

INTRODUCTORY NOTES

Theme: Stand firm with faith, love, and hope in the Lord Jesus Christ despite opposition, fully assured that Jesus will return to rescue us from wrath for resurrection life with him.

A) Introduction to 1 Thessalonians

‘1 Thessalonians opens a window on to a newly planted church in the middle of the first century AD. It tells us how it came into being, what the apostle taught it, and what were its strengths and weaknesses, its theological and moral problems, and how it was spreading the gospel.’¹

When we read through the pages of Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians’ church we soon realise that the believers are very young in the faith. They needed reassurance about their genuine conversion to God’s gospel in the face of persecution (1:3-10; 2:13-16), reminding that Paul’s ministry among them was genuine (2:1-12, 2:17-3:13), and teaching on specific issues on how to endure faithfully as Christians with hope in Jesus’ return (4:1-5:28).

At the heart of all Paul says is the future hopes of the personal return of the Lord Jesus Christ. As we wait for him to come again, we can be assured that he will punish those who oppose the gospel and deliver us from the wrath to come for an everlasting life of union with God’s people in and through Jesus Christ.

When Paul and his missionary band of brothers visited Thessalonica it had already become well-established as the capital city of the Roman province of Macedonia. Paul evangelised the city as he usually did, beginning with the synagogue of Jews and then going to the Gentiles – reasoning with the people from the Scriptures, explaining and proving to the Jews that it was necessary for the promised and anointed King (‘Christ’) to suffer, die and rise from the dead, and that the man Jesus was the promised king. (Acts 17:1-3) However, he had only been there a few weeks before the Jewish leaders in Thessalonica stirred up violent opposition to Paul’s gospel, forcing Paul and his companions to flee for their lives. (See Acts 17:5-10) Paul and Silas first flee to Berea and then are chased further to Athens by the Thessalonians Jews. (See Acts 17:10-15)

From Athens, Paul feared that the church had quickly fallen away in the face of violent opposition to his gospel. It was out of great concern that Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to further establish and encourage them in their Christian faith. Timothy has now returned with good news that the Thessalonians church is still standing strong with

¹ John Stott, *The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of Thessalonians* (IVP), p. 20.

faith, love and hope in Christ, in the face of strong opposition. Paul now puts pen to paper very much comforted and filled with thanks to God. He is writing to remind them about what it means to live Christian lives and what genuine gospel ministry is about, as well as to instruct them further in the areas that seem to be lacking in their faith. (1 Thess. 3:6-10)

On the basis of Timothy's report:

- 1.1-3:13 Paul reassures the church that God has chosen them to be his people because of how the gospel came to them, how they received it, and how they are now enduring with faith, love and hope despite strong opposition.
- 4.1-5.28 Paul reminds the church to live holy lives together, to love God's people, to work for a living, and to grieve their dead loved-ones in the knowledge that the Lord Jesus Christ will return.

Preparation for studying 1 Thessalonians

Read through the letter several times. Make a note of everything you learn about:

i. The author:

- What do we learn about Paul from this letter?
- What does he tell us about his purpose for writing?

ii. The recipients:

- What do we learn about the church in Thessalonica at the time of writing?
- What is life like for them? What are the pressure-points in their discipleship?

iii. The subject matter of the letter:

- What are the major sections of the letter?
- What are the major themes of the letter?
- How do you think the major themes relate to each other?
- How do the major themes relate to the purpose of the letter?
- How would you summarise the message of 1 Thessalonians in a sentence?

STUDY 1: Acts 16:6 – 17:15 God guides the Missionaries into Macedonia (Europe)

Before studying the letter in smaller chunks, it's worth discovering more about the birth of the church in Thessalonica. We are at the point in Acts where the gospel comes to Europe: Macedonia (16:6-17:15) & Achaia (17:16-18:17). Momentum is growing, with the way cleared by the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) for Gentiles to join the people of God without having to adopt Jewish customs.

1. Why do we sometimes get discouraged about sharing the gospel with other people?

16:6-10 **2.** We are told that God's Spirit stops Paul and his missionary companions from entering first Asia (v. 6) and then also Bithynia (v. 7).

What makes v. 9 is such a significant vision?

► Significances for us as we go about spreading the gospel?

vv. 11-40 **3.** We're told about three encounters of 'conversion' in **Philippi** (11-15, 16-24, 25-40):

- *How are the people described?*
- *How is their conversion described?*
- *In what ways are they different?*
- *What similarities are there in their experiences?*

► What do you think the church at Philippi was like (40)?

17vv.1-9 **4.** They come to **Thessalonica**. *Where do the missionaries meet, and how is their ministry described?*

Q. What do you think motivates the opposition in 17:5? How does this compare with motivation in 16:19?

Q. What reason do they give for their opposition in each case (16:20-21, 17:6-7)?

► What does this tell us about opposition to the gospel?

vv. 10-15 **5.** SO, they're sent away to **Berea**, where they get quite a different response:

Q. Where did the missionaries go and how was their ministry received (10-11)?

Q. What does this lead to (12)?

6. The heat rises though when opposition arrives.

Q. Who is behind the opposition experienced by the missionaries?

Q. How do the church and mission team respond?

Thinking...7. How would you summarise the effect Paul, Silas, and Timothy's gospel ministry has in Macedonia? *What characterises every mission stop? Does that mean that God's purposes of gospel spread are thwarted in some way?*

At every mission stop there is proclamation of the gospel, a response of faith from some and rigorous opposition from others. But God is sovereign and his purpose is not thwarted. He uses bad reception as much as the glad reception to see his purposes fulfilled. Praise Him, trust Him, preach Him!

Applying...8. 'To be forewarned is to be forearmed.' We should not be surprised when opposition comes our way. *So why are we often taken aback by opposition to gospel endeavour?*

9. *How did the missionaries persevere in the face of adversity? What can we learn from them so that we will persevere in the face of aggression?*

► **What encouragement in gospel ministry can we take from this passage?**

10. *How does this help us prepare to study Paul's 1st letter to the Thessalonian church? What will it help us understand?*

Prayer time: Spend a while as a group praising God for the ways you have witnessed the power of the gospel in changing lives, and pray for Grace Church WP to be like-minded in this gospel ministry.

STUDY 2: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Theme: Paul thanks God for these Christians, confident that they are loved and chosen by God, because of the way God brought the gospel to them and the way they responded genuinely to the message that resulted in the whole region hearing the good news about Jesus.

And so: Let us learn from their genuine response to the gospel and follow their example!

Introduction:1. What signs do you look for that you or others are genuine Christians?

v. 1a: **2.** Looking at v. 1, a) *Who are the three guys writing this letter?* b) *How did they know the people they were writing to?* c) *How had they left the church there?*

The church in Thessalonica is only a few months old, its members are new born Christians, freshly converted from paganism or Judaism. Their Christian convictions have been newly acquired. Their moral standards have been recently adopted. And they are being sorely tested by persecution. You'd expect it to be a very wobbly church wouldn't you?

Let's read 1 Thess 1:1-10 to find out what Timothy's report about them had been like?

vv. 1b-4 **3.** The three missionaries begin by describing the church in Thessalonica:

Q. What stands out in Paul's description of this church?

- v. 1 Church = a community that lives in God the Father and Lord Jesus Christ

▶ *The association could hardly be closer could it...?*

- v. 3 Church = a community distinguished by faith, love, and hope

▶ *Aren't abstract qualities are they, what does each one mean? What are we taught about true qualities of genuine Christians?*

- v. 4 Church = a community which is loved and chosen by God

▶ *What makes Paul so confident about this?*

vv. 3, 5 **4.** God electing people for salvation is a reality that some people find repulsive...

What response does this reality prompt in Paul?

- v. 5 **5.** So, planting the Thess church was the direct result of preaching the gospel.
What does evangelism involve from v. 5?
Why those four expressions?
So, are words enough?
- vv. 6-8 **6.** Now, it seems natural for Paul to move on in his mind from the church to the gospel. In verses 5-10 Paul outlines, in three clear stages, the progress of the gospel in Thessalonica...*Can you pick out those stages (vv. 5, 6, 8)?*
- v. 5 The gospel came to them (as we have seen already)
 - v. 6 They welcomed the message of the gospel – *how? What's striking about the way they received it?* Must've been a profound change in their lives:
 - ▶ **Why do you think living gospel-centred lives always attracts opposition?**
 - v. 8 They proclaimed the message of the gospel – *a loud noise! Meaning?*
 - ▶ **What exactly was the news that was spreading far and wide from Thessalonica?** Compare v. 8 and v.9
 - ▶ **Any lessons to learn for us here?** *Are they extraordinary church?*
- vv. 9-10 **7.** Paul goes on in v.9-10 to give a three part analysis of Christian conversion – arguably fullest account in NT: *What does conversion involve, then?* Turn, Serve, Wait – *what are we told about the one we are waiting for?*

Summary **8.** *Looking back over Chapter 1, what are we being told about the vital relationship between the church and the gospel?*

The church that receives the gospel must pass it on?

The church that receives the gospel must embody it?

Paul is confident that these Thessalonians Christians are united to God, loved by God and chosen by God because of the way the gospel came to them and because of their response to the gospel, resulting in the spread of the gospel throughout the region. Follow their example of faith in God!

Prayer time: Spend a while as a group praising God for the ways you have witnessed the power of the gospel in changing lives, and pray about how he might use you in this gospel ministry.

STUDY 3: 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16

Theme: Paul reminds the church that his gospel ministry amongst them was genuine, because of the way he spoke God's word to them with genuine motives, total integrity, with motherly affection and fatherly concern; and he thanks God for enabling them to suffer for God's word, reassuring them that God will punish all His opponents.

And so: Don't be discouraged from proclaiming Christ by opposition to God's gospel!

Introduction: 1. What will make for good and genuine gospel service of the people in WP?

Prayer: Before we read the passage and get to grips with what God is saying to us through his Word here, we need to *pray*.

As we'll see in 1 Thessalonians 2 and 3, Paul discloses his mind, expresses his emotions and bares his soul – more perhaps than anywhere else in his letters – so that we're given a unique insight into Paul's pastoral heart – as he defends his ministry and conduct among the church. *Let's read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16 to find out how he goes about doing just that!*

Starter 2. In chap 1, Paul wants to reassure the Thessalonians church that God has loved them and elected them to be his people – *What's his main topic here in 2:1-12? What points to that in the passage?*

Paul is appealing to what they already 'know' (2:1, 2, 5, 9, 10, and 11) about Paul and co-workers as they came and proclaimed God's gospel in Thessalonica. [*'You know' that our coming 2 you was genuine gospel ministry from God*]

So in vv. 1-12 the focus is on Paul's gospel activity...

vv. 1-2 3. And Paul sees the need to remind them that his coming to them was not 'empty' ('hollow'/'useless') – **how does he go about answering that charge (2)? In what sense 'empty' (of results' or 'of purpose')?**

Implication: Why might preparedness to suffer 4 beliefs evidence of genuineness?

vv. 3-6 4. Looking at vv. 3-6, **what sort of smear tactics might Paul's critics been using to try to undermine both his authority and his gospel? If Paul had been any of these -ve things why would that have damaged the gospel ministry he was doing?**

Application: What are some possible impure motives for Christian ministry?

Summary - Paul says in vv. 1-6, “We declared God’s gospel to you with integrity as stewards of God’s gospel, approved by God and with the right motives in the midst of great conflict.”

vv. 7-9 **5. How does Paul say he carried out his ministry in vv. 7-9? How does a nursing mother show gentleness – how translate to declaring the gospel?**

vv. 10-12 **6. How does Paul say he carried out his ministry in vv. 7-9? How does a father exhort, encourage and charge his children – how is it translated to declaring the gospel?**

Summary **7. So, looking back over the passage, how does Paul carry out his ministry in relation to: a) God**

b) Thessalonians Christians?

Sum – Paul says in vv. 7-12, “We proclaimed God’s gospel to you with pure motives, utmost integrity, genuine affection, and concern for your well-being in Christian faith.”

In the final paragraph Paul examines once again that Thessalonians’ response:

vv. 13-16 **8. Paul’s first cause for thanks comes in 1:2ff, *what ‘also’ gives him cause to thank God for in vv. 13-16?***

Renews his thanksgiving for the way in which they received the gospel and are enduring, despite of persecution.

b) How might this confirm the reality of Paul’s gospel message?

No-one who is engaged in any form of pastoral ministry (ordained or not) can fail to be touched and challenged by what Paul writes here! We may not be *apostles* of Christ (we haven’t seen the risen Lord, we haven’t been commissioned as eye-witnesses to the risen Christ, we haven’t received a special inspiration of the Holy Spirit to teach with authority or to contribute to the NT) nevertheless Paul’s example of pastoral care and concern in proclaiming the gospel provides us with an excellent model to emulate.

***Applying...* 9. What lessons are there here about maintaining personal integrity in the gospel ministries and opportunities that God opens to us?**

Prayer time: For people who are new or still very young in Christ. Ask the Lord how you can help them grow in the faith. Thank God for people who have taken this kind of genuine interest in your growth in faith in God’s gospel.

STUDY 4: 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13

Theme: Paul's heartfelt joy and desire before God is that the Christians in Thessalonica remain established and firm in their faith, through times of great affliction, until Jesus Christ returns.

So: Let us develop that same heart and cultivate these kinds of relationships in the gospel!

Introduction: 1. Why are *relationships* so important in a church's life?

In these verses of the letter we have a window opened out for us to see the quality of relationship that Paul, Silas and Timothy shared with the Christians in Thessalonica. We will see his heartfelt desire that they remain firm in their faith, his intense concern for them as Christians, as well as the direction and purpose of his gospel ministry. Expect your hearts to be warmed and challenged by his example of what relationships in the gospel ought to look like before God.

Let's read 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13 with open ears!

Pray : Before we read the passage and get to grips with what God is saying to us through his Word here, we need to *pray*.

vv. 17-20 **2. Paul explains why he hasn't been able to return to Thessalonica, *What does Paul want to emphasise and explain to the church?***

- Where have we heard this family tone before? (17)
- How are they to know that Paul wanted this? (18)
- Why are the Thessalonians Christians so precious to him? (19-20)

Reflect **3. Does this perspective cast a different light on our present priorities? *How comfortable are we with this perspective on Christian service? Do we share the same sense of the importance of the coming of Jesus Christ (climax of the ages)?***

So we've seen what motivated Paul's great desire to try again and again to return to the church, in 3:1-5 he shows us some of his fears and frustrations:

vv. 1-5 **4. What was Paul's greatest fear about the church in Thessalonica?**

- *What are the two main ways in which his anxiety is expressed?* (3a, 5b)
- *How had Paul already prepared them for these afflictions?* (3b-4)

So, 'when Paul could stand the pressure no longer' (1, 5) he sends Timothy to them:

5. What was the purpose of sending Timothy? (2b, 5b) *Why do you think he feels the need to go into the details of Timothy's credentials?* (2a)

After Tim returns Paul's fears are replaced with an entirely different response:

vv. 6-10 **6. What was the 'good news' that Timothy brought back with him? What reaction does that bring in Paul?**

- What comfort does their faith bring Paul? (7)
- How does Paul describe his joy and thanksgiving in vv. 8-9?
- Why does Paul's joy turn to prayer (10)? *Was T's report ALL good news?*

Sum – Paul's heartfelt joy and desire before God is that the Thessalonian church remains established and firm in their faith, through times of great affliction, until Christ returns.

The final section tells us what Paul's earnest prayer night and day is all about:

vv. 13-16 **7. How does Paul's prayer reveal what God wanted for them?**

- How do his three great desires for the church *relate* to each other?
- What does the direction of his prayer tell us about the direction of his ministry?

Applying... **8. What can we learn from Paul in his relationship with this church?**

Paul's 'Christian service was bound up with the people for whom he is responsible before God. His authenticity as a minister of Christ and of the gospel is seen in his willingness to spend and be spent for others, to encourage their growth in faith and love, holiness and hope. There is nothing at arms-length about Paul's ministry. Even though he is physically separated from them by many miles, he is utterly committed to them, and all his writing and praying is for one purpose, that the flock be nurtured.' David Jackman, *The Authentic Church: What are our priorities before Christ comes again?* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 1998), p. 73.

- Does our Christian ministry need a change of direction?
- What changes of heart do we need to continually ask God to work in us as a result of this passage?

Prayer time: Thank God for those who have faithfully served you in Christian ministry, and ask God to bless them.

STUDY 5: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

Review **1. What has Paul told the Thessalonians church up to this point?** (Summary sentence for each study?)

So far in his letter Paul has been overflowing with thanks to God and joy in Christ that they are standing fast in the Lord in the face of much suffering. They are true Christians, who received true gospel ministry from Paul and co, and have made model responses to the gospel in spite of strong opposition. Paul has constantly turned their gaze to the return of Christ but is also concerned that Christians live their lives according to God's will. Just as those who told them the gospel demonstrated a godliness of character that was in line with the gospel that they believed and taught, so now Paul now challenges the church to grow more and more in faith, love and hope.

Let's read 1 Thessalonians 3:11-4:12 with open ears and humble hearts!

Pray Before we read the passage and get to grip with what God is saying to us through his Word here, we need to *pray*.

1. What would you say are the big sections?

vv. 1-3a **2. What is Paul's central concern for the Thessalonians Christians in this section?**

- What is it about these instructions that make them important to obey (1-2)?

Reflect **3. Why do you think Paul stresses holiness so much in this letter?**

- Remember the climax of Paul's prayer in 3:11-13?
- Remember how Paul had lived among them (1:6; 2:10-12)?

One of the purposes of God bringing us into union with Jesus Christ is our holiness – it is the mark that demonstrates the reality of gospel in our lives.

Clearly, Paul is not telling them anything new nor is he correcting any wrong behaviour (2), but he urges them to grow in the grace of God 'more and more'.

vv.3-6a **3. How should the reality of the gospel mark our lives in vv. 3-6?**

- What does it mean to 'abstain from sexual immorality'? (3)
- What do you think 'learning to control our own bodies' in this way involves? (4-5)
- How is it possible to sin against our Christian family in this way? (6a)

The test of whether I truly know God is whether I have turned my back on sexual sin – real gospel belief is proved by a change in sexual behaviour. Knowledge of God ought to work itself out in love for God's family.

vv. 6b-8 **4. Why is it so necessary that we obey these instructions?**

- What will the Lord Jesus avenge? (6b)
- What does the call of God on our lives involve for us? (7)
- How does v. 8 further motivate us to live by God's principles for sexuality?

The Holy God calls us to be holy and makes us holy his Holy Spirit. But if we reject Paul's command to holiness, we reject not only the God who calls but also the God who equips his people through the gift of his Spirit.

Now, it is striking that Paul has warned them solemnly about this before (4:6), as he did about the suffering of affliction as Christians (3:4).

5. Why do you think Paul sees the need to make this his no. 1 reminder in the area of their sanctification?

If 4:3-8 are commands that flow out from Paul's prayer in 3:13, Paul's urging them to increased brotherly love in 4:9-12 seems to flow out from his prayer in 3:12.

vv. 9-12 **6. What do we learn here about the nature of true brotherly love?** How are they urged to love each other in the region more & more? *Surprising?*

- **What is the irrefutable evidence that we're been taught by God (9-10)?**

How might they have been taught by God (through his gospel)?

- **What ambitions are Christians to have according to vv. 11-12?**

What spiritual dangers do we avoid by aiming to live this way?

How is working for one's living an expression of Christian love?

Why are these important Christian aims?

The 'more and more' principle applies as much to brotherly love as it does to faith and hope in Christ. Only the gospel of the Lord Jesus can teach and enable us to practice this life-changing principle – to love each other! To be idle and choose to depend on the brotherly love of others will not win the church any respect from outsiders (*see David Jackman, p. 110!*)

Applying... **7. What have we learnt here about a life that demonstrates genuine gospel belief?**

- **In what ways do we need to grow in our love for fellow Christians?**

i) general service at church?

ii) Specific individuals to accept and be concerned for?

- **What changes will you make** so that you increasingly win the respect of outsiders to the Christian faith?

Prayer time: Ask God to grow your behaviour to match your beliefs so that others see your love for God and for the people around you.

STUDY 6: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Theme: When Christ returns in glory, the Christian dead and the Christian living will rise and will together be brought into everlasting fellowship with the Lord Jesus.

Thrust: Encourage each other with the certain gospel hope we have in God.

Introduction: Q. When you remember Christians you know and love who've died, how do you feel and what thoughts arise in your heart?

Pray Before we read the passage and get to grips with what God is saying to us through his Word here, we need to *pray*.

Starter So far in this letter, there are some things that the Thessalonians church have no need to be written to about (e.g. 4:9-10). Paul has done a lot of reminding the church about what they already know:

There are things Paul says *he* knows / confident about *them* – Ch. 1 – They've been chosen and loved by God because of the way gospel came to them, how they responded with repentance & faith, and how the gospel is going out from them (1:1-10).

There are things that Paul says *they* know about *him* – Ch. 2 – That Paul shared God's gospel in manner worthy of Kingdom of God (2:1-12).

And Timothy has returned and his *report* has greatly encouraged Paul – He's full of joy that they're standing firm in the Lord Jesus in the face of stern opposition and affliction (2:13-3:8).

3:10 It seems, though, that there were things lacking in their faith that led Paul to want to see them again and help them with (3:10).

- **Q. What did he remind them about in 4:1-12 – remember these? Why so important?**
 - Urges them to live to please God more and more in their sexuality, love for e/o, and working lives (3:9-4:12).

Well, in 4:13-18 he starts to tell them about something they *don't know* and are *not sure* about....

v. 13-18 **2. What did Paul not want them to be ignorant about?** How are these people described in v. 13, 14, 15, 16?

- *Why might the church been upset that some Christians had died when Christ had not yet returned? (Miss out on blessings of being with Christ?)*
- *What are the spiritual dangers for us if we're ignorant about life after death?*

v. 13 **3. Now the death of someone we love naturally causes grief, but what is Paul telling us about grieving for Christians who've died ('fallen asleep')?**

- *Why is it not pleasing to God if we grieve as those who have no hope (4:1)?*

v. 14 **4. What reason does Paul give in v. 14 for a Christian to have genuine hope in the face of death?**

- *So where is our future hope grounded? Why does one follow from the other?*
- *If we forget the reality of our hope, how will this damaging the church? (1:3; 4:1)*

Implication = If they fell asleep through Jesus, then God will bring them with Jesus.

Application: How does this ingredient of hope transform our grief?

How can our attitude to death be a witness to the reality of the gospel?

vv. 15-17 **5. Looking at vv. 15-17, how does Paul describe this momentous event when God will bring those who sleep with Jesus into fellowship with the Lord?**

- *By who's **authority** is he speaking? Why say that at this stage?*
- v. 15 **i. What does Paul stress in v. 15?**
Those who are alive at Christ's return will not have an advantage over the sleeping ones
- v. 16 **ii. What does Paul want his readers to have no doubt about (16)?**
It's by Lord's *initiative & power*, and unmistakable – Jn 5:25, 28 [gen. Res.]; Mt. 24:30-31
- v. 17 **iii. What is being emphasised in the description of what'll happen *after* resurrection of dead (17)?**
The irresistible power of the Lord to reunite all his people in his presence
 - *Q. Why is 'in the air' a significant phrase (see Eph. 2:2; 1 Thess 2:18)?*
Nothing is able to stop fulfilment of God's purposes, & so we shall be w. Lord forever

Sum - Paul says (13-17), "When Christ returns in glory, both Christian dead and Christian living <i>will</i> rise and <i>together</i> they will be brought into everlasting fellowship with the Lord."
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Applying... **6. How can we go and do v. 18, i.e. use these words of God to console people in grief, and to overcome sadness and anxieties about Christians who have died?**

- *Why do we esp. need certainty about the events surrounding Christ's return?*
- *What happens when we lose sight of the coming of the Lord?*
- *Does the return of Christ animate us? How so / why not?*

It is only the hope of the future which makes sense of what is happening in the present.

STUDY 7:1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Theme: The return of Christ will surprise those who don't believe the gospel and they will not escape God's wrath, but let us be sober & confident that Christ will deliver us from the wrath to come.

Thrust: Keep strengthening each other as you live with faith, love and hope of salvation in Christ.

Introduction: Q. If we can be certain Christ is returning to judge, how then ought we to live?

Pray Before we read the passage and get to grips with what God is saying to us through his Word here, we need to *pray*.

Recap 1. In our previous study we saw that, while the Thessalonians church was genuinely Christian, they were ignorant about the future hope for Christians who died before Christ returned.

- **What has Paul said to encourage them in 4:13-18? So where is our future hope grounded? Why does one follow from the other?**

So, having told them about *what* will happen to Christians who have died – that when Christ returns in glory, both Christian dead and Christian living will rise and together they will be brought into everlasting fellowship with the Lord – Paul now turns in 5:1-11 to the question of *when* all this will take place. It seems that they felt unsure of how to prepare themselves for Jesus to come again from heaven...

vv. 1-2 **2. What don't they need to be written to about the return of Christ? Why?**

- **How will the Lord's coming be like the night time burglar?** (See also Matt. 24:43; 2 Peter 3:10; Rev. 3:3; 16:15)
- During his visit Paul had evidently taught the Thessalonians about the Day of the Lord – **which OT passages might he have taken them to?**

Isa. 13:6-13; Amos 5:18-24; Ezek. 30:1-3; Joel 2:1-3, 11-13; 3:11-16; Mal. 4:1-6;

- So, nobody knows the date (*cf.* Mk. 13:32; Mt. 24:44; Acts 1:7-8), but **what do we know 'the Day of Lord' is all about?** (*people being brought to judgement*)

vv. 3-5 **3. So, with this OT knowledge in mind, what do you think Paul's contrast, between those in the 'dark' and those in 'light', is all about in vv. 3-5?**

- **How** will Lord's coming be **like the onset of labour for those in darkness?**
- **Will the experience be any less sudden for those in the light?** So how it be different for the Christian, according to vv. 4-5? (*Ready, not taken by surprise!*)

Although the day of the Lord will be sudden, as with the night time thief and the onset of labour pains, the Christian has sure hope of being delivered from God's wrath (*cf.* 1:10) and should not be surprised when Jesus comes since he / she is ready and waiting for his coming.

vv. 5-8 **4. So, if Christ is going to come suddenly, unexpectedly and unavoidably, how can we get ourselves ready for his coming?**

- What must we do (6, 8)? *Why (5b, 8)?*
- What are 'the others' asleep to (7)? *Who are these people, what are their attitudes / behaviour like (3)?*
- *How should our attitudes and behaviour be different to these people?*
- What does it mean that we have already put on faith and love as a breastplate and the hope of salvation as a helmet (8)? *Why does a Christian need these pieces of armour?*

vv. 9-10 **5. What makes Paul so confident that the Thessalonian Christians will be ready when Christ returns?**

- What then is the ultimate reason that we should be bold and not faint-hearted as we look forward to the return of Christ to judge (5, 8, 9-10)? *In ourselves?*
- How does Paul once again reassure them about Christians who have died?

vv. 11 **6. These are stark truths to know, what encouragement is there for us here in fulfilling our great commission?**

Applying... **7. What kind of sobering effect has this passage had on you?**

8. How does this passage build us up for...

- the launch of the Christmas services?

- being a congregation not just for ourselves but for our unbelieving friends?

Pray – Thank God, Resolve before God, Ask God's help...

STUDY 8: 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28

Theme: God is faithful and will keep his people growing together in holiness as we look forward to the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so: Seek the good of God's church by esteeming your leaders, caring patiently for those with problems – always rejoicing as you pray with thanks in all circumstances and listening to God.

Introductory: Q. What have we learnt so far about how a church ought to treat each other?

Pray Before we read the passage and get to grips with what God is saying to us through his Word here, we need to *pray*.

So, having turned and trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ, they are now waiting for him to return on the Day of Judgement. While they wait we've found out that God's will for us is that we live holy lives in sexual purity (4:1-8), in practical expressions of love for each other (4:9-10), and in good honest hard work to earn a living (4:11-12). They have also been told to encourage and build each other up about the return of Christ (4:13-5:11). In this final section we learn about our Christian responsibilities in belonging to 'the family of God' in a local church. Paul is going to ask and urge them to do a few things...

Recap **1. What has Paul already 'asked' & 'urged' Thessalonian church to do?** (4:1-8, 9-12, 18; 5:11)

vv. 12-13 **2. How is the church in Thessalonica to treat their leaders? What is it about the nature of Christian leadership that warrants that kind of treatment?**

- **What is true pastoral work about that makes it *hard* work?** (See also 1 Thess 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:8; 1 Cor. 15:10; 1 Tim. 4:10; Rom. 16:12; 1 Tim. 5:17; Col. 1:29)

- Both Jesus & Paul make it quite clear that Christian leadership is 1stly about *service* (Mk. 10:42-45; 1 Cor. 4:1; 2 Cor. 4:5) – **So, what sense 'over you in the Lord'?**

See also, Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24

- **What to you think it means that true Christian pastors 'admonish' the church?** (See also Acts 20:31; 1 Cor. 4:14; Col. 1:28; 3:16)

So, 'Paul envisages a distinct group of leaders, who are 'over' the congregation in the Lord, to whom has been entrusted their pastoral oversight and care, including admonition, and who are expected to work hard in serving them. It is true that "they are identified by their activities rather than by a name."

- **How will this combination of *appreciation* and *affection* enable pastors and people to live at peace with each other?**

- ▶ **Application** - When is it difficult to do this?

vv. 14-15 **3. Now, the existence of church pastors does not relieve church members of their responsibilities to care for one another, what attitudes does Paul encourage between believers in vv. 14-15?**

4. Paul has touched on issues of work, bereavement and sexual self-control before now in the letter, but **why do you think the *idle*, the *timid*, and the *weak*, especially need patience from others in the rest of the church?**

5. **Why do you think Paul senses the need to say what he does in v. 15?**

▶ **Application** – What sort of people/people’s problems make you impatient?

So Paul lays it on the congregation to care for and love each other as sisters and brothers in Christ, to give appropriate support, encouragement or warning to some of the members, and to pursue kindness not retaliation.

vv. 16-22 6. Paul continues addressing the church as a whole, not individual Christians. ***When you read vv. 16-22, what are Paul’s main concern for them when they gather together to hear God’s word and encourage each other?***

- How might these attitudes *shape the life of the church*?
- How might we *test* whether a *message / messenger is from the Holy Spirit*?

vv. 23-24 7. Paul prays a final prayer – **What does he ask God to do? Why is Paul so confident that God will answer his prayer affirmatively?**

▶ **Application** – When is it right 4 us to share Paul’s confidence in prayer?

vv. 25-28 8. **What do Paul’s final requests tell us about his heart for *them* and *their growth*?**

Applying... 9. **How does this passage inspire us to pray for our pastors / other church leaders?**

10. **Who in your church needs your support and patience?**

Prayer time: Thank God for the way he spoke to you throughout this book and ask him to open your eyes and see the opportunity around you to share the gospel or to encourage your fellow brother and sister in Christ as you wait for his second coming, pray also for the commitment you made so that you can be faithful to fulfil them.