary</i>
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>NTT</i>	<i>New Testament Theology</i>
<i>OTP</i>	J. H. Charlesworth, ed., <i>Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i> (2 vols, 1985)
<i>P. Oxy.</i>	<i>Oxyrhynchus Papyri</i>
<i>Pillar</i>	<i>Pillar New Testament Commentary</i>
<i>Pol. Philippians</i>	Polycarp, <i>To the Philippians</i>
RSV	Revised Standard Version
Sir	Sirach/Ecclesiasticus
<i>SNTSMS</i>	<i>Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series</i>

TCGNT2	B. Metzger, <i>A Textual Commentary of the Greek New Testament</i> (2nd edition, 2002).
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
WBC	<i>Word Biblical Commentary</i>
WCF	<i>Westminster Confession of Faith</i>
<i>Wis</i>	<i>Wisdom of Solomon</i>
WLC	<i>Westminster Larger Catechism</i>
WSC	<i>Westminster Shorter Catechism</i>

Preface

I loved writing this commentary. Studying and writing about the Word of God is very enjoyable for me, and I trust is to God's glory (Psalm 115:1).

I appreciate the goals and format of the EP Study Commentary Series. If I could say it in my own words, the commentaries are primarily aimed at the church, but the writers are expected to consult and occasionally explain the insights (and mistakes) of historical and current scholarship. The format requiring 'Application' sections every few verses is also valuable. This reinforces the fact that the written Word of God was intended by God to speak not only to the original readers, but also to us today. The 'Application' sections also give me a chance to expand further upon various theological issues and apply some of Paul's points with modern examples.

Again, this commentary is aimed primarily at the church. I had two audiences in mind as I wrote.

In the first place, I considered pastors who would be using this commentary for preaching and teaching. More specifically, I imagined the alumni from Reformed Theological Seminary,

Charlotte, where I have taught since 1993 (1 Thessalonians 2:20). Among other things, I tried to give information and explanations that will be useful for them to understand Paul better in his original context. I also tried to provide a brief explanation of scholarly trends, because these pastors will be interacting with other commentaries, articles and books. Finally, I gave ideas and resources that could be used in preaching and teaching. These pastors were my primary audience.

Secondly, I also constantly thought of my mother, Emmy Cara. She had been a pastor's wife for many years but has had no formal academic training in the Bible. She is very interested in the Bible and wants to understand and apply it better. My mother enjoys having difficult issues explained and learning new ideas. However, she wants the discussion not to be full of unexplained technical jargon. As I wrote the text of the commentary, I had my mother in mind as well as pastors. For her, and readers like her, I kept most of the technical jargon to the endnotes; or when I did use a technical term in the text, I often explained it.

This commentary is traditional in most respects but, as in all commentaries, there are some emphases which I included that reflect my interests. These are as follows:

1. The logical and grammatical progression of thought within the scriptural paragraph is highlighted. This aids in separating the main points from the subsidiary points as Paul presents them.
2. 1 and 2 Thessalonians contain many passages that intentionally use emotional language or discuss emotionally laden topics. Hence, I make many comments concerning Paul's intended emotional impact upon the reader.
3. I have an interest in the creeds of the church (primarily Reformed and Lutheran) and have included many references concerning the creeds' citations of 1 and 2 Thessalonians and their discussions of topics related to these two epistles. This

is especially helpful for pastors who use creeds in worship services.

The entire translation of 1 and 2 Thessalonians is mine. It is a fairly literal translation to aid in the technical study of Scripture, especially for those who have no Greek background. It is not offered as a smooth English translation. Technical Greek grammar is not for everybody! Hence, I have kept most of the grammatical comments relating to the Greek text to the endnotes.

Two of my teaching assistants at Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte, helped with the work on this commentary. Jim Mitchell, my son-in-law, is now the pastor of the Smyrna and Hickory Grove Associate Reformed Presbyterian churches. Drew Goodman is still a student, and I look forward to his help with my next book.

I want to thank my mother, Emmy Cara, for raising me in a loving Christian home and supporting me as an adult (2 Timothy 1:5). Also, she sped this book along by often winsomely asking, ‘Bobby, when are you going to finish the commentary?’ Finally, my lovely wife, Jill Cara, deserves thanks (Proverbs 31:10). Without her—well, most things in my life would be worse without her.

Robert J. Cara

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Charlotte, North Carolina

April 2009

Introductory matters

Why study 1 and 2 Thessalonians?

What comes first to the mind of many Christians when they are asked about 1 and 2 Thessalonians? They usually answer that there are several somewhat difficult passages relating to the Second Coming (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; 5:1–11; 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12). Yes, this is true. Some in the young Thessalonian church had questions and were confused about certain aspects of the Second Coming. These passages are important and, as we shall see, the central points which Paul is making in each of them are clear, even though all the details may not be.

When scholars are asked about 1 and 2 Thessalonians, they also mention the Second Coming, but in addition emphasize that these are very early letters of Paul and in fact are very early Christian documents of any sort. What were Paul's first canonical letters? Many, including me, would answer: Galatians, then 1 Thessalonians and then 2 Thessalonians. Others would reply that Galatians was written later, which would make 1 and 2 Thessalonians the first two books that Paul wrote.¹ Either way, 1 and 2 Thessalonians were

early books of Paul (written approximately AD 50), and they are also some of the earliest books in the New Testament canon.²

By studying 1 and 2 Thessalonians, we get to read some of Paul's first scriptural statements about the glories of Christ (e.g., 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 2 Thessalonians 1:7–10). We also notice Paul's great compassion and love for this young Thessalonian church (e.g., 1 Thessalonians 2:20; 2 Thessalonians 3:16), which may have been only six months old when he was writing 1 Thessalonians. Despite being young, she was generally doing well. While it is true that there were some difficulties, most of these were caused by those outside the church (e.g., 1 Thessalonians 2:14), although a few arose from within the church (2 Thessalonians 3:6). All of these aspects have direct and indirect meaning for us today in the twenty-first century. Of course, all books in the Bible, and all parts of all biblical books, are important and are worthy of our study because ultimately the Triune God wrote them not only for the original readers, but also for us.

Occasions and purposes

Ancient Thessalonica was an important, prosperous city. It was the capital city of the Macedonian province (modern-day northern Greece and the southern portion of modern-day Macedonia). Thessalonica's economy was aided by its being a major harbour on the Aegean Sea and a major stop on the Via Egnatia, which was an important east-west road connecting western Greece to Byzantium (modern-day Istanbul).³

The following summary of the occasion which prompted the writing of 1 Thessalonians and the purpose of the letter is fairly standard and most scholars, whether conservative or critical/liberal, would agree with it.⁴ The view put forward concerning 2 Thessalonians is fairly standard among conservatives and is also

accepted by some critical scholars, but, as will be discussed below, many of the latter do not believe that Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians.

During Paul's 'second missionary journey' (AD 49–52, see Acts 15:36–18:22), he comes to Thessalonica and founds the church (Acts 17:1–4). Silas (Silvanus) and Timothy are with him (Acts 17:14–15). As a result of disturbances over Paul and his teachings, the apostle is forced by those outside the church to leave Thessalonica earlier than he wanted to (Acts 17:5–10). Paul's stay in Thessalonica may have been only a month ('three Sabbath days', Acts 17:2) or perhaps a few months.⁵ Silas and Timothy leave Thessalonica after Paul does (Acts 17:15).

Later, while in Athens with Timothy, Paul longs to know how the young Thessalonian church is faring and to encourage her. He decides to send Timothy back to Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 3:1–2). In the meantime, Paul goes to Corinth and eventually Silas arrives there also. Timothy does indeed go to Thessalonica and subsequently returns to Paul and Silas in Corinth (1 Thessalonians 3:6; Acts 18:1,5). Timothy gives a report to Paul, who then writes 1 Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 3:6). Paul is thought to have written 1 Thessalonians in approximately AD 50, which may have been only six months after he first went to Thessalonica.

More specifically, what was in Timothy's report? Its content was primarily positive. Two positive aspects are summarized in 1 Thessalonians 3:6: firstly, the church was spiritually healthy despite outside opposition (1 Thessalonians 2:14); and, secondly, the Thessalonians still appreciated Paul. However, Timothy also reports, thirdly, that there have been charges made against Paul by some people outside the church, accusing him of being a conniving travelling teacher (1 Thessalonians 2:1–12). Fourthly, Timothy relays several questions from church members related to the Second Coming (1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:10), and, fifthly, he brings the news

that some members are lazy, idle and unruly and do not want to work (1 Thessalonians 4:11–12; 5:14).

Hence, the purpose of 1 Thessalonians is for Paul to convey to the Thessalonians how encouraged he is by the good report about them (1 Thessalonians 3:7) and to deal with other aspects of the news brought by Timothy. Of course, not everything in the letter is directly related to this report. Paul includes teachings (e.g., 1 Thessalonians 5:16–17) as well as personal information and/or requests (e.g., 1 Thessalonians 5:25) that might relate to any church in the Graeco-Roman world.

We do not know who delivered 1 Thessalonians to the Thessalonian church. But apparently, after delivering the letter, this person (or persons) returns to Paul, who is evidently still in Corinth,⁶ with more recent news about the church. Paul writes 2 Thessalonians shortly (a few weeks or months?) after 1 Thessalonians. 2 Thessalonians was also written from Corinth in approximately AD 50.

This second report, which prompted the writing of 2 Thessalonians, is also primarily positive but does contain two negatives. The positive aspect is explicitly once again that the church is spiritually healthy (2 Thessalonians 1:3–4) despite continued outside persecution (2 Thessalonians 1:5–6), and that the Thessalonians still have a high regard for Paul, which is implied by the fact that he no longer has to defend himself. The negative aspects are that the Thessalonians have received false information about the Second Coming (2 Thessalonians 2:2), and that the problem of idleness on the part of some in the church has worsened (2 Thessalonians 3:6–15).

Hence, Paul's purpose for writing 2 Thessalonians includes commending them for their continued spiritual growth and encouraging them to progress further (2 Thessalonians 1:3–4;

2:13–17; 3:4), dealing with the false information about the Second Coming (2 Thessalonians 2:1–12) and giving an extended discussion concerning the idleness problem (2 Thessalonians 3:6–15). Once again, not everything in 2 Thessalonians is directly related to the report, and thus Paul includes portions that are more general in their application (e.g., 2 Thessalonians 3:16).

Authorship

Both 1 and 2 Thessalonians state that the letters are from Paul, Silas and Timothy (1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1). There is the clear implication in the letters that Paul is the author and that Silas and Timothy endorse what he writes (i.e., Paul primarily uses ‘we’ as an editorial ‘we’).⁷ Throughout history, and currently, all agree that on the surface these two letters indicate that Paul is the author.

However, beginning in the late 1700s, some critical/ liberal scholars began to doubt that the real historical Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians.⁸ They argued that someone later than Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians using 1 Thessalonians as a pattern; in other words, 2 Thessalonians is pseudonymous. Currently, conservative scholarship holds that the historical Paul wrote both 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Recent critical scholarship is agreed that Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians,⁹ but is split over whether or not he wrote 2 Thessalonians.¹⁰

I firmly believe that the historical Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians. My primary, and indeed ultimate, argument is that the Scripture, the Word of God, says so (2 Thessalonians 1:1). One cannot have a higher authority than God speaking through Scripture, and this closes the case for me. However, there are also secondary arguments that dovetail with the primary one.

Allow me briefly to summarize some of the arguments that have

been raised against Paul's having written 2 Thessalonians and then to respond by setting out secondary counter-arguments:¹¹

1. *Argument*: '2 Thessalonians is too closely patterned after 1 Thessalonians to have been written by Paul. Why would he have copied himself?'

Response: Yes, some sections are parallel (e.g., 1 Thessalonians 1:1 with 2 Thessalonians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 2:9 with 2 Thessalonians 3:8; 1 Thessalonians 2:13 with 2 Thessalonians 2:13), but many are not. It is not so unusual that Paul, when writing a second letter from the same location to the same church at round about the same time, should use similar phrases in the two letters.

2. *Argument*: '2 Thessalonians is more formal in tone than 1 Thessalonians.'

Response: Yes, this is true, but it is also to be expected. Paul was obviously thrilled about the health of the Thessalonian church when Timothy gave him the first report. When the second report arrives, Paul has already indicated his love for the church and does not need to repeat all the emotional language.

3. *Argument*: 'There are two different views of "signs" related to the Second Coming (1 Thessalonians 5:2 versus 2 Thessalonians 2:3). Paul would not have contradicted himself in such a short space of time.'

Response: These verses are not necessarily contradictory (see comments on 2 Thessalonians 2:8).

Another 'secondary' argument favouring the Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians is that the early church universally attributed it to Paul, despite knowing that there may have been a pseudonymous

letter in Paul's name associated with Thessalonica (2 Thessalonians 2:2; 3:17).

A final question related to authorship concerns who physically wrote the letters. Was it Paul or an amanuensis (i.e. secretary)? On the basis of Romans 16:22 and 2 Thessalonians 3:17, Paul did, in at least some of his letters, use an amanuensis who wrote down what the apostle dictated (see further discussion at 2 Thessalonians 3:17).

I Thessalonians

I

Opening section and thanksgiving

(1 THESSALONIANS 1:1–10)

Almighty God, who is the ultimate author of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, used Paul to communicate God's message to the church at Thessalonica, and also to communicate God's message to us in the twenty-first century. May we (the reader and I) humbly ask that God would grant us understanding as we approach his grand text.

Paul writes 1 Thessalonians from Corinth soon after he received a verbal report from Timothy, who had just returned from the Thessalonian church. Paul is thrilled that the report is primarily positive and writes 1 Thessalonians with enthusiasm. (For further discussion, see 'Introductory matters'.)

Opening section (1 Thessalonians 1:1)

The format Paul adopts in his letters matches well with the standard format of any Hellenistic/Jewish letter of the first century AD. This is especially true for the opening words. A typical Hellenistic letter uses the formula ‘X (from whom) to Y (to whom), Greetings’.¹ Paul follows this general form.

All of Paul’s letters, including 1 Thessalonians, have the same overarching form of ‘X to Y, grace and peace’. However, within this general pattern, there are slight differences in the openings of individual letters as Paul expands upon the ‘X’, ‘Y’, and/or ‘grace and peace’ in a variety of ways. How does the opening of 1 Thessalonians compare with Paul’s other letters? It has the least amount of additional material. Also, in 1 Thessalonians (and 2 Thessalonians) there are two unusual grammatical expressions: ‘of Thessalonians’ and ‘in God’.

1:1. *Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, to the church of [the] Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.*²

Although Paul is the primary author, the letter is described as being from ‘Paul and Silvanus and Timothy’ because all three ministered in Thessalonica (cf. Acts 16:1–3; 17:14–15) and the other two endorsed what Paul wrote.³ At the time the letter was written, the three men were in Corinth (Acts 18:5; 2 Corinthians 1:19) in the year AD 50.

As opposed to all of Paul’s other letters, there are no epithets to describe the sender(s) in the openings of either 1 or 2 Thessalonians (cf. ‘Paul, the apostle’ and ‘Timothy, the brother’ in 2 Corinthians 1:1).⁴ Some argue that Paul did not use ‘Paul, the apostle,’ here because his authority was not being questioned.⁵ This argument does not adequately take into account Paul’s defence in

1 Thessalonians 2. It is best to assume that the lack of any epithet is related to the fact that 1 and 2 Thessalonians were early letters.⁶ Subsequently, Paul included epithets as part of his standard letter format. This change in format over time is similar to Paul's using 'church' in the opening salutations of his early letters and changing to 'saints' in his later letters (see discussion below).

'Silvanus' is certainly the Silas mentioned in Acts. He is probably also the 'Silvanus' of 1 Peter 5:12. 'Silvanus' is a Latin/Roman name and may reflect his prestigious Roman citizenship (Acts 16:37). 'Silas' may simply be a shortened form of 'Silvanus', or, possibly, the Greek version of his Aramaic name, *šē'illa'* (Saul), which just happens to sound similar to 'Silvanus'.⁷

The letter is addressed to 'the church of [the] Thessalonians'.⁸ To be called the 'church' was an honour and an encouragement for the Thessalonians. Certainly, by AD 50 the term 'church' (*ekklēsia*) had become a technical term for the Christian covenant community, either in its local manifestation (as here) or in a broader sense (e.g., Acts 9:31; Ephesians 1:22, Philippians 3:6).⁹ Interestingly, in Paul's first five canonical letters (Galatians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians), 'church' is used in the opening address to his readers. In his later canonical letters to congregations (Romans, Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians), 'saints' is used.¹⁰ Obviously, the 'church' is composed of 'saints'.

Paul expands upon the 'church' by noting that she is 'in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ'. Although in Greek the word 'in' (*en*) is not repeated, it is certain that 'in' relates to both 'God' and 'Lord'.¹¹

The use of the expression 'in God' is somewhat unusual in Paul's writings (but see Colossians 3:3), although 'in ... the Lord Jesus Christ' is not. The expression 'in Christ' (4:16) and its equivalents (e.g., 'in Christ Jesus', 2:14; 'in the Lord', 3:8; 2 Thessalonians 3:4;

‘in the Lord Jesus Christ’, 2 Thessalonians 3:12; ‘in him’, Philippians 3:9) refer to the believers’ union with Christ (represented by, and connected to, Christ) and the variety of implications that flow from this.¹²

Initially, two possible implications present themselves for ‘in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ’: either a general meaning that the Thessalonians are in union with God/Christ; or a more specific meaning that God/Christ is the instrument through whom the Thessalonians became a church (examples of this instrumental usage include Romans 3:24; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 2:17).¹³ The general meaning is probably in view here in 1 Thessalonians 1:1 because it is more common in Paul’s writings, and this sense should be assumed when there is no explicit contextual reason to opt for the instrumental meaning.

Paul’s high view of the divinity of Christ is portrayed here. The Thessalonian church is ‘in’ (one preposition) *both* the ‘Father’ and the Lord Jesus Christ’, which shows the very close connection between the two persons of the Godhead. Also, ‘Lord’ (*kyrios*), as used here, notes divinity. In the Septuagint (a Greek translation of the Old Testament written 250–150 BC), *kyrios* translates both God’s personal name, *Yahweh* (misnamed Jehovah), and the Hebrew word for ‘lord’, or ‘master’, (including God’s title as the divine ‘Lord’, *Adonai*). When the New Testament uses *kyrios* in reference to Jesus, sometimes it is explicitly declaring that he is *Yahweh* (e.g., Mark 1:3; Acts 2:21; Romans 10:13; Ephesians 4:8, citing Psalm 68:18; Philippians 2:11; Hebrews 1:10).¹⁴ In other places, the emphasis is on the generic ‘lord’/‘master’ (e.g., Matthew 8:2) or the divine ‘Lord’/‘Master’ (e.g., John 20:28; Acts 2:34; Revelation 19:16). In a third large group, there is a merging of *Yahweh* and divine ‘Lord’/‘Master’ (e.g., Acts 2:36). 1 Thessalonians 1:1 is in the third group. There is certainly an aspect of the clear divinity (*Yahweh* and

divine ‘Lord’/‘Master’) associated with *kyrios* because of the close connection between the Father and the Son.¹⁵

For a discussion of ‘Grace and peace to you’, see the same phrase in 2 Thessalonians 1:2.

Application

As was true in the first century AD, Christians today are organized into local groups. As a result of sin—our own and that of others—we may not have as high a view of this body of people as God does. Yes, there are problems in these modern groups, and the Bible even provides critiques of some of those in New Testament times. But the Triune God, speaking through Paul, has declared that each of these groups of true Christians is a ‘church’—that is, a special assembly of God’s covenant people.

This church is wonderfully connected to ‘God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ’. This connection exists both individually and corporately and, as we shall see in the subsequent texts of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, it provides all manner of blessings and responsibilities. The *Heidelberg Catechism* (AD 1563) expounds upon these blessings and responsibilities: ‘First, that all and every one who believes, being members of Christ, are in common, partakers of Him, and of all His riches and gifts; secondly, that every one must know it to be his duty, readily and cheerfully to employ his gifts, for the advantage and salvation of other members.’¹⁶

May we have the proper understanding, actions and emotional responses to the church, as befits a group that is ‘in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ’!

Thanksgiving—Remembering your work (1 Thessalonians 1:2–3)

In 1 Thessalonians 1:2–10, Paul encourages the Thessalonians by informing them that he often gives thanks to God in prayer for God's work in their past, present and future lives. For the convenience of the reader, the passage has been separated into two sections, covering verses 2–3 and 4–10 respectively.

Although an opening 'thanksgiving' in relation to his readers is a normal part of Paul's letters (all include such a thanksgiving except for Galatians, 2 Corinthians, 1 Timothy and Titus),¹⁷ this particular one seems especially appropriate because Paul has just heard the good news about the Thessalonian church from Timothy's report (3:6).

In Greek, 1 Thessalonians 1:2–10 is a single sentence, one of the most grammatically complicated in all of Paul's letters (similar to Ephesians 1:3–14). Because of the complexity, it is important to distinguish clearly between Paul's main point and several subsidiary points that expand upon and/or qualify it. As is common in Paul's writings, and in Greek generally (much more so than in English), the sub-points are shown through the use of (adverbial) participles.¹⁸

The main grammatical point (or clause) on which the whole of 1 Thessalonians 1:2–10 hinges is the verb 'we give thanks' (1:2). There are three subsidiary points indicated by three participles ('making remembrance', 'remembering' and 'knowing') each of which makes a separate comment about the principal verb. 'Making remembrance' without ceasing relates to *when* Paul prays (1:2). 'Remembering' the Thessalonians' work, labour and perseverance gives the *immediate reason* for Paul's thankful prayers (1:3). 'Knowing' their divine election gives the *ultimate reason* that Paul is thanking God (1:4). Paul then makes two further sub-points under this third

participle. He knows the Thessalonians are elect by two evidences. Firstly, Paul's preaching produced changes in them—this refers primarily to the time when the apostle was with the Thessalonians (1:5). Secondly, the Thessalonians imitated Paul, in particular in spreading the gospel despite opposition after Paul had left them (1:6–10).

1:2. *We give thanks to God always concerning all of you, unceasingly making remembrance [of you] in our prayers ...*

'We¹⁹ give thanks to God always concerning all of you' is the main clause that is discussed in the remainder of 1 Thessalonians 1:2–10. This clause is wonderful shorthand for Paul's theology of grace. The beliefs and works of the Thessalonians warm Paul's heart, but he acknowledges that God is ultimately to be thanked for them.

The knowledge that Paul is praying for the Thessalonians and that God is ultimately responsible for their salvation provides encouragement for them to persevere in the Christian life.

The expression 'unceasingly making remembrance [of you] in our prayers' is the first of three participial phrases related to 'we give thanks'. It reminds the Thessalonians that Paul often prays for them. Although this phrase adds little conceptually to the previous main clause, it does emphasize Paul's heartfelt concern for the Thessalonians. (Note that I have interpreted 'unceasingly' as modifying 'making'; grammatically, it could modify 'remembering' in 1:3.²⁰) In 1 Thessalonians 5:17, using very similar language, Paul exhorts the Thessalonians themselves to 'pray unceasingly'.²¹

1:3. *... remembering before our God and Father your work from faith, and labour from love, and perseverance from hope in [the return of] our Lord Jesus Christ ...*

This verse is the second participial phrase related to ‘we give thanks’. It gives the immediate reason for the thanksgiving before the Father—the Thessalonians’ threefold ‘work’, ‘labour’ and ‘perseverance’. As can be seen from verses 5–10, Paul is describing the Thessalonians’ way of life when he was with them, and especially their actions in spreading the gospel after he left despite opposition. The expressions ‘work’, ‘labour’ and ‘perseverance’ all refer to the same actions, but they are rhetorically arranged in an ascending order of difficulty in relation to the opposition faced—i.e., ‘work’ does not necessarily imply any resistance to their efforts; ‘labour’ implies a certain amount of opposition and ‘perseverance’ implies an even greater degree of antagonism.²²

The Thessalonians’ ‘work’, ‘labour’ and ‘perseverance’ were produced by their ‘faith’, ‘love’ and ‘hope’ respectively. Combining these two threefold patterns is another example of Paul’s rhetorical flair. The linking together of ‘faith’, ‘love’ and ‘hope’ appears often in Paul’s letters, and not in any specific order (Romans 5:2–5; 1 Corinthians 13:13; Galatians 5:5–6; Ephesians 4:2–5; Colossians 1:4–5; 1 Thessalonians 5:8; see also Hebrews 6:10–12; 10:22–24, 1 Peter 1:3–8, 21–22).²³ His emphasis upon one or other of the three differs according to each context, with the final quality to be named usually being the one that is stressed (e.g., in 1 Corinthians 13:13, ‘love’ is highlighted because of the context). Paul generally implies ‘faith’ in Christ, ‘love’ of man and ‘hope’ in the Second Coming (Colossians 1:4–5). In 1 Thessalonians 1:3 it is not clear whether ‘love’ refers to God, or man, or both.

Among the three, the emphasis in 1 Thessalonians 1:3 is on ‘hope’ in the Second Coming, as shown by the order, the usage in 1 Thessalonians 5:8 and the general prominence given to the Second Coming in 1 Thessalonians (e.g., 1:10; 4:13–5:11). Paul commends the Thessalonians for a firm belief in Christ’s Second Coming and for the way that belief is aiding them now in enduring

their trials (cf. 4:13). Possibly overly influenced by 1 Corinthians 13:13, many Christians have downplayed ‘hope’ in relation to ‘faith’ and, especially, to ‘love’.

The expression ‘work from faith’ is a reminder that Paul does not always contrast ‘works’ and ‘faith’, and many times uses ‘work(s)’ in a positive sense (e.g., Romans 15:18; Ephesians 2:10; Colossians 1:10; 3:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:13, 2 Thessalonians 1:11; 2:17; 1 Timothy 2:10). This positive use of the word is always related to human works done by God’s grace. On the other hand, Paul also uses ‘works’ or ‘works of the law’ to describe a method of salvation that merits eternal life (‘righteousness’) by doing all that the moral law requires (e.g., Romans 3:20; 4:2; 9:32; 10:5; 11:6; Galatians 3:10; Ephesians 2:9). It is not possible for us to attain salvation by this method because of Adam’s sin and subsequently ours. Indeed, it is now sinful to attempt to do so (Philippians 3:3). Interestingly, the term ‘works’ is used both positively and negatively in Ephesians 2:9–10.

From a grammatical point of view, ‘before our God and Father’ can modify either ‘remembering’, the threefold ‘work’, ‘labour’ and ‘perseverance’, or ‘perseverance ... Lord Jesus Christ’. As can be seen from the translation given above, I prefer to take it as modifying ‘remembering’, partially on the basis of my interpretation of verse 2.

Application

Seeing the good things that other Christians do should drive us to thank God. We do this because we realize that these good works are ultimately a result of God’s election. One aspect of our personal prayers should be that we often remember the good that other Christians do and thank and praise God for it.

Thanking God for the good works of others is another practical out-working of our belief in God’s grace. Christians believe that they are not

able in and of themselves to perform truly good works because of sin. Hence, grace is required to overcome sin and enable Christians to lead holy lives. Christians honestly believe this, and they reflect it in their prayers by ultimately thanking God for the good that they see others do.

Although Paul is reporting to the Thessalonians that he thanks God for their labours of love, he is also *secondarily* commending and thanking the Thessalonians themselves. Paul's example encourages us occasionally to commend or thank others, both privately and publicly, for the good things they have accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Thanksgiving—Knowing your election (1 Thessalonians 1:4–10)

Paul continues his long sentence of 1 Thessalonians 1:2–10. (See the previous section for introductory comments on this whole passage.) 'Knowing ... your election' (1:4) is the third of the three participial phrases related to 'we give thanks' (1:2). Paul gives thanks to God because ultimately the good works done by the Thessalonians are a result of their divine election in eternity past. The following verses (1:5–10) set out the evidence on which Paul's knowledge that the Thessalonians are elect is based.

1:4. ... *knowing, brothers having been beloved by God, your election ...*

Paul only uses the noun 'election' here and in four places in Romans (Romans 9:11; 11:5,7,28); however, the concept occurs often in his writings (e.g., Ephesians 1:4; 1 Thessalonians 5:9; 2 Thessalonians 2:13).²⁴ By connecting the 'call' passages (2:12; 4:7; 5:24; 2 Thessalonians 1:11; 2:14; cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:9, 2 Thessalonians 2:13) closely with 'election' in 1 and 2 Thessalonians, we can see that election is probably the key

theological concept to describe God's initiative in these two letters. It becomes the basis for the later commands to lead holy lives (sanctification). This matches Paul's common 'indicative/imperative' pattern, in which he tells Christians about some aspect of their salvation that they already have (indicative), and this forms the basis for his giving them commands leading to sanctification (imperative).²⁵ There is a parallel between the pattern of election leading to sanctification in 1 and 2 Thessalonians that matches well with the pattern of justification and sanctification in Romans and Galatians.²⁶ This partially explains why Paul does not use the word 'justification' in 1 and 2 Thessalonians. The concept of 'justification' is subsumed within the larger concept of 'election'. (For more on 'call', see comments on 1 Thessalonians 4:7.)

The Greek for 'beloved'²⁷ is unusual because Paul uses a perfect participle (*agapaō*), and not the verbal adjective (*agapētos*) that he normally uses (e.g., Romans 1:7; Colossians 1:7). This unusual construction is also found in 2 Thessalonians 2:13 and Jude 1, which similarly have election as their context. The Greek perfect tense emphasizes the completed action in the past (here, God's loving his people in electing them) that results in one's present situation.

1:5. ... *because our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also with power, and with the Holy Spirit, and with full conviction—just as you know what type [of men] we were among you for your sake.*

Paul gives the first evidence on which his confidence in the election of the Thessalonians is based—namely, that his preaching produced changes in their lives.²⁸ He primarily witnessed this change during the short time that he was with them, but of course its effects continued. The pattern in which Paul discusses the nature and effect of preaching (1:5) and then goes on to speak of imitation (1:6–10) will occur again in 2:13–14.

Paul encourages the Thessalonians (and himself!) by reminding

them of how God had changed them through his preaching. As in verse 3, Paul does this with rhetorical flair. Yes, the Thessalonians heard human words in Paul's preaching, but it was not 'only' a human 'word'. It was God speaking through the 'power' of the 'Holy Spirit' to give them 'full conviction' inwardly of his truth. Adding to the rhetorical impact is the fact that the three phrases ('with power', 'with the Holy Spirit', 'with full conviction') are grammatically parallel, but not logically parallel—that is, they are grammatically presented as equals, but logically these are not three equivalent concepts. It is the 'Holy Spirit' who, with 'power', produces 'full conviction'.

Paul understood preaching as God's primary instrument of grace, as he often connects the 'power' of God with the preached 'gospel' (Romans 1:15–16; 15:19; 1 Corinthians 1:17–18; Ephesians 3:6–7; 2 Timothy 1:8). One evidence of being a Christian is whether the Word of God, written and preached, has changed, and is changing, you.

The second half of verse 5 ('just as ... sake') is a parenthesis concerning Paul's good actions within the larger argument concerning the good works of the Thessalonians (1:5–10). Bruce notes, 'The conjunction ['just as'] links the following words with the preceding so as to imply: "we know what kind of people you turned out to be when you received the gospel *as* you know what kind of people we were when we brought it to you."²⁹ This parenthesis enhances the trust in Paul's preaching and also anticipates Paul's defence of himself in 1 Thessalonians 2. The expression 'you know' is used often in 1 Thessalonians (2:1,2,5,11; 3:3,4; 4:2; 5:2; cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:6; 3:7). This shows and further encourages the closeness between Paul and the Thessalonians.

1:6. *And you yourselves became imitators of us and the Lord, having received the word amidst much tribulation with joy from the Holy Spirit ...*

In 1 Thessalonians 1:6–10, Paul moves to his second evidence on which he bases his confidence in the election of the Thessalonians—that is, their imitation of him and the Lord. Although verses 6–10 are logically connected to the participle ‘knowing’ in verse 4, Paul has transformed them into the form of an independent sentence, or sentences, on grounds of length, despite the grammatical irregularity.

Exactly what did the Thessalonians do to imitate Paul? They ‘received the word amidst much tribulation’ (1:6) and preached ‘the word of the Lord’ (1:8) to others.³⁰ Note that it is the ‘word’ that connects these two actions and confirms that both are referred to. Although there are two aspects to their imitation of Paul, the emphasis is on their following his example in preaching. It is difficult to understand how the Thessalonians’ having ‘received the word amidst much tribulation’ is an active imitation of Paul. He is probably referring to the general theme of acting positively when facing difficult circumstances (cf. 2:14), of which receiving the ‘word’ is one specific example.³¹

How are these actions an imitation ‘of the Lord’? In context, and as usual for Paul, ‘Lord’ here refers specifically to Christ. Some commentators see Christ’s attitude when enduring suffering as the example to be copied.³² However, on the basis of Paul’s use elsewhere of ‘imitators’ (e.g., 1 Corinthians 11:1; Ephesians 5:1), he is probably not thinking of specific events in Christ’s earthly ministry that he and the Thessalonians are to imitate, but rather in general terms of ‘behaviour that would be consistent with existence in the sphere of the Lordship of Christ’.³³ Hence, Paul tells the Thessalonians to imitate specific things that he did as he was under the lordship of Christ.

Paul uses ‘imitators’ (*mimētēs*, *symmimētēs*) and ‘to imitate’ (*mimeomai*) several times (1:6; 2:14; 2 Thessalonians 3:7,9; 1 Corinthians 4:16; 11:1; Ephesians 5:1; Philippians 3:17).

Except for Ephesians 5:1 (which speaks of imitating God) and 1 Thessalonians 2:14 (imitating other churches), Paul portrays *himself* as the one whom his readers are to imitate. In the apostle's view, this imitation of himself is related to imitation of Christ. However, this does not alter the fact that Paul wants others to imitate him. All Christians (see 1:7; 2:14), and especially leaders, should be models who set an example for others. Without sounding pompous, leaders should encourage others to imitate them.

In a wonderful juxtaposition Paul associates 'tribulation' with 'joy'. For most, these two are opposites; but for the Christian, the 'Holy Spirit' produces 'joy' even in difficult circumstances. Hendriksen notes that Paul and Silas' singing in the Philippian jail (Acts 16:25) may be in the background here, because it occurred shortly before Paul's visit to Thessalonica.³⁴ (See comments on 2:20 for a further discussion of 'joy'.)

1:7. ... so that you became an example to all those who believe in Macedonia and Achaia.

Paul further praises the Thessalonian church by noting that she herself had become an 'example' (*typos*) which other believers were imitating.³⁵ Combining verses 6 and 8, we see that the Thessalonian church, amidst difficult circumstances, was sending out preachers of the 'word', and this became an 'example' to be followed by other churches. In addition to individuals, the corporate actions of churches are to be imitated. In 1 Thessalonians 1:6–7 and in several other places (e.g., 2 Thessalonians 3:9; Philippians 3:17), Paul uses 'imitator' and 'example' together.

'Macedonia' and 'Achaia' were separate Roman provinces. 'Macedonia', of which Thessalonica was the capital city, comprised modern-day northern Greece and the southern portion of present-day Macedonia (the former Yugoslav Republic). 'Achaia' corresponds to what is now southern and central Greece.

The Thessalonian preachers made an impact on ‘all those who believe’. Paul refers both to those who were already Christians and to the new converts through the preaching. Although he is not specifically making a point of it in this context, his use of the present tense ‘those who believe’ (*pisteuō*) as a definition of Christians is worth considering. Paul often uses this definition in his letters (for the Thessalonian correspondence, see 1:7; 2:10,13; 2 Thessalonians 1:10), not to mention his use of ‘faith’ (*pistis*, e.g., 3:5; 2 Thessalonians 3:2), which is the noun related to the verb ‘believe’. Morris correctly notes, ‘The central importance of faith in the Christian life comes out in the way Christians are called simply “believers”.’³⁶ An emphasis on ‘those who believe’ as a definition of true Christians reminds us, firstly, of the Triune God in whom we are to believe (e.g., 4:14; Titus 3:8); secondly, that our justification is by faith in the work of Christ, and not by our works (e.g., Galatians 2:16; 3:5–6); and, thirdly, that our present sanctification is by faith (e.g., 1:3).

1:8. *For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith in God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything.*

Paul combines two concepts into this compressed sentence. The first, continuing the thought from verses 6–7, is that the preaching of the Thessalonians is an important aspect of the example that is imitated by others. Secondly, this preaching resulted in, among other things, knowledge of Paul’s missionary activity in Thessalonica. This preaching, and the knowledge resulting from it, was so geographically widespread that many times in Paul’s travels Christians knew about the events in Thessalonica before Paul told them.

‘Word of the Lord’ refers to the word spoken by Christ (cf. 4:15; 2 Thessalonians 3:1). Paul uses this famous Old Testament formula

(‘word of the LORD’), which emphasized that it was Yahweh who was speaking, and he applies it to Christ. Further, Paul considers the preaching of the Thessalonians as Christ speaking!³⁷ (For more discussion on this topic, see 2:13; 2 Thessalonians 3:1.)

The Greek verb translated as ‘has sounded forth’ (*exēcheomai*) is only used here in the New Testament, though it occurs a few times in the Septuagint (Joel 3:14 [4:14 in the Septuagint]; 3 Macc. 3:2; Sir. 40:13). The exact background to the metaphor is not clear (is the image that of a trumpet or thunder?), but certainly Paul wants to emphasize the intensity of the preaching by the use of this word.³⁸

Using hyperbole, Paul indicates that the Thessalonians’ preaching has gone into ‘every place’.³⁹ Part of the explanation for the rapid spread of the preaching was the location of Thessalonica. Not only was it a harbour, but it was situated on the famous road, the Via Egnatia. The latter was an important east-west route from Dyrrhachium on the west coast of Greece stretching eastward to Byzantium. Grammatically, ‘every place’ is linked to ‘your faith in God’,⁴⁰ which is equated to the ‘word of the Lord has sounded forth’; in other words, the Thessalonians’ preaching manifested their ‘faith in God’.

Another result of the preaching was that the knowledge of Paul’s previous missionary activity in Thessalonica had become so well known that Paul had ‘no need to say anything’ about it. This phrase implies that some others were making negative comments about Paul’s trip to Thessalonica and foreshadows his defence in 1 Thessalonians 2. Of course, this does not mean that Paul did not tell others about God’s work in Thessalonica (e.g., 2 Thessalonians 1:4, 2 Corinthians 8:1–5); it only indicates that he had no *need* to tell others.

1:9–10. *For they report concerning us what type of visit we had with you, and*

how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and real God and to wait for his Son from heaven ...

‘They’ (those referred to in verses 7–8 in Macedonia, Achaia and every place) ‘report’ two items that they learned from the Thessalonian preachers. The first is the facts concerning Paul’s ‘visit’ (*eisodos*) to Thessalonica. These facts probably include the persecution Paul endured (Acts 17:5–10), his exemplary behaviour and his preaching. This again foreshadows of Paul’s explicit defence of himself in 1 Thessalonians 2. (*Eisodos* is also used in 2:1.)

The second reported item concerns the change brought about in the Thessalonian Christians. They ‘turned to God from idols’. Paul summarizes the result of this turning in two ways: ‘to serve the living and real God’ and ‘to wait for his Son from heaven’.⁴¹

They ‘turned’ in faith ‘to God’, but they also ‘turned’ away from pagan ‘idols’.⁴² Here Paul designates their conversion in both positive and negative terms. Contrast this with his more positive description of a Christian in verse 8 as one who has ‘faith towards God’. Obviously, the Scriptures use different words for conversion and the Christian life depending on which aspects are being emphasized. In verse 9, Paul is partially stressing the former depravity of the Thessalonians’ lives (‘idols’) in order to highlight the wonder of their conversion.

In contradistinction to ‘idols’, which are lifeless and a hoax, Paul describes God as ‘living and real’. Nowhere else in the New Testament are these two words used together to describe God, although the expression ‘living God’ is used often (e.g., 2 Corinthians 3:3; 6:16; 1 Timothy 3:15). Possibly Jeremiah 10:10 is in the background because it includes equivalent Hebrew words for ‘living’ and ‘real’ to describe God in the context of idols.⁴³ As usual in Paul’s epistles, ‘God’ refers to God the Father, as ‘his Son’ in the next phrase confirms.

‘To wait for his Son from heaven’ refers to Christ’s Second Coming.⁴⁴ ‘To wait’ includes an ethical component, as it encourages us to lead holy lives motivated by our concern to honour Christ when he returns (see further discussion in the ‘Application’ section following 1 Thessalonians 5:5b–11).⁴⁵ ‘To wait’ also emphasizes the hope of the joys that are associated with Christ’s Second Coming (cf. 1:3).

Here a Christian is defined as one who both serves the Father and awaits the Son. Is this a summary which is true of us? To reflect more accurately the variety of emphases in the Bible, the church should occasionally describe a Christian in this way.

1:10. ... *whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the coming wrath.*

The second half of 1 Thessalonians 1:10 contains two clauses that further define ‘his Son’ in the earlier part of the verse. The first clause refers to Christ’s resurrection; he was ‘raised’ (*egeirō*) by God the Father ‘from the dead’. (‘Dead’ is plural, and it implies that Christ was included among the ‘dead ones’, and thus that he truly suffered death.) ‘Raised from the dead’ is a very common expression in Paul’s writings (e.g., Romans 4:24; 10:9; 1 Corinthians 15:12; Galatians 1:1; 2 Timothy 2:8) and in the New Testament generally (e.g., Luke 20:37; John 2:22; Acts 3:15; Hebrews 11:19; 1 Peter 1:21). Although Paul does not connect the dots for us, so to speak, he is assuming that the reader understands that ‘raised from the dead’ implies, firstly, that Christ *died* for sinners—which explains the reference to ‘the dead’—and, secondly, that Christ is now reigning with power, which explains ‘raised’.

The second clause, ‘Jesus who delivers us from the coming wrath’, refers to the Second Coming. There will be God’s ‘wrath’ upon those who are ultimately unrepentant (see 2 Thessalonians 1:6–9; 2:8–12), but Paul comforts the Thessalonians by reminding

them that they are exempt from this ‘wrath’. The word ‘delivers’ (*rhýomai*) is used in the New Testament in a similar way to ‘saves’ (*sōzō*) but with much less frequency (see Romans 11:26, where the two words are synonyms).⁴⁶ The usual emphasis of ‘delivers’ is on God or Christ rescuing, or delivering, Christians from a difficult situation. Sometimes the difficulty is of a physical nature (e.g., Luke 1:74; Romans 15:31; 2 Thessalonians 3:2); and at others, as in this text, it explicitly includes a ‘spiritual’ component (e.g., Colossians 1:13; Romans 7:24). One aspect of the deliverance accomplished at the Second Coming includes God’s legally acquitting, or justifying, us publicly at the last judgement. But in order for us to have a guarantee now that we shall be justified at the last judgement, our future public justification must be based on the work of another—the work of Christ (cf. Romans 5:9; 8:34).⁴⁷ Hence, we are truly justified now by the merit of Christ when we first believe, and God will publicly declare this at the last judgement.

In this short opening thanksgiving section Paul explicitly mentions the Second Coming twice (1:10), and strongly implies it once (1:3). Each reference to it emphasizes a different aspect. In 1 Thessalonians 1:3, ‘hope’ aids us in persevering during trials. ‘To wait’, at the beginning of verse 10, encourages us to lead holy lives to honour Christ when he returns. The final part of the verse reminds us that we shall avoid the ‘coming wrath’. These texts show us that the Second Coming should often be part of our thinking and has multi-faceted implications for us. In addition to 1 Thessalonians 1:10, several other sections of this letter end with a reference to the Second Coming (2:12, 16; 3:13; 4:17–18; 5:10–11).

Application

Paul commends the Thessalonians for being ‘examples’ to others (1:7). Paul explicitly, and the Thessalonians by implication, have asked others to become ‘imitators of us and the Lord’ (1:6; 2:14). Paul wants not only

churches corporately, but all individual Christians, to be examples. Also, they are occasionally to urge others to follow their example. A scary thought, isn't it, if taken seriously?

Knowing that others are imitating us, whether we ask them to do so or not, is a great responsibility; yet this is one of the many ways God motivates us to live a more godly life. It is also a sacred privilege; God has so designed the church that we are to influence each other by being good examples.

During worship, do we sing the hymns as though we really believed the words and enjoyed worshipping the Lord, or do we mumble and seem reluctant? Those around you know whether you sing out and seem enthusiastic about worship. You are an example—either good or bad.

Grandparents (and I am one of them), you have the opportunity to influence your grandchildren. Think about the various ways you can inspire them during their next visit. The image of grandfather (or Opa in my case!) reading the Bible at mealtimes can be powerful, as well as watching him do a good deed for a neighbour, help someone at the hospital, or publicly make a stand for honesty and integrity.

Yes, God has designed that all Christians should be good examples, but there is an even higher responsibility for church officers (James 3:1; 1 Timothy 5:20) and their families (1 Timothy 3:4; Titus 1:6) because they are more visible. Calvin saw the importance of a pastor being an example and the responsibility this entailed—so much so that in his *Catechism of 1538* he included this duty as one of the three main functions of a pastor: 'Pastors had to be set over churches [1] both to instruct the people publicly and privately in pure doctrine, [2] to administer the sacraments, and [3] to teach them by the best example concerning holiness and purity of life.'⁴⁸

May we all be good examples for God's glory and the aid of others.