

PAUL'S FIRST LETTER TO THE COMMUNITY IN THESSALONICA^a

Greeting

1 From Paul, Silvanus,^b and Timothy, to the community of the Thessalonians,^c who are in God our Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace and peace to you!

Praise for the Thessalonians' Faith and Example

²We give thanks to God for all of you all the time, as we mention you in our prayers. ³In front of our God and Father, we're constantly remembering your faithful behavior, your loving hard work, and your hopeful endurance.^d ⁴Because we know that you're chosen,^e brothers and sisters; you're loved by God. ⁵After all, the good news we brought you didn't just come to you in words—far from it. It also came with power, with the Holy Spirit, and with great forcefulness.^f ⁶Because you know what we were like for your sake, when we were with you.^g ⁷And you became imitators of us and of the Lord. You were welcoming the message, amidst a lot of persecution, with the joy of the Holy Spirit. ⁸As a result, you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia^h and Achaia.ⁱ ⁹In fact,^j the message about the Lord^k didn't just ring out from you to Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has gone out everywhere, to the point that we don't need to say anything. ¹⁰Because people tell the story about us—about what a warm welcome we had from you. They tell how you turned from idols to God—to serve the living and true God. ¹¹And you're waiting for his Son to come from heaven: Jesus, the

^a Prn. thess-a-la-nye-ka.

^b Prn. sil-vain-us.

^c Prn. thess-a-loe-nee-ans.

^d Lit. "your work of faith and your toil of love and your endurance of hope."

^e Lit. "your chosenness."

^f Or "conviction," or "fullness."

^g Lit. "...with great conviction, just as you know what sort of people we were among you, for your sake."

^h Prn. mass-a-doe-nee-a.

ⁱ Prn. a-kay-a.

^j Or "After all."

^k Or "the Lord's message"; lit. "the word of the Lord."

One that he raised from among the dead. He's the One who saves us from the wrath of God that's coming.

Paul's Ministry in Thessalonica

2 Now you know, brothers and sisters, that our visit with you was anything but a failure. ²As you know, we had suffered and had been humiliated in Philippi before we came to you.^a But in dependence on our God, we were totally open in telling you the good news about God, in the midst of lots of opposition. ³Because our appeal to you didn't come out of self-deception, filthiness, or dishonesty. ⁴No—we tell the good news because we've been found worthy by God to be entrusted with it. It's not as though we're trying to please human beings—not at all. We're trying to please God, who's the One who tests our hearts. ⁵And as you know, we never used flattering words—nor did we misrepresent greedy motives.^b God is our witness. ⁶And we didn't try to get recognition^c from people—not from you, nor from others. ⁷We could have imposed ourselves, as apostles^d of Christ. But we didn't. We were gentle^e with you,^f like a nursing mother that gently cares for her children. ⁸We felt so drawn to you!^g We were glad to give you not just the good news, but our own lives! That's how dear you were to us. ⁹After all, brothers and sisters, remember our sweat^h and hard work. We worked night and day, so that we wouldn't be a burden to any of you, as we preached the good news about God to you. ¹⁰You—and God—are witnesses to the holiness and integrity and faultlessness of our conductⁱ towards you believers. ¹¹You know equally well how we treated each one of you—¹²encouraging you and comforting you like a father treats his own children. And we implored you to conduct yourselves in a way worthy of God, who is calling^j you to his own sovereign rule and glory.

¹³And that's also why we constantly thank God. Because you accepted the message of God that you heard from us. You welcomed it—not just as a human message,^k but as exactly what it really is: God's word. And it's producing results^l in those of you who believe. ¹⁴After all, brothers and sisters, you've followed in

^a Prn. fil-lip-pye.

^b Lit. "For we were neither in a word of flattery, just as you know, nor in the false representation of motives of greed."

^c Or "glory."

^d See "Bible Words."

^e Some of the best ancient mss have "babies," which in Greek differs by only one letter from "gentle." But it's hard to imagine Paul writing that.

^f Lit. "in the midst of you" (pl.).

^g Lit. "We so yearned for you."

^h Traditionally: "toil."

ⁱ Lit. "...witnesses how holy and how just [traditionally: "righteous"] and how faultless we were."

^j Some mss have "who had called."

^k Lit. "the word of human beings."

^l Or "it's working," as in "it's being effective."

the footsteps of^a God's communities in Christ that are in Judea.^b Because you've also experienced exactly the same sufferings from the people of your own country as they have from the Judeans—who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and severely persecuted us.^c They're not pleasing to God, and they're at odds with all humanity! ¹⁶They've been trying to keep us from talking to the Gentiles so that they'll be saved—so their sins are right up to the rim all the time. And God's wrath has come on them completely.^d

Paul Wishes He Could Visit Them Again

¹⁷Well, brothers and sisters, we've been separated from you^e for a little while—in terms of physical presence,^f but not in terms of our heart. We've been incredibly anxious to see your faces again—we've been feeling very urgent about it.^g ¹⁸We've really wanted to visit you. (I, Paul, wanted to come two different times—but Satan blocked us.) ¹⁹After all, who is our hope, our joy, our crown^h to be proud of? Aren't you yourselvesⁱ our crown, in front of our Lord Jesus, when he comes? ²⁰After all, you're our pride and joy.

3 So, when we couldn't stand it anymore, we thought it was best that we stay behind in Athens by ourselves. ²And we sent Timothy, our brother and God's helper^j in the good news of Christ. He came to strengthen you, and to encourage you in^k your faith. ³That way, none of you would be upset by the persecution you were experiencing.^l After all, you yourselves know that we're destined for this. ⁴Because even when we were with you, we were telling you ahead of time that we're going to be persecuted. Which, as you know, is exactly what happened. ⁵And that's why, when I couldn't stand it any longer, I sent Timothy to find out about^m your faith. I was worried thatⁿ the tempter had tempted you, and our hard work would turn out to be for nothing.

But Timothy has just now come back to us from you. And he's told us the good news of your faith and your love. And he tells us that you always have good

^a Lit. "you became imitators of." But Paul is not saying that the Thessalonian Christians have tried to imitate the Judean Christians—but only that their experience has turned out to be parallel.

^b Pm. joo-dee-a.

^c Or "drove us out."

^d Or "has finally come on them."

^e Lit. "orphaned from you."

^f Lit. "in face."

^g Lit. "we were abundantly eager to see your face, in much strong desire."

^h This is a crown of reward or recognition, rather like a medal, not a royal crown.

ⁱ Lit. "you indeed."

^j Some very good mss have "servant," but it's more probable that the surprising word "helper" has been toned down to "servant" at some point.

^k Lit. "for the sake of."

^l Lit. "by these persecutions."

^m Lit. "to know."

ⁿ Lit. "Whether perhaps."

memories of us—that you really want to see us, just as much as we want to see you. ⁷So thanks to your faith, brothers and sisters, we’ve been encouraged about you, in the midst of all our hardships and persecutions. ⁸Because now we live, if you’re standing firm in the Lord. ⁹After all, how can we thank God enough to pay back all the joy that we have in front of our God because of you? ¹⁰Night and day, we’re praying as hard as we possibly can, that we’ll be able to see your face—and equip you in whatever ways your faith needs it.^a

¹¹Now may God himself, the Father of our Lord Jesus, guide our path to you. ¹²And may the Lord increase your love and make it overflow^b for one another and for everyone—just as we love you. ¹³And may that love serve to strengthen your hearts. May they be faultlessly holy in front of our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus, with all his holy ones. Amen!^c

Living in a Way That Pleases God

4 Finally, then, brothers and sisters, we want to ask you, and call on you in the Lord Jesus, to do something. As you know, you’ve accepted teaching from us about how you should live^d in order to please God. And you’re living^e just that way. We want you to increase what you’re doing even more. ²After all, you know what instructions we gave you from the Lord Jesus. ³Because it’s God’s will for you to become holy—that you should keep away from sexual immorality, and ⁴everybody should be intimate with their own spouse^f in holiness and honor. ⁵It shouldn’t be in lustful passion, like the Gentiles, who don’t know God. ⁶Don’t break boundaries and cheat with somebody else’s spouse.^g Because the Lord is the judge who is going to punish all these sorts of offenses—just as we’ve warned you, and warned you in all seriousness.^h ⁷After all, the Lord didn’t call you in filthiness, but in holiness. ⁸So the person that defies that command isn’t defying a human being—they’re defying God, who gives you his Spirit.

⁹But as for loving your fellow Christians,ⁱ you don’t have any need for me to write to you. Because you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another. ¹⁰And you’re doing exactly that, for all the brothers and sisters throughout Macedonia. We just call on you, brothers and sisters, to increase what you’re

^a Verses 9-10 are one long rhetorical question; lit. “For what thanks can we give to God in repayment for you, concerning all the joy that we have through you in front of our God, as we night and day ask more than anything to see your face and equip the deficits of your faith?”

^b Lit. “And the Lord increase you and make you full/overflow with love.” I think “increase” refers to their love, not to their numbers.

^c Many early mss lack the word “Amen.”

^d Lit. “walk.”

^e Lit. “walking.”

^f Or less likely: “Everyone should know how to control their own body.”

^g Lit. “Not to break boundaries and cheat their brother or sister in this business.”

^h Lit. “and solemnly testified to you.”

ⁱ Lit. “But concerning brotherly love.”

doing even more. ¹¹And consider it an honor to live in quiet generosity, and to take care of your own affairs. And work with your own hands, just as we instructed you. ¹²That way, you'll conduct yourselves decently in front of outsiders, and you won't need anything from anyone.^a

The Coming of the Lord Jesus

¹³Now brothers and sisters, we don't want you to be uninformed about those who've passed away.^b We don't want you to grieve, like everybody else who doesn't have hope. ¹⁴Because if we believe that *Jesus* died and rose, then God, *through* Jesus, in the same way, will also bring *with* Jesus those who've passed away.^c ¹⁵And we're telling you this by the Lord's own teaching:^d we who are left alive at the Lord's coming *will not* precede those who've passed away.^e ¹⁶Because

In the blink of an eye,
With the call of an archangel,
With the trumpet of God,
The Lord himself is going to come down from heaven,
And the dead in Christ are going to rise first.
¹⁷Then we, who've been left alive,
Are going to be snatched away with them into the clouds,
To meet the Lord in the air.
And so from then on we'll always be with the Lord.

¹⁸So encourage each other with these sayings.

5 But as for the times and the dates, brothers and sisters, you don't need me to write to you. ²Because you already know very well^f that the Day of the Lord is coming just like a thief in the night.^g ³When they're saying, "Peace and security," suddenly destruction is going to come for them. It'll be like a pregnant woman in labor^h—and they're not going to getⁱ out of it! ⁴But brothers and sisters, you're not in the dark. So that day isn't going to come up on you^j like a thief. ⁵Because you're all people who belong to the light, and to the day.^k We're not of the night, or of the darkness. ⁶So let's not sleep like everybody else—just the opposite. Let's keep watch and be sober. ⁷After all, people who sleep, sleep at night; and people who

^a Or "you won't have need of anything."

^b Lit. "And we don't want you to be ignorant about those who are asleep." "Those who are asleep" is a common euphemism for people who've died.

^c Lit. "fallen asleep."

^d See Mt. 24:30-31; Mk 13:26-27.

^e Lit. "fallen asleep."

^f Lit. "For you yourselves know accurately."

^g See Mt. 24:42-44; Lk. 12:39-40 (see also 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 3:3; 16:15).

^h See Mt. 24:8; Mk 13:8.

ⁱ Lit. "flee" or "escape."

^j Or "catch you." But it doesn't mean that you'll be caught like a thief—it's the thief that "catches" you unaware.

^k Lit. "For you're all children of the light and children of the day." See "Bible Words" under "Children of."

get drunk, get drunk at night. ⁸But we people of the day should be sober. We should wear the breastplate of faith and love, and the helmet of our hope of salvation.^a ⁹Because God hasn't destined us for wrath—just the opposite. We're destined to be saved by our Lord Jesus Christ,^b ¹⁰who died on our behalf. So it's the same whether we live or whether we pass away:^c we're going to live with him. ¹¹So encourage each other, and build each other up, just as you're doing already.

¹²Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge the people who work hard for you, care for you in the Lord, and give you wise counsel. ¹³And hold them in the very highest esteem because of their work. Be at peace with each other. ¹⁴And we call on you, brothers and sisters, to warn people who are undisciplined. Comfort people who are discouraged. Stay loyal to people who are weak. Be patient with everyone. ¹⁵Make sure that nobody pays back nastiness with nastiness.^d Just the opposite: always strive for what's good for one another, and for everybody.

Final Encouragements and Challenges

¹⁶Be joyful all the time. ¹⁷Pray continuously. ¹⁸Give thanks in all circumstances, because that's God's will for you in Christ Jesus. ¹⁹Don't smother the Spirit. ²⁰Don't despise prophecies: ²¹test everything, and hold on to what's good. ²²Keep away from every appearance of evil.

²³And may God himself, the God of peace, make you holy, through and through. And may your whole spirit, soul and body be protected, so that you'll be free from blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴The One who called you is faithful, and he's going to do it.

²⁵Brothers and sisters, pray for us too.^e

Final Greeting

²⁶Say hello to all the brothers and sisters with a holy kiss. ²⁷I put you under binding obligation in the name of the Lord: have this letter read to all the brothers and sisters.

²⁸May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you!^f

^a See Isa. 59:17; Wisd. 5:18.

^b Lit. "...wrath, but the opposite: for acquiring salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ."

^c Lit. "the same whether we are awake or whether we sleep."

^d Or "evil with evil"; lit. "bad with bad."

^e Some mss leave out the word "too."

^f Some mss add, "Amen."