

## Church Bible School (CBS) + Internet-Bible-School (IBS)

# 1<sup>st</sup> THESSALONIANS (Lesson 16) -

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### Concerning the studying

I **recommend** you to read through the respective book in the bible at first. Our manual is the bible. And then to go through one or two pages of the material every day, which implies to also look up and read the given bible scriptures to become thoroughly acquainted with the subject. Another suggestion would be to use this material as one's regular devotion.

If you would like to **obtain a degree (certificate) at the end of the seminar**, you need to answer the **test questions** at the end of each lesson and send or email it to us with your full name and address. And now I wish you lots of joy and spiritual profit during your bible study.

**Pastor Joh. W. Matutis**

### MISCELLANEOUS

This letter is the **oldest text** of the New Testament. At the same time this is also one of the early Pauline letters along with the Epistle to the Galatians. Whereas for **Galatians** we are not quite sure where and when it was written.

However the 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians is one of the oldest, respectively earliest letters we received from Paul which presents the **way of salvation**, the **theology** as well as **mission and church planting** of Paul and the first Christians. This letter gives us insight into the **work ethics** of the apostle Paul like no other. We see the practice of that which he wrote to Timothy: You knew my teaching, my conduct and motivation (2Tim 3,10).

After he had to interrupt his mission work after a short time in Thessalonica and had had to flee, but his mission was not complete. He also cared for them through letters and sending **Timothy to Thessalonica** and made a lot of sacrifices to help the newly converted. He saw so many positive things happening in them that he could only rejoice and be grateful for the establishment of the church (1Thess 1,2-3,13).

### About the church plant in Thessalonica

Paul planted the church in Thessalonica around AD50 **during his second mission journey** with Timothy. At the time of composition of the letter Thessalonica was the capital of the imperial **province Macedonia** and city of the Roman proconsulate. The city **Thessalonica**'s name originated from "**Thessalonika**", a sister of Alexander the Great that was probably built to honor her. Today's form of the name "**Salonika**" stills keeps the "**k**" in the last syllable "**nika = victory**".

**Thessalonica** had about 200.000 inhabitants at that time and was an important center for government and trade of Macedonia. Paul usually liked to work in such cities from where the message could be carried on to the other cities of the province.

This **Thessonian church** was one of the liveliest and most fruitful churches at the time of the first century especially during the age of apostle Paul.

The **church plant** is recorded in Act 17,1-9. After Paul left **Philippi** (1Thes 2, 2) and left **Luke behind** he came back with Silas and Timothy on his second mission journey to Thessalonica (Act 17,1-10).

Paul and his team did not **get there by their own will** and also did not leave because they wanted to. It was an **evident guidance of God**.

On the **second mission journey** in the years 49 to 51 Paul and Silas also went to Thessalonica in AD50. As Luke reports in Apg 17,1-10 Paul spoke in the synagogues on **three sabbaths** about the holy scripture (Old Testament). He proved according to the OT prophecies that the Messiah had to suffer and resurrect from the dead and that Jesus is the Christ (Act 17,4.5). Some of them were convinced right away and followed Paul and Silas and also a multitude of Greeks and not few women from the upper class.

Some Jews became **jealous and envious** and some common folks and mob they organised a riot. Paul and Silas had to flee the same night. They went to **Beroea** (or Veria) about 70 km south west from Thessalonica.

The **triumph of the gospel** moved with the sun „**toward the west**“. When the missionary team Paul-Silvanus-Timothy had to leave the **first church** of God in Europe, Phillippi, they did not go back disappointed and discouraged but advanced to the west. On the street **Via Egnatia** (the great street of the Roman empire which connected east and west) to **Amphipolis** and later to **Apollonia** ( Acts 17,1), which is about 70 km from Thessalonica – this is a distance that a man could walk in one day, where they surely proclaimed the gospel also.

**Amphipolis** – was a garrison town and had a strong industry. There were great gold and silver mines. It was also known for its wood and ships, as well as its strategic position as important customs station. There were many foreigners and workers from everywhere. There was also a synagogue.

**Apollonia** – a Roman city where there had to be no taxes paid to Rome. The city was known for its **imprinting of silver coins and pottery**. It had a **harbor** that reached into the city. Christianity must have found its way into the city quite early because it is known that **bishops** from Apollonia were at the councils in Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451).

We don't read that during **transit** of the apostle Paul through these two cities that there were churches planted. But according to the **Thessalonian's love** to all the „brethren in Macedonia" we should not only think (1Thess 4,10) of **Philippi** and **Beroea**. In many places of the province some Christians and Christian groups must have existed and were taken care of. The **mention of Amphipolis and Apollonia** was not included **in vain**.

**Thessalonica**, main city of the **province Macedonia** in the northwest of Greece had an economic meaning because of its location at the **Via Egnatia** (the street that connected the East of the Roman Empire with Rome) and the access to the sea through a harbor in the **Thermaic gulf**. The **other point of connection was the Jewish church** that even had a synagogue in Thessalonica and was therefore more meaningful than the little group in **Philippi** where they only had a place of prayer by the river (Act 16,13).

When we read Acts 17,1 very attentively, how the Jews used their influence there to influence other cities, then Thessalonica probably had a central "**synagogue**" for the whole province there. Fundamentally Paul always went to the **Jews in a synagogue** because the Jews were supposed to hear the gospel first (Act 13,46/ Rom 1,16). In addition Paul knew that as a foreigner or as a guest he would always be given the chance to say a few words about the law and the prophets or greetings in the synagogue. He used this opportunity to preach the gospel.

He spoke to them concerning "**scripture**", which means about the Old Testament, the laws and the prophets. He referred those prophecies to the Messiah (Christ) – and that He had already been there in the person of Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified by the Romans.

**For the Jews it was probably hard to understand** that the Christ as the Messiah and anointed of God had to suffer and even die and then resurrected from the dead. Paul spoke concerning those things in scripture and explained them to the audience and proved to them that this Jesus was indeed the Christ, the promised Messiah of God (Act 17,4). In Thessalonica Paul went to the **synagogue for three sabbaths**. This tells us that he was perhaps only few weeks in the beginning of his ministry at Thessalonica. After three weeks he must have continued to teach in a private house or a school (Act 17,2), because some **leading Jews** and a **multitude of God-fearing Greeks** (Non-Jews) and also „**not few**" of the **most respected women were converted and supported Paul**. These were women who were either married to respected Jewish business men in town or women whose husbands obviously had a lot of influence at Thessalonica.

**Aristarchus originated from the Thessalonian Jews** and was mentioned in Acts 19,29; 20,4; 27,2/ Col 4,10ff. As a special co-worker of Paul. With few words Luke describes the success of this announcement through Paul. At first it says that **not all** but **only few** of the Jews were convinced and converted.

This statement ... "were convinced ..." we should not think of sales psychology and communication skills that Paul and his coworkers used to convince people. Paul did not convince someone of Christ against their will. He was preaching from scripture and some of the Jews agreed with his exegesis. They understood his words to be the truth and were therefore convinced of Paul's message. The apostle did not rely upon them or recruit them. They did not advertise new members for their groups. The ones who listened followed Paul and Silas, **and followed them freely**. The word of God reached people from all social classes. .

The **Christian church** in this living merchant city consisted mainly of Gentile Christians. Since the church in Thessalonica grew continuously the **Jews** got some mean men from the mob. They gathered them and caused a riot in town. They all went to the house of **Jason** and wanted to mock them in public (Acts 17,5).

Soon the **unbelieving Jews in Thessalonica** would reject the gospel. **Jealousy** and **envy** of the ambitious Jews played an important role for the rebellion.

Perhaps it was the fear to lose some of the dedicated **members of the synagogue** and also the jealousy of the Jewish men that their wives might convert and support the church of the Christians.

**It is to be acknowledged in this situation**, that the Jews did not go to the upper class people as in all other places but that they turned to the **dregs of society**. Such groups actually had nothing to do with the **God-fearing Jews**. **Wicked men from the mob** were the leaders of those people who finally caused a riot in the whole city. But this also caused the elders of the city to become aware of the situation and put an end to the preaching of the word of God in Thessalonica.

**Paul and his co-workers did not cause the riot**, and also the believers of the young churches had not planned or practiced any such thing. They had only gathered quietly to hear the preaching of Paul. In those verses the **activities of the mob** are described, but only in short.

In addition there were **false accusations against them**. They did not find anybody in Jason's house, but still claimed that he was hosting them. In the face of the riot in Thessalonica **Paul and Silas** were even called „men who **stir up the whole world**. This was then followed by the accusation they would **act against the commands of the Emperors** – a claim that was already raised against Jesus by the Jews in Jerusalem. Such claims were false and could not be supported. But these men did not consider to follow Paul but sought to find ways to get rid of him and stop this movement. Their words and deeds were not honorable, appropriate or honest, let alone God-fearing. „**They stirred up the crowd and also the elders of the city heard it**. The Romans did not seem to be moved by any of it but the „**people**“ and the „**elders of the city**“ were in an uproar.

It says that since **they did not find Paul** they took **Jason** and some brothers before the elders of the city and shouted: „**These are the ones who stir up the whole world**, and now they have come here. **Jason is hosting them at his house**. And they all supposedly acted against the Emperor's commands and claimed somebody else as king, namely Jesus.“ (Acts 17,6–9). Paul – who was a **Roman citizen himself** – surely would not have acted against the commands of the Emperor. In his sermon about **Jesus the Christ** (the anointed) he perhaps mentioned that Jesus is king and will return as such, because He is the king of kings and lord of lords! This great truth **was publically twisted** and used against the followers of Paul, so that they stirred up the people and the elders of the city, all who heard it.

„**Jason**“ **could have been a physician** (what his Greek name reveals „healer“) **and a Jewish proselyte**. He was not so bigoted like the others. Only after someone pledged for **Jason and the others they would let them go**. It was impossible for Paul and Silas to stay in this city any longer. The brothers sent them to **Beroea** the same night (Acts 17,10). **Beroea** was a small city west of Thessalonica and also located **at the famous Roman street Via Egnatia**. Paul and Silas left Thessalonica very soon and under rather adverse conditions. It seems that the brethren encouraged and also accompanied them.

**Beroea seems to be an important stage** for the further ministry of Paul in Thessalonica. When they went there, they went to the synagogue first – according to their custom (Acts 17,10–13). These were more friendly and examined scripture to seek the truth for themselves. Many of them believed, and not few of them were noble Greek men and women. It says that the Jews in the synagogue in Beroea were more friendly than those in Thessalonica because they were open to receive the word and looked through scripture themselves to test the spoken word of Paul. But when the **Jews of Thessalonica found out** that also in Beroea the word of God was preached by Paul they also went there and brought confusion. The Jews of Thessalonica did not cease and continued their wicked practices in the neighboring city. They still claimed Paul would stir up the whole world.

**In reality the Jews themselves were the ones** who did not believe and who stirred something up – which is the city of Beroea and the people. **The turmoil** came from those who did not believe the word of God and were offended by it that some, respectively many, would become members of the new church.

Besides the **report of Acts** especially the book **1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians** gives us further insight into the events of Paul's second mission journey with his helpers, when he came to Thessalonica first and preached the word. Some months later **Paul** wrote to the young church of Thessalonica from Corinth or Athens.

The example of the Thessalonian church shows us **how a NT church was planted and cared for**:

- The gospel is preached with authority and people come to Jesus (1Thess 1,5).
- The converts are encouraged to become disciples and follow Jesus
  - by taking care of them like mother cares for her children (1Thes 2,7)
  - and providing for them spiritually like a father provides and protects (1Thes 2,11.12).

**It is amazing** how Paul (apparently) won such a great number of **God-fearing Greeks** and the noble women for the gospel, so that he could establish a solid and thoroughly taught church as we can see in the epistles to the Thessalonians.

Perhaps this was only possible because there were **some mature God-fearing** with leader qualities in town who would **continue** the work and **strengthen** the believers who assumed authority in the church and gave it some structure. It is also amazing that they sent **financial support to him two times** (Phil 4,16) and also supported the other co-workers of his team on regular terms (1Thess 2,9/ 2 Thess 3,7-9). Or maybe Paul was there **a little longer** than just 4 weeks until the riot happened. That is more likely because we read that they looked for him in the **house of Jason** (Apg 17,5) because they suspected that he would still teach and work there.

**Jason** means: „**Yahwe is help**“ and is the Greek form of **Joshua**. He had become a Christian and the church seemed to gather at his house (Acts 17,5-9/ Rom 16,21).

**1 Th 2,14-16** shows us that the Thessalonian church was mainly consisting of „**Gentile-Christians**“. And only this success of Paul among the „**Greeks**“ agitated the Jews to the uttermost so that they became envious (Acts 17,5-9).

The first letter speaks about the Thessalonians who **“received the word under much tribulation”**. At last the events of Acts 17,5-9 must have happened and forced them to leave the city upon advice of the brethren.

**Without ceasing** Paul and his team had to think of the brethren in Thessalonica and prayed for them (1 Thess 1,2). There were always news about the tribulations of this church that Paul heard of (1Th 3,1-5). And they were worried about their situation. Since he could not visit them himself (1Thess 2,17-18) **Paul sent his co-worker Timothy from Athens** (1Thes 3,2.5) so that he could get a personal impression of the condition of the church and strengthen the believers in their trials by direct encouragement. This way Timothy was sent out (1Thess 3,2). He brought back the good news that the church in spite of all difficulties did not forsake their faith (1Thes 3,6-10). At the same time **Paul dealt with a question** that the church had on their heart. The Christians in Thessalonica lived by the expectation that Jesus would return in their life time. Some of the church members had already died in the meantime and the church was troubled.

**What happens to the dead?** Were their hopes for a life with Christ in vain? Perhaps the church of the Thessalonians were strongly influenced by the Sadducees who did not **believe in the resurrection of the dead** (Acts 23,8/Mt 22,23-32). For them after death everything is over (Is 38,18).

Therefore Paul answered to the worried church: „**the living and the dead Christians** will be united with the returning Christ.“ (1Thes 4,13-18).

**The exact time of His return is not revealed**. Therefore we have to be watchful and live in inner fellowship with Christ (1Thes 5,1-11).

The church did not cause **Paul yet** to deal **with special problem** therefore 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians still had much room to display the fullness of the gospel.

There is not much „**dogmatic**“ (a little eschatology on the side) but instead more practical theology (ethics) and practical „**faith tools**“.

Based on **1.Thessalonians** we see today how once the writings began in the time of the early church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Since the **ancient letter does not state a date** we don't know how long after the first epistle the 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians was written.

The **reason for the letter** should be first of all to care for **the small, young church** in the big city of Thessalonica. Paul could no longer accompany the growth and development of the church personally. Therefore he wanted to stay connected with them at least in the **written way**. He is glad that the Christians have received the good news and are eager to live their life by faith (1Thess 1,3).

In Chapter 2 **Paul is justifying himself** against accusations he had lead the believers astray and deceived them **by flattery**. A special problem for the church of Thessalonica was the **Parousia** (second coming): the coming of Jesus Christ at the end of time (1Thess 2,19). According to 1Thess this coming of Christ is soon to be anticipated. About **30 years later** 2 Thess warns against a **exaggerated expectation** of it. 2 Thess 2,2: The signs that are going before the coming of Christ have yet to happen.

**1Thess 5,1-11** shows that the coming of Christ is also connected to the church. Therefore the Christians are supposed to be watchful. But in 2 Thess the judgment rather hits the opponents and persecutors of the church (2Thess 1,5-10; 2,10-12).

**The first Epistle to the Thessalonians is a letter of expectation**. It is soaked with our glorious expectation to be saved from the wrath of God and then to be with Him for all times. The apostle of the nations revealed that the expectations that the children of Israel had, which is to pass by the wrath and judgment to enter into an earthly kingdom of God does not apply to us (Eph 1,22.23).

**The first epistle to the Thessalonians is a pastoral letter.** There are different **pastoral** topics covered. **Pauline topics** that can be found in the Epistle to the Romans, Corinthians, Galatians or Philippians in more detail are only mentioned lightly. Here the eschatological salvation through Jesus Christ is in the center of attention. The church should be aware of the imminent return of Jesus and live their daily life as „**elect**“.

Paul addresses the concerns about the dead church members with regard to the Parousia of Jesus and explains that the resurrection power of Jesus applies to the living and the dead (1Thess 4,13). He encourages them with the assurance that after death all will be **united with Jesus Christ**. The God of Jesus Christ is a faithful God who is equally loving the dead and the living.

Even though the second epistle to the Thessalonians was written by Paul (2Thess 1,1), **there are still some differences concerning Eschatology**. Just as in 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter im 2.Petrusbrief um die "Eschatologie", um die Zukunftserwartung biblisch-realistischer Art ( 2Petr 1,10.11; 1,19–21). John and also the apostle Paul want to remind the believers that at first the **great apostasy** and all other signs must appear before Jesus appears (1Cor 15,1 /1Joh 3,21 /1Thess 4,9-12).

In the second part of the letter (4,1-5.22) Paul gives concrete **instructions for the attitude** of the young Christian church.

**The whole letter sounds like a „faith foundational course“ for converts:**

1. Election	Ch. 1,4
2. Suffering and reigning with Him	Ch. 1,6
3. The expectation of the Lord	Ch. 1,10
4. The doctrine of the Trinity	Ch. 1,3-5
5. Die Auferstehung der Toten	Ch. 1,10
6. Durch Leiden zur Herrlichkeit	Ch. 2,2
7. Walking worthy of the gospel	Ch. 2,10
8. The anger of God	Ch. 2,16
9. The arrival of the Lord	Ch. 2,19
10. Who is God / Holiness	Ch. 3,3
11. The Holy Spirit	Ch. 3,8
12. Who is God / love	Ch. 3,9
13. The perfect man	Ch. 5,23

**In 1Thess we can see the work of ministry of Paul:**

- He did not come to them **with convincing words**, but in the power and strength of the Holy Spirit and great assurance (1Thess 1,5). This was perhaps the key to strengthen the believers so quickly and firmly in their faith.
- The Thessalonians heard the message of the gospel **despite of tribulations** with the joy of the Holy Spirit (with a supernatural enthusiasm). The Gentiles had quickly turned from their idols and the Jews immediately started to serve the living God (the resurrected Jesus 1Thess 1,6.9).
- In addition they **had seen and experienced the apostle and his co-workers** and how they proved with their lives what they believed and stood in the face of trials and tests and were never discouraged (1Thess 2,4) and how they did not try to please men but God (1Thess 2,5). They also did not seek their own honor.
- When they worked among them they were „gentle“ which means sensitive and caring, providing for them like a mother and a father (1Thess 2,7.11).
- They were not a burden to anyone (1Thess 2,8.9).

## **AUTHOR**

The whole **content of the letter** tells us about the person and message of the apostle Paul. He calls himself simply «**Paul**» (1Thess 1,1) and connects his name with those of **Silvanus** (Silas) and **Timothy** (1,1), names that we are acquainted with from the book of Acts and Pauline epistles because they are Paul's co-workers and companions. The many personal memories of the author clearly reveal the apostle Paul to be the writer. Also the ancient traditions mention Paul on one accord as the author of the Epistles to the Thessalonians.

The place **of authorship is not directly mentioned**, but from the indications of the letter we can tell that it was written during the „second mission trip“ (Act 18,5). In **Corinth** Paul met Silvanus and Timothy (comp. 1Thess 1,1). The mention of Athens (1Thess 3,1) also fits the route of this mission trip, and also the impression that the church plant at Thessalonica was not too long ago. The mention of Achaia in 1Thess 1,7 could also point to Corinth as the place of authorship. (**Corinth** is the capital of the province Achaia).

## **RECIPIENTS**

Recipients of the letter is the „**church of Thessalonica**“ (1Thess 1,1). There is no doubt that **Thessalonica** is well known because of the two letters of the apostle Paul to the local church there. As these letters show the church at Thessalonica was a very **successful church** with regard to spreading the message of Jesus Christ. In the church there were believing **Jews** (1Thess 2,14-16) as well as Gentile Christians (1Thess 1,9) and fellowshiped in peaceful coexistence. They have obviously gone **through some tribulations** even though it is not quite clear what exactly that was (1Thess 1,6). Paul was very satisfied with the condition of the church and was able to establish it further with the help of Timothy (1Thess 3,6). The good reputation of the church was spread throughout many cities (1Thess 1,8).

### **The church of Thessalonica is a good role model.**

- They experienced sound conversion.
- They had turned from their idols.
- They were converted to God and not to Paul!
- They converted to serve God.
- They were walking by faith.
- They were filled with the spirit.
- They walked in love!
- They were firm in hope.

## **COMPOSITION; PURPOSE AND GOAL**

A short time after the church plant in Thessalonica Paul had to leave **the city against his will**. Since the church plant some months had gone by. They had time to organize the church but the authority of the leaders did not seem to be very much respected (1Thess 5,12). In spite of two attempts the apostle Paul could not visit Thessalonica again (1Thess 2,17-18).

From Athens **he sent Timothy to Thessalonica** because he was worried about the young Christian church etc (i.e. because of the oppression of the fellow citizens). Timothy had good news when he came to Corinth where Paul was at that time, there only seemed to be confusing expectations concerning the return of the Lord. Some church members were **worried about the dead** because they feared they would not participate in the Parousia (1Thess 4,13-18). Others were so overwhelmed by the thought of the **return of the Lord** that they neglected their work and wanted to prepare in a sober way for their coming (1Thess 4,10-12).

Then Paul authored the first epistle to the Thessalonians about 50/51AD. Timothy brought this letter to Thessalonica, so that all church members could read it (1Thess 5,27). With the love and care that the apostle felt **for his newly converts** he could not help but write this letter.

### **He has three reasons to write:**

1. To strengthen the faith of the believers who had already been tested (1Thess 3, 2-5);
2. An exhortation of the believers to progress in their life and sanctification (1Thess 4,1-8,10; 5,11-21);
3. An explanation of the believers about the return of Jesus Christ and the preparation for Parousia.

## **AUTHENTICITY**

In the ancient time the authenticity of this letter was never questioned. The epistle to the Thessalonians was mentioned in manuscripts such as the first canon of Marcion and Muratori. Polycarp, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clemens of Alexandria and many more referred to it and never thought of any other author than Paul.

## **CONTENT AND DIVISION**

<b>1. Personal part</b> (Paul and Thessalonians)	Ch. 1-3
a) Prayer of thanksgiving for conversion of Thessalo	Ch. 1,1-10
The foundation: election	Ch. 1,4
The fruits: faith, love, hope	Ch. 1,3
The testimony: a role model	Ch. 1,7
The marks: repentance, service, expectation	Ch. 1,9-10
b) <b>The blessed ministry of the missionary Paul</b>	Ch. 2,1-3,13
God's guidance for ministry	Ch. 2,1-2
Faithfulness in ministry and proclamation	Ch. 2,3-6
Joy in ministry	Ch. 2,7-12
Affirmation of ministry	Ch. 2,13

Enmity in ministry	Ch. 2,14-16
Guidance in ministry	Ch. 2,17-20
Serving in ministry	Ch. 3,1-2
Tribulation and distress in ministry	Ch. 3,3-8
Fellowship in ministry	Ch. 3,9-13

<b>2. Teaching part</b> (exhortation and instruction)	Ch. 4-5
The growth in sanctification	Ch. 4,1-8
Brotherly love and ambition	Ch. 4,9-12
The rapture and the dead	Ch. 4,13-18
The Parousia of Christ	Ch. 5,1-3
Readiness for the second coming	Ch. 5,4-11
Exhortation for community life	Ch. 5,12-22
Prayer request	Ch. 5,23-24
Greeting and blessing	Ch. 5,25-28

Keyword: **Parousia**

Key verse: „*May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.*“ (1Thess 3,13).

## **MISCELLANEOUS**

From 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians we find out some things about **ancient community life**:

### **The reception of the message of salvation ...**

- ... under much tribulation. Ch. 1,6
- ... with the joy of the Holy Spirit Ch. 1,6
- ... as the Word of God. Ch. 2,13

### **Their conversion**

- faith in God Ch. 1,8
- repentance to God Ch. 1,9
- turning from idols Ch. 1,9
- reception of the Holy Spirit Ch. 4,8

### **Their characteristics**

- works of faith Ch. 1,3; 3,7
- works of love Ch. 1,3; 3,6
- patience in hope Ch. 1,3
- steadfast in God Ch. 3,8
- role model for the believers Ch. 1,7-8
- hard-charging brotherly love Ch. 4,9

**The return of Jesus Christ** ... this is the great **pastoral** topic and concern of the 1. Thessalonians, that the apostle Paul wants to focus on. The believers are supposed to encourage and strengthen each other.

**The whole ancient Christian walk of faith was determined by the anticipation of the return of Jesus Christ.** Paul had declared it to the churches and they took it too serious. In his writing he makes it clear that redemption will be perfected when He returns and our earthly life finds an end.

The **teaching about the return of the Lord** for His people was not clearly explored and discussed until the Lord revealed it to the Lord and he shared it as: "**a word of the Lord**" (1Thess 4,15-17). Here the **common Jewish point of view** (an unbiblical misunderstanding) from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century before Christ is rebuked by Paul through the help of the Holy Spirit. In the apocryphal book 2Esra 13,14-24 it says, „*that only those who are still alive in the victorious return of the Messiah, will be **more blessed than the dead.***“ Therefore Paul says: „**We will not be more privileged than the dead.**“ (1Thess 4,15). He reassures the Thessalonians that both groups are the same before God (1Cor 15,52) and will enter the fullness of the kingdom of God together. He radically changes the Jewish perspective and turns it upside down by saying that the „**dead in Christ**“ will be the first to resurrect.“ (1Thess 4,16).

This category of people who are „**in Christ**“ includes all believers, all righteous of all times, whether they lived before or after Christ (1Cor 15,22-23/ Joh 5,28/ Act 17,31/ Rom 2,5-16).

The return of the Lord is **mentioned 318 times in the 260 chapters of the New Testament** – this is an average of a mention every 20<sup>th</sup> verse. This should be sufficient to prove how important this doctrine is.

This short Epistle to the Thessalonians consists of **five chapters**, of which **four** close with a statement about the return of Christ, which amazingly summarizes the doctrine that was explained before.

- **Conversion and the return of Christ** (Ch. 1,10)  
A mark of a true conversion is the expectation of the return of the Son of God.
- **Ministry and the return of Christ** (Ch. 2,19)  
The victory and joy of a minister of God in the return of the Master will be, that He will disclose to them the fruits of their testimony, which is souls that he lead to salvation.
- **Sanctification and the return of Christ** (Ch. 3,13)  
The more eager the expectation of the return the more eager the strife for holiness.
- **Resurrection and the return of Christ** (Ch. 4,13-18)  
Faith in the resurrection of the dead is based on the resurrection of Christ Himself. When the Lord will return in His glory the dead will rise and taken into the rapture with the living.
- **Preparation for the return of Christ** (Ch. 5, 1-11.23)
  - Walking in the light Ch. 5,4-5
  - Watchfulness Ch. 5,6
  - Soberness Ch. 5,6-8

Excursion: **The different manifestations of Jesus Christ ...**

- ... the incarnation of Jesus in His birth (Joh 1,14),
- ... the revelation of Jesus after His resurrection (1Cor 15,4 ff.),
- ... the return of Christ for His church (rapture) (1Thess 4,13–18/ 1Cor 15,51),
- ... the visible manifestation of Jesus on the mount of olives (Zach 14,4)

In both Epistles to the Thessalonians Paul makes an emphasis on the „**last things**“. The „**sermon to the Athenians**“ (Acts 17) shows that he told the **Gentile audience** clearly about the coming judgment of the world (1Thess 4,6), which God has placed into the hands of the risen Christ, which will happen on the **day of the Lord** (the visible return of Christ) (1Thess 5,2).

On this day the **righteous** will rise to inherit the salvation in the presence of the Lord (1Thess 4,16; 5,9). The „**unrighteous**“ will be separated from Christ forever (even though this is not explicitly mentioned by Paul it can be concluded. 2Thess 1,9). Before the end there will be a world wide apostasy and the appearance of the Antichrist (the man of sin – 2Thess 2).

A **second important and surprising special feature** in the Epistles of Thessalonians are the open and spontaneous **emphasis of the divinity of Jesus**. Several times Christ and God, the Father are called the **mutual origin of divine blessing** and are both called upon to in prayer (1Thess 1,1; 3,11/ 2Thess 1,1,2.12; 2,16; 3,5). Therefore Paul uses the New Testament term „**Day of the Lord**“ (Day of Yahweh) and refers to Jesus as the „**Lord**“ (1Thess 5,2/ 2Thess 2,2/ Amos 5,18/ Joel 2,1; 3,4/ Zeph 1,7.14/ Mal 3,23). This association of the day of the Lord with judgement is **maintained in the New Testament**. It focuses on the final reward or punishment (Acts 17,31/ Rom 2,5.16/ 2Cor 1,14). According to 2Petr 3,10-13 there will be a new heaven and a new earth. Further Paul must have **known the sermons of Jesus** where He said that He would come like „**a thief in the night**“ (Mt 24,3-46/ Mk 13,3-37/ Luk 21,5-36/ 2Petr 3,10/ Rev 3,3; 16,15).

## **Detailed interpretation**

The 1<sup>st</sup> Epistle to the Thessalonians is a **very „young“ epistle**, which means it is **the eldest literal document** of the New Testament and was written about 50 AD. It differs in some ways from the **later epistles of the apostle Paul**. Not only the introduction is different, but also some **typical terms of Pauline theology** are missing.

He does not talk about **law, flesh and justification** because the issues that relate to those words were not yet topical in Thessalonica. Also the cross, freedom and life was not yet an issue. After a short greeting: "**Grace and peace!**" the author mentions the purpose and goal of salvation. Salvation comes from "**grace**" and the free love of God and in the "**peace**" of God it is sustained.

The first Epistle to the Thessalonians is written in a very **lively style** and makes concrete statements, but they are yet kept rather general (such as 1Thess 5,1-11). It contains many terminologies and deals with almost only **traditional material of ancient Christianity**. In the **eleven verses** for example in 1Thess 5,1-11 **we find some less typical words and terms from Paul** and the way he uses them is different than Paul usually uses them.

Some bible interpreters believe that Paul has summarized 4 different **old sermons** or statements from experiences, questions that came up and problems he encountered during his first mission journey and used it to prepare **both Epistles to the Thessalonians**.

- The first part sounds like a letter **of a friend** with praise and thanksgiving for the condition of the church (1Thess 2,13-4,1). These thoughts are new and especially relating to this certain church.
- The second point that he deals with in 1Thes. 1,1- 2,12; 4,3-5,28 are the **warnings against the new apostles** who had been sneaking into the church. He also defends his office as an apostle.
- In the third point he addresses in 2Thess 1,1-12 and 3,6-16 the **attitude of Gnostic preachers**. The church was supposed to **excommunicate** members with unworthy lifestyle and exclude them from communion.
- In the fourth point he tries to hamper the **Gnostics** who allegedly used his name and his message to support their own claims (comp. 2Petr 3,15-16), misunderstand his words and appear as „**copycats**“ (Acts 19,13-16 / 2Thess 2,13-14; 2,1-12; 2,15-3,5; 3,17ff.).

That those are **4 subject areas** can be concluded from the four thanksgivings (1Thess 1,2; 2,13/ 2Thess 1,3; 2,13 / 1Thess 4,2; 5,28/ 2Thess 3,16; 3,18) that we can find in the four canonical letters.

The beginning of the first Epistle to the Thessalonians **differs** from all other **Pauline letters** as they are shorter and he does not refer to himself as slave of Jesus Christ (Rom 1,1/ Phil 1,1) or apostle (Rom 1,1/ 1Cor 1,1/ 2Cor 1,1/ Gal 1,1). He does not yet have any problems with the Jewish Christians or Gnostics etc, so that they would doubt his authority as an apostle. The mention of his name was enough. He had already cared for them like a mother (1Thess 2,7) and exhorted them like a father (1Thess 1,2,11f.). Also his companions **Silvanus and Timothy** are only mentioned by name, which was not Paul's later custom (comp. 1Cor 1,1/ 2Cor 1,1/ Phil 1,1). When he mentions them like this, the Thessalonians must have known them personally.

This church was only a handful of people who were gathered in some house at Thessalonica, and compared to the vast majority of the citizens who were members of the Jewish synagogue they formed a minority and were mocked, oppressed and persecuted by the other citizens. They were supposed to know that their origin and standing in God was appointed by God, the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. God Himself has called them and grants them protection and help.

Since Jesus Christ, **Lord of Lords** (Phil 2,9ff.) is also their Lord the Christians do not have to fear their power. They can face the future things with confidence and assurance. The authors and senders just mention their names without a title: "**Paul and Silvanus and Timothy**". The three men start by **giving thanks**". The **church of Thessalonica** was the fruit of the mutual service of the three messengers of God.

The Thessalonians knew who these men were and had experienced their authority.

- **Silvanus** better known by the name of Silas from the Book of Acts – a prophet and leading authority from the Jerusalem church. He accompanied Paul on his second mission journey (Acts 15,22.32.40). He was also with Paul in the prison at Philippi (Act 16,19;25-29).

**Paul left Silas** at Berea at first (Acts 17,10), but then meets him in Corinth again (Acts 18,5).

Silas had separated himself from Barnabas to minister with Paul (Acts 15,40), later he also worked with **Peter** (1Petr 5,12) and was also a secretary and **messenger**. According to Acts 16,37 not only Paul but also Silas **had Roman citizenship**. Perhaps he was also born in the diaspora and therefore very suitable for mission work.

- **Timothy** met Paul on his journey to Lystra and then went with him (Acts 16,1); he became the most faithful co-worker of Paul. Paul sent him to Thessalonica from Athens to receive news about the condition of faith of the church so that Timothy was also no stranger to them (1Thess 3,1.6).

**Timothy** as the youngest is mentioned third. He belonged to the most faithful and closest co-workers of the apostle Paul (1 Thess 3,2/ Phil 2,19ff./ 1Cor 4,17; 16,10),

**He is mentioned in 5 letters** (2Cor, Phil, 1. & 2Thess, Phlm) as sender.

That he – just like Silvanus – is not **co-author of the 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians** can be seen in 1Thess 3,1ff. where Paul speaks about his journey to Thessalonica.

**He is from Lystra**, the son of a Greek and a converted Jewish mother (Acts 16,1). Through Paul he came to faith (1Tim 1,2), and was recommended as traveling companion for Paul's second mission journey regardless of his young age (1Tim 4,12) and Paul took him along (Acts 16,1-3). He became a valuable co-worker (Acts 17,14; 18,5/ 1Cor 4,17; 16,10/ 2Cor 1,19/ Phil 2,20) and belonged to the delegation that brought the collection of money to the church of Jerusalem along with Paul (Acts 20,4).

According to 2Cor 1,19 they were with Paul on his second mission trip **through Greece** and also went with him to Thessalonica. That he – and also Silvanus – as **co-senders of the letter** were also indirectly mentioned was because this letter to the **Christian church was not a private letter** of Paul. Therefore he added the names of his co-workers as co-senders to the letter. This also shows that in the church of Jesus Christ not the most talented determined how everything should go and all have to follow him, but he always included others to the proclamation of the gospel so that the truth, **according to OT law** (Deut 19,15) would be **confirmed by two or three witnesses** (comp. Mk 6,7 & Lk 10,1). It was not necessary to mention any titles to the Thessalonians. Later this would become different.

**These three men** had done the work with the Thessalonians together and had suffered together. The whole **missionary work of Paul** was always **"team work"**. Paul was not only the only team leader and spokes person. „**Team-work**“ was the way to establish a church from the beginning (Acts 11,25.26; 13,1-2).

**From Lystra** Paul took on leadership of the team (Acts 14,12; 15,2) and grew to become a missionary while the turbulent occurrences in Thessalonica were a new **„baptism of fire“**. Receiver of the **letter is the church of the Thessalonians**. The word for church, ekklesia, which is not only a religious term but also describes a any assembly of people such as a political meeting, always has to be explained by the amendment as **church of God** (1Thess 2,14/ 1Cor 1,2; 11,22) or church of Christ (Rom 16,16) which emphasise what kind of gathering it is.

In the beginning of the **1<sup>st</sup> main part** (1Thess 1,2-3,13) it becomes evident that Paul wants to pick up on the **forcefully disconnected** relationship with the **Thessalonians**.

- He thanks God for the reception of the Good News and the work of God's grace in those who have received the faith.
- Paul gives thanks **to God first**, who has chosen the recipients of the letter. Paul knows that only the Holy Spirit can work the faith in people. He thanks God for the work of His Holy Spirit.

**(1Thess 1, 1–10) The Thessalonian church had become a role model church for Paul.** In spite of the mistreatments in Philippi he **still had the courage** to bring the Good News to the Thessalonians. After a walk of several days (ca. 150 km), his back full of scars from the punishment in Philippi (Acts 16,22/ 1Thess 2,2) Paul and his companions Silas and Timothy came to Thessalonica and was unashamed to preach the gospel of Jesus right there (1Thess 2,1ff.).

Paul does not talk about his own personal condition because they knew what he was going through. He only wrote: „We **remember the the work of faith.**“ They had actually not planned to come to Thessalonica, they came there because they escaped from Philippi and after they came to the city they had to leave quickly too. Therefore the missionary work was a **„work of faith“**, because it had become one of the strongest churches **due to the supernatural work of God** and the Holy Spirit.

Therefore Paul mainly gives thanks for the good report that he received from Timothy. But even more he thanked God for the fact that he would choose **„these“** and that they had **„proved themselves“**. For him they were the believers, the **„beloved“** because he had experienced so much **„self-less love“**. He remembered how **Jason** (their host) was dragged before the judges of the city and also they were treated like criminals or revolutionaries, but they even pledged for him (Acts 17,5-9) and took **„the blame“**. Even though the church of Thessalonica had to go through much tribulations and had to suffer after the apostle left, there were still so many good things to report about (1Thess 1,5; 3,6), because they had not only theoretically accepted Christ but also practically lived as Christians (1Thes. 1,8; 3,6). The **authenticity and vitality** of their faith was quickly known in the surrounding areas.

**(1Thess 1,1) The introduction – The blessing.** The short greeting: **"Grace and peace!"** - mention reason and purpose of salvation. Salvation comes from the free and undeserved **"grace"** of God and through peace it is sustained. It reminds of the Jewish greeting **"Shalom"** – which means peace or all of salvation. It contains two important elements of the Gospel. **„Grace and peace“** - the absolute **grace** without works or rituals as well as the **peace** with God as a result of righteousness **by faith alone**.

In **the final words** of 1Thess 5,23-28 both are repeated and purposefully related to the Godhead Jesus as it says **„the God of peace“** and the **"grace" of our Lord Jesus Christ**. Because the greetings are **so precise and short** they stand out and reveal the desire of the author to get straight to the point. Sharing his thoughts and telling them the truth concerning some matters.

Also the second part of the greeting „God, our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ“ expresses **a special relation** between the **„Father“** and the **„Son“** (Jesus). Therefore the apostle can also say that both are **„IN“** them.

Paul **is happy and grateful to God** that in spite of their persecution and tribulation they received the gospel and kept it. The Thessalonians who were Gentiles before confessed a totally **„different God than before“**: Their former Gods demanded slavery, fear and sacrifices, now they live in the freedom of children of God (comp. Rom 4-7).

Christians find **a new safety** in the love of God. Through Jesus they now have a God who is a **„Father“**. This is a totally new, almost revolutionary **„image of God“**. God was no longer only the strict, demanding, law-giving and judging God ... Now He is **„Father God“**.

Through the Holy Spirit we now even call God **„Abba, dear Father“** (Mk 14,36/ Ro 8,15). So far this was **unthinkable and incredible** and even heresy (Mt 26,63; 27,43/ Lk 22,70/ Joh 10,36). Through the historical development (Babylonian exile at the time of Jesus, the Roman oppression) they only knew the wrath and judgment of God, that has to be satisfied by sacrifices, rituals and other things (Pharisees etc.). God has not been a Father to the Jews for a long time. And then Jesus came and re-introduced the Aramaic expression **„Abba“**. This word applies to our term **„Daddy“** and offered a deep intimate relationship with god and is also a term for Sonship. Also the **„Lord's prayer“** expresses those relations.

**1Thess 1,4-10 In Thessalonica a real (NT) church was planted.** God Himself calls and elects a „new people“. First of all every believer was elected by God. Therefore Paul said: **„We know your (individual) election“**. But not only that every single one is chosen for salvation, but also the church (and the believers of the city or nation) has a certain **„election“** (calling and purpose). Therefore for Paul the believers in Thessalonica are very special. They are the called ones (ecclesia) and elect by God. Through these **God elect** He has **manifested His divine plan** (Acts 9,15/ Rom 1,13).

He felt that here, with the plant and development of this church **God had started something new** ( Eph 3,2/ Col 1,25). He revealed a glorious gospel that he was given (s. Gal 1,12). He experience how through God and His Holy Spirit the church became God's elect and the **„body of Christ“** (Phil 3,6/ 1Thess 2,14).

**The church in Thessalonica was mainly developed by the work of the Holy Spirit.** This is what we gather **from the information** and the **positive memories** respectively words of the apostle. He says: **„Our message of salvation** was not only brought to you in word alone but also with the power of the Holy Spirit and assurance.“ They preached and God worked.

For Paul there was no **„other gospel** than that which was once preached by Jesus in the churches, to the disciples and the Holy Spirit, the traditions of the apostles, the Gospels, etc. **This is what lived by with his whole heart** and therefore he can say: **„My gospel“**. The testimony full of divine reality also caused the audience to believe with assurance. In these letters he even calls them **witnesses**: *"You know for yourself what kind of people we were among you ..."* Their personalities, personal qualities and attitudes, devotion and life style were preaching the same message and not only their **„proclamations“** (1Thess 2,9-12).

Furthermore there was a huge **„revival“** (a spiritual, God-given awakening), and when Paul wrote the 1<sup>st</sup> Epistle to the Thessalonians this was still on-going. All the visible **marks** and **changes** in the converts, such as the **supernatural joy** testified of their conversion so that even outsiders became curious and started to ask questions (1Thess 1,8.9).

The Thessalonians were so infected by **the joy of the Holy Spirit** by the missionaries, that even when they were persecuted they were not afraid of tribulations and suffering and with courage received the Word of God and also stood by it. **Visible conversion** has always been a very useful tool of evangelism (spreading of the gospel).

**Holy enthusiasts in contagious.** They wanted the truth in spite of the **„problems“** that one would have because of faith in Jesus. **Trials** can be several inner or outward needs, all the great or small, physical or spiritual suffering. Christians share this burden with all people.

**"Election"** proves in the „reception and working on the heart of the Word, so that we get new emotions and thoughts and are moved by God. They experience a **supernatural divine joy** in the face of adversity while the non-believers get upset and are sad (1Thess 2,13/ 1Cor 1,18/ Phil 4,4/ Mat 13,20,21/ Joh 15,11). The church of Thessalonica was a **„city on a mountain top that could not be hidden“**. The **„Gospel of Jesus“** was spread by their personal effort and word of mouth through the whole region.

The living God could **at first work something within the Thessalonians** and then they were able to share the living faith and the love of God with others. Paul was very excited about that. They did not only acknowledge Jesus as their „Lord“ or adopt to some new truths, but they lived according to it – as His own possession.

Through their **every day life** they made their election visible. **Actions speak louder than words**. Paul was amazed how quickly they understood the „**counsel of God**“ and applied that in their life, making a difference in the city of commerce at the harbor. Therefore he calls them „**Brethren, beloved of God**“ **before calling them the elect**." Paul calls the believers „**brethren**“. They are „relatives“, „**brothers and sisters**“ and in addition „**loved by God**“.

If you compare the **1<sup>st</sup> Epistle to the Thessalonians** with the other letters of Paul you can find that **this greeting** (brethren) very often. In the long Epistle to the Romans we find it only 10 - , in Galatians 9-, Philippians 6-, and in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 3- times. In the 1<sup>st</sup> Epistle to the Thessalonians we find it **14-times**, that Paul uses to address the **recipients**. This **personal, loving greeting** shows how Paul was relating to them with deep love. The Thessalonians are **brethren that God dearly loves**. The love of God is revealed in their election and that they became a part of the life and ministry of the apostle.

**1Thess 1,2-3 Paul thanks God for the church**. A true biblical, spirit-lead church is not to be „**taken for granted**“. Even when **the church was far from perfect** and they still had concerns about them they gave thanks for this church.

They say: "**We always thank God for you**". Perhaps this is why the Holy Spirit worked among them with such power. **Prayers of thanksgiving are prayers of blessing**, that always **have a positive effect** on things even when those things are negative in themselves.

**1Thess 1,2,3 Paul shows us how and why to pray for others**. Whenever he thinks of them, and he constantly does that, he mentions them with thanksgiving. He thanks God for their election and calling and that they have become believers and beloved of God.

For Paul it was very important to **think of them often**, for whom he once laboured, fought and prayed and to whom he had been a blessing. To stay prayerful for those you have served for the cause of God, that is what connects one Christian with the other and keeps them in **spiritual fellowship**. This is how true believers are building the kingdom of God, the church and body of Christ **in the invisible world**. **Only by that kind of awareness the visible part of the earthly church** connects with **the invisible heavenly part of the universal church** of Jesus Christ, and therewith **with the head of the body Jesus Christ**, from whom all spiritual impulses come.

When we read the text **1Thess 1,3** we automatically think of the three elements of our walk and ministry in **1Cor 13,13** where it is about **faith, love and hope**.

- Paul „**thinks**“ of the work among the Thessalonians for **their faith**. Their faith has become effective (Gal 5,6) through the supernatural effect of God's grace (Phil 1,29).
- Paul „**thinks**“ of their ministry and **love**. Only love gives value to our ministry before God. And this exceptional, devoted love can only come from God (Rom 5,5). This **divine love** works by serving each other at all times, giving comfort to the sad, exhorting the disorderly and being strong for the weak and practicing patience with everybody (1Thess 5,14,15).
- And finally Paul „**thinks**„ of their **persistence** and **steadfastness** in their expectation of the coming of our Lord Jesus.

Since the apostle Paul **understands the present time and the second coming of the Lord** he knows that his missionary work in Thessalonica was not in vain, regardless of the adversity and tribulations.

He did not live and work for **the moment** but in everything he did, said and wrote he always **focused on eternity**. He was sure, even if he was **broken hearted sometimes** that all will be for the glory of God and not in vain ( 2Sam 12,23) until Jesus comes back and all will be revealed (1Thess 4,14).

**1Thess 1,4 and 5 The secret of the ancient proclamation was** that they were real with the audience and told them everything they needed to know, which was important for salvation and what mattered for **being a Christian**. They focused on the **Gospel of Christ** and that Jesus is Lord. They preached **original Christianity**, not some theories of philosophies, but the pure „word“ and God Himself confirmed the „word of God“ through their mouth by His power, by signs and wonders of the Holy Spirit (Mk 16,17-18/ Rom 15,18-19).

**Their proclamation** was emphasised by God's **supernatural and unusual** intervention and revelation, as He had already done it in the Old Testament (Ex 7,3/ Deut 4,34; 6,22; 7,19/ Is 8,18/ Dan 6,27). Such a **powerful proclamation** had to convince the Thessalonians to accept Jesus and give them assurance. Paul and the first Christians were so powerful because they knew that the Word of God would not **return unto Him void** (Is 55,10-11) and that especially as **stewards of God**. Therefore the apostle boldly speaks about their divine „**election**“ (Eph 1,4/ 2Thess 2,13/ Ro 8,29-33; 9,6-26/ Col 3,12/ Tit 1,1).

**1Thess 1,5 The Gospel works through God-devoted people.** The conversion of the Thessalonians was a **supernatural work of God**, no normal reaction to an understandable sermon, because what Paul proclaimed was the contrary of the human imagination and philosophy (com.1Cor 2,1-5).

His message was proclaimed in all weakness, but this **triggered the supernatural power of God**, which then continued to work by itself, such as through the „**word**“ (the sermon, teaching, pastoral care), **the power** (which means by wonders and signs), **the spirit** (such as the spiritual gifts and the manifestation of the Holy Spirit and in the **working of assurance** (a firm conviction - com. Eph 1,13/ Joh 16,8-11), so that the life of the audience was radically changed. **Paul and his team** preached not only convincing truth, they **also lived** in accordance to all the preached. Their life and **role model emphasised** their proclamation so that the Thessalonians were challenged in their thinking and feeling.

**1Thess 1,6.7** The **persecution and tribulation** made the Thessalonians true „**disciples of Jesus**“. So it was in the beginning of the church at Jerusalem (1Thess 2,14) and it continued in Thessalonica. Only tribulations and challenges **strengthen** our spiritual „**immune system**“ and make us resilient, proven and inspirational. Here we see faith, and how people are inspired to receive the word of God and **imitate the missionaries**.

Even though the **Jewish Christians** had to experience hatred and opposition by their kinsmen, and the **Gentile Christians** had to assert themselves against Paganism, they were still full of the joy of God. **The Holy Spirit** played an important role for the Thessalonians to protect the believers who were persecuted for because of faith in Christ (Mt 10,19/ 1Petr 4,12-14).

It is interesting to note, that everywhere where there is **joy** mentioned in a special way in the NT it is always related to the Holy Spirit. The true joy is not depending on outward circumstances, **the referenced joy is a work of the Holy Spirit**, who is given to us in the rebirth and which we can apply to our life for sanctification. **The joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit** and belongs to the „new man“ and the „new creation“ within us. .

The **great tribulation alone surely did not cause them to be joyful**, the church surely had no delight in the **riot of the city** or that some of them had to pledge and pay huge amounts of money – No!

Their **supernatural joy and enthusiasms** originated from the Holy Spirit that dwelled in their hearts. In the missionaries **they saw and learned** that joy of a believer is not depending on outward circumstances but only depending on the **fellowship with Christ** (Mt 13,18-46).

**1Thess 1,8 God's supernatural work stirred up the people.** We do not assume that the church sent out missionaries to the close or far areas surrounding Thessalonica, but rather there was an **indirect missionary work** taking place. Thessalonica was a commercial city and many people passed through it and met some of the Christians. Many Thessalonians were merchants and traveled through the country. When they talked with friends and relatives they did not conceal that they believed in Christ and that it gave their life a new direction and meaning. True faith cannot be hidden in the heart but must be proclaimed. This is how the message of the **changing power of the gospel** spread in the other regions (Is 52,7/ Rom 10,15), without a missionary ministry.

It says: through the Thessalonians the word of God „**sounded**“ or „**rang**“ like an echo and not alone through **Macedonia** and **Achaia**. It spread throughout two great Roman provinces in Greece. Like a huge wave it was spreading through them, their life style and their personal testimony from city to city.

This strong **model of evangelism** was inspired by the **Holy Spirit** when we remember how Paul and his team did not freely go there but were **forced** to flee to Thessalonica and also had to flee from there very soon.

**1Thess 1,9ff. Here is also a rest of the early Christian confession of faith from the sermon to the Gentiles.** In Jewish Christian confessions (Rom 1,1-4) only the Christ is proclaimed, in a sermon to the Gentiles also the **Jewish faith in One God** has to be adopted to the faith confession. This message was also content of the sermon of the apostles in Athens (Acts 17,29-31).

**When Paul spoke to the Jews** he could presume their knowledge of the one true God, etc. To them only the arrival of the God-promised Messiah had to be proclaimed.

**But before the Gentiles**, who were not trained in the faith of Israel, two things had to be emphasised:

- The **necessity** to acknowledge the only living God and to give up idol worship
- and the necessity to prepare for the coming, universal judgment of God and to call upon Jesus, the God man, who died as a substitutionary atonement for our sin and rose from the dead (1Thess 4,6/ Acts 17,29-31) to be saved from the wrath of God.

The **sermon of the apostle** in Thessalonica was not without fruit. **Most of the church members** seemed to be Gentile Christians and not Jewish Christians (1Thess 2,14). It is also remarkable that at first it says nothing about the confession to Jesus Christ as Lord but it speaks about the **turning to God** ( Acts 14,15; 15,19; 26,18,20). Turning to God was automatically connected with giving up idol worship. The **early Christian conversion** was not only a new acknowledgement of a **theoretical – philosophical God**, but a new **service for the living God**. Who turns to the living, true God, receives **Jesus as his new Lord** whom they do not honor with rituals but with their will, body, souls and spirit.

This conversion was a personal and **open confession of Jesus**, the risen Lord (Rom 3,30/ 1KCr 8,4-6/ Gal 3,20), Who redeems humanity **from the wrath of God** and gives them eternal life and promises them a home in heaven (1Thess 1,10; 4,16/ 2Thess 1,7/ Phil 3,20). The Gentiles did not know such a God before and also Judaism did not offer such things.

**1Thess 1,10 This is a quote from an early Christian faith confession.** Paul did not freely invent this, it originates from a structure that uses terminologies from sermons of the first church. It does not mention the typical events of the story of Christ, such as the incarnation, the pre-existent Son of God, or His works and teachings while He was on earth.

If someone is a Christian he is **no longer without hope** (1Thess 4,13), but has a future. He does not have to be afraid of a dark nothing at the end of time, but he can count on the manifestation of salvation by the appearance of Jesus Christ (1. Cor 16,22). As surely as Christ rose from the dead, the risen one will also come back **at then end of time** (1Thess 4,14).

The **epistles of the apostle Paul** are no literal production to spread Christianity among the Gentiles, but a **concrete letter to Christian churches with their special problems**. Much more they contain some indications that tell us what Paul told the Gentiles and Jews when he preached (Rom 1,1ff.; 18ff./ 1Cor 1,10ff.; 2,1ff.; 15,3ff./ Gal 3,1ff./ 1Thess 1,9ff.).

That the **old Christian terminologies** contain missionary statements becomes clear in both texts. In Rom 1,1,5 and Gal 1,15, Paul says that he is a called apostle who is set apart for the proclamation of the Gospel. By the authority of his assignment he feels obligated towards the wise, uneducated and barbarians (Rom. 1,14). Also in 1Cor 15,1ff. Paul is referring to his mission sermon. He reminds the Corinthians of the Gospel that he preached and they received and which brought them to faith (1Cor 15,11). And the **resurrection of Jesus is always the central message**.

Here Paul already **corrects the Parousia expectations of the Thessalonians**. He makes it clear that the center of their expectation should be the **person Jesus** that God rose from the dead. Just like He rose from the dead so He will also come down from the throne of God to return (1Thess 4,16/ Tit 2,13/ 2Tim 4,8), and save us from the coming judgment / wrath of God. The believers did not expect the wrath of God but the **transformation** into the image of Christ (1Cor 15,49/ Rom 8,29/ Phil 3,21) and their **eternal reward**.

**Chapter 2** Here Paul addresses rumors that he heard concerning his ministry and his person and his tone changes.

- Paul defends himself against claims of deception,
- deceit and greed (2,3-6).
- Paul refers to his office (2,4) and restraint (2,7).
- He had shared his faith and life with the whole church like a loving mother and father (2,7-12).

He emphasises **the marks of a real Christian ambassador** and uses himself and co-workers as role models (1Thess 2,1-12).

- They were appointed by God, even when they had to struggle with weakness, fear and trembling (1Cor 2,3; 4,12-13; 9,16).
- Paul proves himself against people (2Cor 4,5).
- Paul points out that he also had to suffer and faced tribulations.
- Paul was not discouraged by it. He had perseverance!
- Paul claimed God's encouragement.
- He worked hard, he speaks of working day and night.

**1Thess 2,1-4** Paul and his team were struggling with problems in Macedonia from the start. They were beaten in Philippi (Act16,19-40). But this was not a discouragement, but with joy they continued to proclaim the Gospel. They came to Thessalonica by **hazard and without plan**. And yet they went there with boldness (Acts17,2) and preached the „**Gospel**“. This term appeared in 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians **5-times** (1Thess 1,5; 2,2.4.8; 3,2). They also did not act wrong and if their motivation would have been wrong then God would not have blessed their work so richly.

**They could have pleased the rebellious Jews** by ceasing to preach Jesus, but they wanted to please God and not people.

**It was God Himself** who gave him the courage and freedom to exercise his ministry without fear of people and worrying about himself, to preach the Gospel in Thessalonica, even when this led to adversity by the Jews and Greek.

**1Thess 2,3** Paul rejects the **accusations and personal suspicions** which did not only question his actions in Thessalonica, but also in Corinth (2 Cor 2,17; 4,2). With his arguments in this chapter Paul distinguishes himself from the many other **evangelists** of his era.

The three men were not the only „missionaries“ that appeared in the cities of Greece. They were three of a hundred and did not want to be confused with them. Jesus Himself speaks about (Mt 23,15) the eager **mission works of the Pharisees and scribes**, who would go across the land and sea to convert one proselyte. In the whole Greek area a **huge flock** of missionaries with the most different world views, philosophies and religious cults traveled around, evangelists, healers, witches, artists, musicians and actors.

On the outside Paul did not look much different than **the philosophical evangelists** who also appeared as ambassadors of God and preachers of right living in the many streets and corners. There were idealists, convinced philosophers and also deceivers who faked signs and wonders and tried to gain honor and money by speaking words of flattery. The likeness of Paul with those preachers seemed to be such that he feared to be confused with them.

The **philosophical preachers** were depending **on the charity of the audience** and therefore thought about their own profit, even though they preached against worldly riches.

**In Corinth** the accusations against Paul were even sharper and more precise. Since Paul promised at the apostle council that he would collect money for the Christians of Jerusalem (Gal 2,10), and asked for collections in the churches that he planted (Rom 15,25ff./ 1Cor 16,1/ 2 Cor 8,1-4; 9,1ff.), they suspected he took some of the money to satisfy his own needs (2Kor 7,2; 12,16ff.).

**Missionaries** were everywhere at that time. Not only Christian missionaries went from city to city, philosophers, magicians and speakers did the same. Especially the **Cynics** seemed to have a mutual resemblance with the Christian evangelists. With a shabby coat, a bag and rod, without family or home they went from town to town and stood at the streets, market places and presented their doctrines about wealth, poverty, virtues and evil. Many philosophers felt **they had an assignment**. They called themselves servants of God just like Paul (2Cor 6,4/1Tim 2,7 & 2Tim 1,11).

The **Cynics** appeared with the claim to be heard, because they felt like representatives of God who were sent to earth by God. His word was the word of God, whoever did not receive it offended God.

When we watch Paul, listen to him and read his letters we can see that he also had the same way of speech and disputing and also used similar arguments like the philosophers. His home town Tarsus was one of the great **centers of the Stoics**. He must have heard them often. Therefore he seems to use some of the expressions unconsciously or even on purpose. .

**Even the most modest Cynic** who only lived on veggies and water was depending on the charity of his audience. Therefore there were many of them who flattered the audience with their speech to obtain honor and reward.

**Not all of them were role models**. Many of them did not live the life style they proclaimed and requested from the audience. Since Paul outwardly was not so different from those philosophers there were suspicions he was one of them and only wanted to win followers to gain honor and money. **Therefore Paul defended the origin and kind of his message**. They did not originate from some revelation that leads people astray but it is the truth. He is not driven by unclean motives that oppose the will of God. Also calculating for his own profit was alien to him (1Thess 2,5). His apostolic existence has a different foundation and different purpose.

Paul emphasises that it is not a **thirst for honor or money** that drove him to minister, but that it was all about the gospel and that he only spoke what God had told him to speak (1Thess 2,1ff.).

Therefore Paul also says in 1Thess 4,11,12 that it is „**an honor for him to financially provide for himself**“ and not to be depending on anyone else. He can prove it by his life style. Paul was a role model for the Thessalonians and was not a burden to anyone.

**Practical work** was part of NT life and is the foundation for many parables and stories. Paul even said: „**Who does not work, should not eat**“ (1Thess 4,11), because man is called by God to serve / to work (2Thess 3,6-9/ Acts 20,35/ Gen 3,19). So we find out in the bible about the jobs of God's elect.

They are farmers, shepherds and many other areas are mentioned. Jesus Himself was a carpenter. We know that some of the disciples used to be fishermen. Luke was perhaps a physician.

**Work** in the New and Old Testament is not a negative thing, which opposes Greek tradition. In the Old Testament we see what role man has in the divine order of creation. In the New Testament work is the inspiration of many parables of Jesus. Work is something **totally normal and necessary** to make a living. In His parables Jesus teaches us to work with our hands in order to do good (Lk 16,1-8/ 1Cor 10,31).

Paul defends himself: „**We were not a burden to anyone**“ (1Thess 2,9). We know that Paul was a **tentmaker** and made his own living (Act 18,3; 20,34). He was careful not to be a burden to anyone even if he had a lack (2Cor 11,9).

Surely **Paul followed the Pharisee's tradition** to also learn a regular job while he studied the Word (Act 18,3). Tarsus was an important center of weaving and was known for their tent-making. This is the profession that Paul must have learned and also must have been good at it.

For the profession of the tentmaker **a huge variety of work is possible**: It starts with working on a weaving chair, to sew tents for soldiers or produce sunprotection for private houses and market stands up to the trade with tent fabrics or finished tents. Since the **tents** at that time consisted of skins, goat hair or linen the production needed much different work. **The apostle must have been a professional**. This way it was possible for him to earn his own income regardless of students who would pay him for tuition or not. Paul later points out that he never **was a financial burden for any of his churches**. Neither in Thessalonica nor in Corinth.

**His profession is part of his ministry**, an opportunity to meet people and reveal Christ to them, who would lead them to God the Father, which is a result of the love that the Holy Spirit is pouring into our souls and changes us and sanctifies us (Eph 4,28) and brings us closer to our divine purpose. Paul calls the Thessalonians as witnesses who can testify that he did not **make any material profit** for himself.

**1Thess 2,4** Here he says that he did not make himself an apostle and come up with his doctrine himself, but that his proclamation has **divine origin** and intervention (Gal 1,1.11ff.; 15ff.). **Only after God had tried him and found him worthy**, he was entrusted with the gospel to share it (1Cor 9,17; com. 4,1).

**1Thess 2,5** Once more he speaks about the evangelists of his time and does not only speak about fallacy, disingenuousness and malice but also mentions **flattery, greed and honor**. He made much effort for the Thessalonians but not as a **flatterer**, but as parents, a mother (2,7) or a father (2,11). He told them what God has called him to do (2Tim 4,2). But still he fears some could accuse him to use the gospel in order to make financial profit, because some did that.

**(1Thess 2,6)** The third accusation that Paul rejects is that he is seeking glory, honor or approval like the philosophers. **But he only wants to please God** (1Thess 2,20).

**(1Thess 2,7)** What Paul says here in plural is what all true apostles of Jesus Christ say. They were all messengers of the Lord, they did not **take themselves so serious**. To him and also all other true apostles the welfare of the church was more important than their own. Most of them died as **martyrs**.

**(1Thess 2,8)** As the next verses show the love for the Thessalonians was physically challenging him beyond his capacities. He offered them all of his strength, time and health.

**(1Thess 2,9)** For a true minister of God it is important **not to be a burden to anyone**. He took care of himself. That was a custom of all apostles, to remain **financially independent and free from churches** (1Cor 9,15), even though the preacher actually has the right to receive provision from the church (1Cor 9,7ff./ Gal 6,6).

Only at the comparatively wealthy **church of Philippi** Paul made an exception (Phil 4,15-17/ vgl. 2Cor 11,9). They had supported him when he was in prison and could not work as a tentmaker. Other than that he had worked day and night.

**(1Thess 2,10-11)** He says that the Thessalonians can testify that he did not receive wages from them and served them like a mother and father, even though he often had to be strict with them (1Cor 4,14/ Acts 20,31).

**(1Thess 2,12)** Here he summarizes how his **counseling work** looked like practically: »**exhortation, encouragement, invoking**« (comp. 1Thess 2,3.5.10). His **pastoral care** was always accompanied by urgent counsel, encouragement, challenges up to loving help (1Thess 4,7/ Gal 1,6).

**Counseling was only for believers.** Pastoral care is not **for unbelievers**. Unbelievers have to be „**evangelised**“ first. They have to be converted. Jesus must be their Lord. They must have the Holy Spirit, obey God and want to believe. Only then they can be ministered to through pastoral care. You have to be **born again** in order to **see the kingdom of God** (vgl. Joh 3,3.12). The „**calling**“ and „**election**“ only happen when we are „**born again**“.

**1Thess 2,13-16** Paul thanks God, that the Thessalonians did not only receive the sermon as a **word of men**, but as the „**word of God**“, as a divinely – Holy Spirit inspired message (comp Is 55,1-5/ Acts 20,32/ 2Tim 2,15/ Hebr 4,12).

They did not only look at the outward things, were not confused by the despise and rejection of the Jews. Honest people who receive grace from God and believers can hear when the voice of God is hidden behind a human voice. It does not matter to them how you call the message. If this is the „**Gospel**“ (1Thess 2,4) or the Good News (1Thess 2,2.8.9) or the Gospel of God (1Thess 1,6) or if it is simply the Word (1Thess 1,8) or the Word of the Lord (1Thess 2,3) or „our message“, it does not matter. The most important thing is that God speaks (Rom 10,14.17/ 1Cor 14,36/ 2Cor 2,17; 4,2; 5,20; 13,3) and that it is a „**Rhema**“ (a divine word at the right time).

(**1Thess 2,14**) The Thessalonians were not only imitators of the apostle (1Thess 1,6), but also of the Christian **church of Judea**. They were not the first and only who were persecuted because they believed the word (com. Mt 10,17) the same happened to the churches **in Palestine** (com. Gal 1,22-24) because suffering (especially because of Jesus) is part of a Christian's life (1Thess 3,3). Even though the apostle Paul emphasises his **independency of Jerusalem** (Gal 1,1.15ff.), he was very fond of the **relation to the first church** (Rom 15,25ff./ 1Cor 16,1/ 2Cor 8,4.14; 9,1.12ff./ Gal 1,22; 2,1ff.). Both were not only united by faith in Jesus but also in the suffering by their fellow citizens, even though they were geographically far away from each other, they still shared the same **tribulations**.

He calls the Thessalonians **his imitators** (1Thess 2,14). The word „**imitator**“, which has a certain negative sound, was however not used in that sense by Paul. He usually encouraged the churches **to imitate** him (1Cor 4,16; 11,1/ Phil 3,17/ vgl. Gal 4,22/ Phil 4,9).

**If you live your faith without compromise** there will always be persecution and opposition, especially from the religious people. Where the gospel is proclaimed with power and by the Holy Spirit, where people are **called out of this world by God** some people are offended because they feel bothered. **Turmoil, defamation and hate is targeting the new converts** so that there is no other way for Christians than that of suffering.

The Thessalonians went on their way, but they were not worried or even desperate but they had received the word with great joy, regardless of the persecution.

**This joy does not come from the natural human being.** It is a work of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5,22) or as Paul calls it: the joy of the Lord (Phil 3,1). It is **not depending on outward circumstances** and therefore it is consistent (1Thess 5,16/ Phil 4,4). Suffering and persecution cannot reduce its power (Phil 2,17ff./ 2 Cor 6,10). In the joy of the Holy Spirit the kingdom of God is already manifested in us (Rom 14,17).

**If someone becomes a follower of Christ, he becomes a role model for others.** It was the same way for the Thessalonians in Greece, which was parted by the Romans among the two provinces Macedonia and Achaia. The young believers were still in their first love and their open confession of Jesus did not **remain unnoticed in the city** and people were offended and agitated because of that.

**New believers** are usually very radical in the beginning of their walk, they are bold and make no compromises. They still have the fire. They are like young wine that still has to fester (s.a. Mt 9,17/ Mk 2,22/ Lk 5,37,38).

And also was the message of the apostle Paul **very provocative** for the Jews. In this letter we find the strongest **anti-Jewish terminologies of the whole New Testament**. This was the way **how the gospel was originally proclaimed**. Paul speaks the same things that Peter was preaching on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2,14-15), that was also the message of Stephen when he was stoned (Act 7,52). This message once used to agitate Paul and finally lead to his conversion (Act 9,4). He used to be a **fanatic hater of Christians** and persecuted the disciples of Jesus in all Judea (Gal 1,13-14), but now suffers the leaders of the Jews who are still trying to undermine the preaching of the gospel so that salvation would not be extended to the Gentiles (1Thess 2,16).

The **spreading of Christianity** was a thorn in the side of the Jews and especially they did not want it to be acknowledged as a superseded version of Judaism. Therefore the Jewish theologians separated themselves from the Christians and declared Jesus **as accursed** and tried to erase his name. The Thora believing Jews made the **name of Jesus** a taboo **and referred to Him as the Nameless** and tried to erase the memory of Him.

Therefore Paul is not **the only one** in the New Testament who is **using such a rethoric against the Jews**. Jesus Himself said similar things such as in the Gospel of Matthew and John or the Revelations of John (Rev 2,9; 3,9/ Joh 8,44).

Especially the **Jews who were in exile** could only maintain their identity under strict separation from the foreign cultures surrounding them. Because of their self-appointed separation the Roman / Greek upper class had an adversity against Jews, because it seemed they thought they were something better than everybody else. Therefore the **accusations and charges** against Paul and the Christians were not harmless. They were those who **„stirred up the whole world“**. **Subtle** as the Jews were they said: *„These people act against the command of the Emperor because they claim somebody else is king, namely Jesus.“* (Joh 19,12.15).

Maybe some of the Christians had acted distant when the Emperor was publically worshipped. The sentence: **„Jesus is Lord!“** was anything but a **harmless sentence in the Roman Empire** where only the **Emperor could be the king of Rome**. The confession of Jesus as their Lord indeed carries a questioning of the Roman Emperor, not his political position, but the **religious position**, (he was the Pontifex-Maximum – the high priest) that he also enjoyed and which was also not questioned by the citizens of the Roman Empire. In the time of early Christianity there were **denunciations of Christians** by the Jewish church. The legal position of the Jews in the Roman Empire was better than that of the Christian churches.

**In Thessalonica Christians realized right in the beginning that they were being persecuted** and that this was a part of Christian life. Paul also had to go through it (Acts 9,23-26), and so it was for the saints in Judea and it is still so up to today. **A spiritually healthy person will not seek suffering** but it is a natural consequence of the confession to Christ which provokes this kind of resistance. This is a sign that they are on the right way.

(**1Thess 2,15**) Paul who earlier persecuted the church of God now **turns against his own people** in a similar way as the prophets had done in the Old Testament.

But he did not **call them to repentance** but addresses the Jews in a **sharp tone**. He also does not use his own words but uses terminologies and facts that were widely spread.

There are three charges, **that he raises against the Jews**.

- At first he blames them for killing the Lord. He does not usually voice such a charge. When he speaks of the death of Jesus he usually uses the word **„crucified“** (1Cor 1,23; 2,2.8/ 2Cor 13,4/ Gal 3,1/ Phil 2,8) or **„gave away“** (Rom 4,25; 8,32/ Gal 2,20). This is not a **typical Pauline statement** but what Paul says here is a part of **early Christian polemic**: The Jews killed Jesus (Mk 14,1/ Joh 5,18; 7,1.19ff.; 25; 8,37.40; 11,53/ Acts 2,23.36; 3,15; 4,10; 5,30; 7,52; 10,39).
- The second charge is **that they are the murderers of the prophets** and this can be found in the Old Testament (1Kin 19,10.14; 22,27/ 2Chr 24,20ff./ Neh 9,26/ Jer 2,30; 11,18-21; 26,8.20ff.). This charge **is not openly claimed in „Jewish scriptures“** but it is spoken out loud in the New Testament (Mt 22,6ff.; 23,29-37/ Mk 12,2ff./ Lk 6,23/ Acts 7,52).
- The second charge is **that the Jews persecute Jesus** and try to prevent the gospel from spreading among the Gentiles so that they would be saved from the wrath of God. We can see this topical charge throughout the Book of Acts (Acts 9,29; 13,50; 14,2.19; 17,5.13; 18,12; 22,22f.; 23,12ff.). Because the Jews are **hindering the Gentile mission** and therefore want to **exclude the Gentiles from salvation** they prove to be **enemies of God** and man and are guilty. Someone like **Paul**, who was a Jew, a fanatic **persecutor of the Christians**, confesses his sin (1Cor 15,9/ Gal 1,13.23/ Phil 3,6) and says that as an apostle he now also has to suffer such persecutions (2Cor 11,24/ Gal 5,11/ 1Thess 2,2).

**The charges** that Paul claims against the Jews do not have economic or political reasons, but are only of **theological – missionary kind**. The claim they are all enemies of man is not a particular charge of the apostle Paul – he does not usually use the word **»enemy«** – but it was a well known Hellenistic – Roman **accusation against the Jews** (Tacitus, Historia V 5,1). When someone knows the historical background Paul does not say a new thing here.

The **„Anti-Judaism“** is **much older than Christianity**.

**„Antijudaism“** emerged because of the emphasized monotheism of the Jews, their special selection, adherence to exaggerated regulations concerning purity and food. Toward the other citizens of the country they seemed to be **inhuman**. That they strictly rested on Saturday brought them the reputation of being lazy.

**One must be aware** that most of the laws of God (Thora) were only written **for the people of Israel** and not for the whole world. But the Jews have extended their cultic laws to the whole world and this is not what God had intended. Because they refused to participate in meals and marriage celebration of others they had more enemies than friends. They seemed to be separated and reserved. Because of their stubbornness they were like aliens and people tried to get rid of them. This led to much hatred targeted at the Jews.

**Because they were separated from the others** people thought that they hated everybody else (Tacitus, Historia V 5,1). We can see the words of the **enemy of the Jews Haman** in the Book of Esther when he speaks to the king: »There are a people who live among the tribes of the provinces whose laws are different and they do not obey the commands of the king, so that the king should no longer allow that they dwell among us (Est 3,8).

This is how throughout history there were always some „**Anti-Jewish conflicts**. For example 410 b.C. **the Egyptians attacked Elephantine** for these reasons and destroyed the temple of the Jews which was built as an alternative to the destroyed temple at Jerusalem.

The most famous are the **pogroms in Alexandria** under Caligula in the year **38 AD**. The houses of the Jews were robbed, the Jews were driven from their living spaces and held captive in blocks of houses (the first ghettos).

When **Titus** was greeted by the citizens of Syrian Antioch after the destruction of Jerusalem 70 AD, they asked him to drive the Jews from the city (Jos, Bell VII 5,2 § 100-104) after there had been some riots against the Jews and their customs (Jos, Bell VII 3,3 § 46ff.). The saying: »**The wrath has fully come upon them**« was common and popular. They believed that the Jews had brought all of their conditions upon themselves and that those were evidence of the wrath of God they deserved because they angered their own God (2Kin 17,18/ Jer 44,6), and „... that the punishment of God would not destroy but discipline them.“ (2Makk 6,12).

In 2Chr 36,16 we find **similar words**: »They despise the messengers of God and their words and mocked the prophets until the wrath of the Lord came against His own people«. 20 years after the Epistle to the Thessalonians (70 AD) there was a catastrophe and the temple of God was destroyed (Mt 10,22/ 1Cor 1,8; 15,24). No matter how much Paul is still connected with his kinsmen he is not blind to their sins.

**The position toward Christ is what separates them.** He sees that his people chose the wrong way and are insisting with fanatic eagerness on their law and righteousness (Rom 9,31ff.), which partly goes beyond the OT revelation of God even though there had not been further divine revelations.

And **because they do not understand the importance of Christ**, they reject Him and persecute the messengers of God (2Cor 11,24). The gospel **makes them lose their privileged position** of being the elect people of God (Mt 8,12), so that Paul puts the Jews in the same box as unbelievers (Rom 3,9). The position that Israel had according to the flesh is **replaced by the true Israel according to the spirit**, the circumcision of flesh is replaced by circumcision of heart and the church of God in Jesus Christ replaces the synagogue (Rom 2,25ff./ Gal 4,21ff.). Jews are no longer the superior people and salvation is available to anyone.

Personally Paul suffered and wept **about the present condition of the Jews** (and their rejective position) so that he wanted to forsake his own salvation and stand in the gap for Israel just as **Moses** (Ex 32,32) did for the people of Israel. (Rom 9,2f.).

(**1Thess 2,17-20**) **The impeded visit.** Paul is very sad and hurting that he is separated from the Thessalonians because of **the hate of the Jews**. He is planning to see them again and strengthen the young church in their faith and support them in times of tribulations. By the letter we cannot tell **what made it so impossible to return to the Thessalonians**; if it was a sickness (2Cor 12,7/ Gal 4,13) or if the political circumstances in Thessalonica did not allow him to return or if it was his ministry at Corinth. Several times, one to two times, Paul had made travel preparations but **Satan** always interfered so that he could not get to them personally.

**Satan is behind every restraint of the kingdom of God.** In Thessalonica Satan used the **unbelieving Jews**. These became jealous and caused a riot in the city and were not ashamed to get involved with the „**mob**“ and even went to **Boerea** to do the same.

The Jews were the ones who brought **Jason and some brothers** before the elders of the city and claimed that: „*Those people who stir up the whole world have come here and they **live with Jason**. They all act against the Emperor's commands and say somebody else is king, namely Jesus.*“

**This was a very serious threat especially in Thessalonica**; because the battle at Philippi it was declared a free city with their own government. The Jews took advantage of that in order to force the missionaries into a political corner that would mark them criminals and revolutionaries who are proclaiming **a new world ruler** (Acts 17,7). **In order not to lose their rights** the Thessalonians had to show **strong allegiance to the state**. They tried to stop every political revolution in its beginning. It seemed that they were more prudent than the elders at Philippi. Jason and the others had to pledge for Paul and his co-workers.

The same night the brethren sent Paul and Silas to **Beroa** (Acts 17). Paul speaks about persecution in 1Thess 2,15.16 and that such people are trying to avoid that the **Gentiles would hear the gospel and find salvation**. In his concern and fear for the church he sent **Timothy from Athens** to find out how the Thessalonians are doing and how they are developing in their faith (1Thess 3,5). And after a short time he returned to the apostle Paul with good news. Based on this good news Paul writes this letter to the church.

### **Chapter 3**

This chapter describes the relationship between the apostle and the church after the separation (1Thess 2,17-3,13) how he imagines a church and what he wishes for them.

**Satan tried to wear Paul out**. He had kept the apostle Paul from visiting the church again (1Thess 2,18), therefore Paul was worried and thought that Satan would take advantage of the situation and attack them (Thess 2,14), for example by defaming Paul and telling lies about him (1Thess 2,3ff.), in order to undermine the trust and the work that they had started (1Thess 3,5). Paul had to leave Beroea and left **Silas** there and sent Timothy to Thessalonica and he himself went on to Athens. He was thinking much about the further development in Thessalonica.

**(1Thess 3,1-10)** Paul promised that when they would follow Jesus they would **not have an easy and simple life**. The apostle knows that the evil tempter is still there and active. Therefore he sent Timothy to them „**to find out if the tempter had tempted them**.“ (1Thess 3,5).

Paul was a realist and counted on the „**temptation of the believers**“. Only being reborn in our spirit does not mean that there will no longer be temptation. Satan will still keep trying to get us back or make us fall. Therefore even a Christian has to pray: „**Do not lead us into temptation**“. **Paul is sober in his perception** of people and knows how close failure, backsliding and insecurities come (1Thess 3,3). He has also not just comforted them with the assurance of the Lord: "Nobody will snatch them out of my hand." He is indeed fearful that "**our work could be in vain**".

**(1Thess 3,5)** Paul knows **that outward needs easily become to inner struggles**, therefore he was so concerned for the church. He **encouraged them and strengthened them** not to be shaken by outward circumstances. He made it evident for them that „**we are destined**“ to bear some defamation, persecution and tribulations (com. Rom 5,3ff.; 8,18ff./ 1Cor 4,9ff.; 15,32/ 2Cor 1,8; 4,1ff.; 8ff.; 6,4ff.; 7,5; 10,1.10; 11,23ff.; 32f.; 12,7.10.15/ Phil 1,12ff.; 2,17; 4,14).

Even though Paul does not give a detailed explanation **why Christians will have to endure suffering** he always emphasises that **suffering** is not something random or unusual in the life of a Christian, but also something **normal** that is part of Christian life and should **not be questioned and not only seen negative** (Rom 5,3; 8,17f.; 35/ 2Cor 1,4-7/ Phil 1,29). For a real believer the tribulations are predestined and inevitable (Joh 16,33/ Rom 8,37). **Satan** is the one who is attacking the saints and tries to bring them to fall (com. Eph 1,11/ Col 2,8/ 2Cor. 11,3/ Gal 1,6-9; 2,7; 4,9-11).

The suffering is rather **a test** of this world where faith has to be proven and strengthened (1Petr 4,12/ 2Cor 4,17/Phil 2,18; 1,29/ 1Thess 1,6/ 2Cor 7,4) and not some „**punishment**“ for our transgressions because Jesus has already suffered for all our sins and mistakes.

**(1Thess 3,6)** Timothy brought **good news** about the faith of the Thessalonians as well as their attitude toward the apostle. **The report** that the brothers brought him from Thessalonica is very positive but there were also **questions** concerning the resurrection and second coming of Christ because some brethren had already died. Here Paul as an experienced bible teacher had to answer this question theologically. He used this opportunity to also correct some things that had been said about him and his ministry. He also speaks concerning other **assumptions and accusations that might come in the future** by calling them his witnesses for the fact that he had never been a burden to them.

**(1Thess 3,7)** Here we can see that **the co-workers** were very important for the apostle's personal condition and his ministry. He was depending on them. In Athens **he was by himself** which was hard for him while he waited for the brethren (Acts 17,14-17). He was very troubled by this situation. He was preaching at the Areopag in Athens he was not successful. Without his brothers he failed. Therefore he left the city earlier than he had planned and continued to travel to Corinth (Acts 18,1). Both of his helpers only met him **in Corinth** (Acts 18,5).

**As a preacher he is not only a giver** so that the church will be strengthened but he himself also needs comfort and encouragement and prayer of the church (Rom 1,11; 15,30/ 2Cor 1,11/ Phil 1,19/ 1Thess 5,25). In the kingdom of God and the ministry for God there is always a give and take. The message that the church was firmly established in faith did not remove the needs that Paul had but it took some weight off his shoulders.

(1Thess 3,8) How tight the **apostels and the church belonged together** can be seen in the sentence that Paul would only live when the church is standing firm. Instead of abiding in the Lord (Phil 4,1) Paul could also say: in faith (Rom 11,20/ 1Cor 16,13/ 2Cor 1,24), in grace (Rom 5,2) or in the gospel (1Cor 15,1). If the Thessalonians would have been **shaken in their faith** this would have been the ruin of his work and the devil would have defeated him (1Thess 3,5).

(1Thess 3,8) The „**steadfastness**“ of the Thessalonians in the Lord **gave Paul new courage and motivation.** In Thessalonica there were not yet such difficulties as Paul later had to deal with in Galatia, Corinth and Colossia. He realized that everything was going well there in the beginning. The apostle also wished that they would receive even more overflow from God.

**The great concern of the apostle for the church is ...**

- ... to complement them where they still lacked faith (3,10),
- ... to help them grow in faith,
- ... that they would become richer in the love among each other and
- ... that they would become richer in their love toward all people (3,12),
- ... that their hearts will be strengthened
- ... that they will be pure and holy before God (3,13).

(1Thess 3,9) So as Paul thanks God **for the message** (1Thess 2,13), so he also gives thanks to God **for the conversion** of the Thessalonians.

(1Thess 3,10) Typically Paul **gives thanks and** also brings his requests before God (Rom 1,8.10/ Phil 1,3) and asks God **for an answer to his prayer request** that he can soon visit the Thessalonians again (com. 1Thess 2,17).

**By the way:** Four or five years later the yearning of Paul to see the Thessalonians face to face is fulfilled when he came to Macedonia 55 AD after the **riot in Ephesus** (Acts 20,1-2). It was his wish that the Thessalonians would be even more encouraged in their faith and build them up and correct them. Paul knows **the more knowledge of God** they become stronger and more mature in their faith (comp. Is 5,13/ Col 1,28; 4,12/ Eph 3,19).

(1Thess 3,11-13) Paul relies totally on **the overflowing grace of God** who will guide you and help you to grow and be sanctified. According to the report of the Thessalonians they were doing well (1Thess.3,6) but for Paul a **Christian never reaches perfection** we always need correction unto perfection and the full measure of God. His faith and love could also still need growth (1Thess 3,10). A little love is not enough it should overflow and be there in abundance. In the coming chapter he **goes deeper into** the term „**love**“ and also the term „**holiness**“ (1Thess 4,3.4.7). Only through holiness the love of God can stand (1Thess 3,12).

**A real intercession awakens and increases the love for the saints and the church.** Paul had experienced how even firm decisions could fall. Pressure and suffering can make us hard and self-focused. Paul prayed that the Thessalonians would not try to conquer their challenges **out of their own strength** and bring forth more love so that **the Lord would increase their love**“ towards all people.

(1Thess 3,13) **Sanctification is the preparation for the return of Jesus.** Without beating about the bush Paul targets the goal and finishing line „when Jesus our Lord returns with all the saints“. The **saints** are the sanctified, the righteous ones (2Thess 1,10/ Zach 14,5). In the NT the term saint does not usually refer to „**angel**“.

**The Thessalonians should stand before God blameless with the saints.** Whoever believes in Jesus **is a new creature**“. For them Jesus has already arrived and is present. Now they only have to become perfect in their walk with him. All members of the church who are **members of the body of Christ** should aim to reach this goal.

## Chapter 4

(1Thess 4,1 – 5.22) contains practical exhortations and corrections **for the continuation of their walk of faith.** Even though the Thessalonians already lived according to the gospel and the instructions of the apostle Paul and his role model, they still needed the word. It is not enough for us to keep all the blessings to ourself but it must also flow from us (comp. Joh 7,38) only then the fullness of blessings is active.

**This is an old biblical principle** (Gen 12,2-3/ Hebr 6,14-15). God does not only want to restore us but also wants us to reach out to our surrounding. He does not only want to save us but our whole house (Acts 16,31). Therefore Paul also encourages the believers by saying: »My brethren, this is what yet has to come and must increase among the Thessalonians.

The **practical results of sanctification** and receiving restoration is

- ... at first „growing in the Lord“
- ... an „overflow of the love of God“ through us and to all people and
- ... a „firmness of heart“ (1Thess 3,12.13/ com. Rom 5,5/ 1Tim 4,13-16/ Phil 1,9-11; 2,14-16).

As a **part of sanctification** especially mentioned are, “... that you would abstain from fornication.“ Paul does not only present **the exegis of the resolutions of the apostle council**. As we know **James the leader of the Jerusalem church** had asked the audience to make a resolution that all uncircumcised (believers from other nations) should only stay away from idol meat, blood and fornication to be acknowledged in the Christian church (Acts 15).

The **resolutions** were put down in written form and passed on to the Christians (Acts 15,19). This **apostle council** happened during the two-year mission journey before Paul came to Thessalonica. As we know he did not understand this apostolic resolution as anything other than that what God had already commanded Noah and therefore all people. Especially „**fornication**“ was treated with much intensity and detail. Maybe Paul and the early Christians had a different understanding of the term than just sexual promiscuity?

The word „**fornication**“ is mentioned **85-times** in the bible with different references and connotations. In Eph 5,5 & Col 3,5 „**fornication**“ and „**greed**“, sexual life and money are mentioned in one sentence because „money“ spoils „**good moral**“. God also created **sexuality** which was first of all supposed to serve the „**procreation**“ of people. It includes all of our being – souls, spirit and body. Otherwise the bible is very open concerning the **sexuality**. Only later in the religious and clerical we got to a point of all kinds of different false interpretations and demonisation.

For the **Hellenistic Jews** such as **Philon of Alexandria** the **command against adultery** included the following:

- premarital sexual intercourse,
- incest,
- marrying daughters of foreign nations,
- re-marriage after divorce,
- intimacy during menstruation,
- to marry barren women when known that she is barren,
- same sex relationships,
- transvestism,
- eunuchs,
- zoophilia and
- prostitution

**Colloquially** the **term fornication** was used for all sexual activity that were outside of heterosexual intimacy within marriage. **Fornication was sin against love**, faithfulness and against the Christian testimony of the Lord who is with us in spirit.

**(1Thess 4,3) This is the will of the Lord: Your sanctification!** Sanctification is more than just to belong to God. **Sanctification is a becoming whole of the whole being** in soul, body and spirit and this is a lifelong process. It is a different word for the „**restoration**“ of man into the likeness of God. **Practical healing** is life for and with God (Rom 6,11). Jesus, who did not think of His life as His own, **sanctified Himself on behalf of us** to reconcile us with God through this sacrifice (Joh 17,19/ 1Cor 1,30.31) .We are once and for all sanctified by the “will” of the Lord Jesus (Hebr 10,10/ Rom 6,3.6/ 2Cor 5,21).

**The true God is a God of sanctification** (1Thess 4,3ff.). Sinners cannot participate in the kingdom of God (1Cor 6,9ff./ Gal 5,19ff.). As a Christian we are no longer dominated by evil powers (Rom 6,12ff.; 7,18ff./1Cor 12,2/ Gal 4,8f.) and we no longer belong to ourselves (1Cor 6,19), but are also bought with a price (1Cor 7,22f.) and have become His possession (Rom 14,7/ 2Cor 5,15). **Therefore Christians can no longer** belong to unrighteousness, impurity, lawlessness and sin. They serve righteousness and sanctification (Rom 6,12ff.). They should also not care about their own well being but every one should watch for his neighbor and esteem him higher than oneself (Phil 2,4.3).

**(1Thess 4,6) „Defraud“ no one!** The Christians separated themselves consciously from the „**Jewish“ business world** where it was normal (even if not purposely) to work your way up by deception, defraud others and cheat. To cause people damage or cheat on them like that was all a sign of carelessness. Christians purposefully distanced themselves from this **Jewish style** (Eph 5,5).

## What does Paul mean by the term: „sanctification“?

- **Sanctification is a process of growth** – toward Him who is our head, Christ – and into His ways. Many converts try to **sanctify the outward conditions of their life** to let that become a deeper experience into the depth of their souls. They try by all means to bring their business, family and marriage life in balance and in line with the foundations of the gospel and do not realise that they are drifting toward a legalistic, painful and often untrue sanctification that cannot be fruitful. **Such as in nature life** does not flow from the outside to the inside, also sanctification starts in the most holy part of us, the center of our life to grow from there into the courts of our life. The new creation starts on the inside. It **changes** our character, thoughts, will, temper, attitudes and world views first. Our whole life on the inside of us will be moved and changed by the Holy Spirit.
- **Sanctification is forsaking** all unrighteous action and following all good and pleasing things before God. Since the young church had just recently been snatched out of **the Gentile thinking and life** and should now not go to the **other extreme** of the Jewish legalism and righteousness but walk by the Spirit, worthy of the Gospel and in expectation of the return of the Lord.
- **Sanctification is our new creation** from glory to glory into the perfect image of our Lord Jesus Christ in an evil time of adversity.
- **It is God who sanctifies us** (1Thess 5,23/ 1Cor 6,11). Jesus has made us His sanctuary (1Cor 1,30). And now it is the assignment of the single believers to make this a reality in their personal life (Rom 6,19).
- **Sanctification in itself** is not a pious effort of our self, but it is a grace gift of God, a gift that is not left to us as an independent possession, but we only possess it and experience it as long as we are living in deep faith fellowship with Christ. As soon **as the fellowship with Him is interrupted** our flesh gains back the power over us and we are again subject to our sinful nature.
- **Sanctification is more than just a moral betterment.** It is a total turn around in life and a foundational change of existence and relationship with God, and so it was with the Thessalonians who **"converted to God and turned from their idols"**!
- Sanctification is the development of people in and through the grace of Jesus and requires a certain attitude. Paul uses a **catalog of sins** to show how a Christian is supposed to live: he avoids fornication, idol worship, breaking the law and deceit. What God wants from the Thessalonians is very general and yet all including – their **sanctification** or as Paul said it (4,1): **„They please God.“**
- When Paul requires **sanctification** in the name of God, he does not give **instructions** for a life in a different world, but for **conquering** the odds of this world. Sanctification is not self-fulfillment or development of personality step by step until you reach a high level of moral perfection, it is a work of God with people who live in fellowship with Christ (1Thess 5,23; 4,7, com. 3,12f./ 1Cor 1,2.30).
- **Sanctification does not consist of askesis and abstinence.** Saints are not merely people who put down humanity and live as angels (Mk 12,25), but are people who belong to God in their whole humanity. Therefore sanctification and sexuality do not exclude each other. For Christians there should be no area of life where **access is denied to Christ.** Because **faith** is not a theoretical **opinion about God** or a thoughtful confirmation of the doctrines of God but being a **"slave"** of God (Ch.1,9) and His ministry (Ch.1,2.3). It is also not something that happens in our head, or just our heart but in our soul. Sanctification wants to flow through **all areas of our human life.**

Faith is not something that should only be **on the inside** but it should also be expressed **outwardly in our daily life.** Truly **sanctified people** are very natural and humble people. **True holiness** has nothing to do with legalism. **People who are sanctified** do not radiate **something oppressive and frightening** to their surrounding. On the contrary. From them something deliberating and appealing goes out to others; a warm and refreshing joy. Jesus lives in them. Therefore sanctification is the best and only way to become a **fruitful witness** of Jesus Christ in this world.

Healing is furthermore (1Thess 4,9.10) - **„brotherly love“** which is **„real“** and not calculating or any kind of hidden motives (Rom 2,9-13).

(**1Thess 4,9**) Paul picks up the **topic sanctification** of verse 3 and also follows another thought thread. Since Christians are **living in close fellowship with each other** and men and women did not sit separately for prayer and communion as in Judaism, but rather tried to fellowship as one big family in one room and even greeted each other with a **holy kiss** (1Thess 5,26), perhaps this caused **erotic temptation** so that you would transgress against God and become guilty of a sin toward your brother.

**(1Thess 4,9-12)** The Thessalonians are „**autodidacts**“ (taught by God) of brotherly love. Paul says: **“You are taught by God to love each other.”** (1Thess 4,9).

**(1Thess 4,10)** Thessalonians lived with the **firm conviction** that **the coming of the Lord Christ was close** and that the final time of salvation would start any moment. This exaggerated expectation of Parousia had therefore caused some **enthusiastic pneumatics** to give up their professions and duties or neglected them in order to just „**wait for the Lord**“. Why still make effort for this earthly life? This is the theme that is addressed in the chapters 1Thess 4,13-18 & 5,1-11 – the upcoming „day of the Lord“. Those who did not listen to Paul later became freeloaders and **their life was out of order**. In 2Thess 3,6-7 Paul even encourages them to distance themselves from such people.

The **tension concerning Christ's second coming should not paralyse our actions as Christians**. It should also not lead to a certain behaviour that would cause a scandal (1Thess 4,11f.; 5,14). The upcoming judgment (1Thess 2,19f.; 3,13; 4,6; 5,23) and the joy that is to come (1Thess 2,12) should be a motivation to shape your life so that you would be worthy and not have to fear God as the avenger. Not only the Thessalonians were anticipating the return of Jesus after hearing a sermon of Paul.

„**Jesus returns**“ - this is a „**pastoral encouragement**“.

- For the world Jesus has already come.
- For the church Jesus is already there, He is among us.
- And for the believers it is a **message for sanctification** and a memory – **to be ready at all times** (Mt 24,42.44; 25,13/ Lk 21,34-36/ Mk 15,33-34). Already in **Ch. 2,12** we can see that this **"change"** for the **apostolic time** is not a side issue at the edge of faith but the actual goal of intensive pastoral care.

**(1Thess 4,13-18)** The return of Jesus is **the emphasised topic of the whole letter here**. The first Christians expected the second coming of Christ and the end of this world in time. The Christians interpreted the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus as a beginning of a new time – a time of salvation. **Jesus will return** as eschatological judge of the whole world. This parousia is the perfection of history through the coming of Christ and the beginning of a new life under the reign of God. Also other Pauline letters are **marked by the expectation of Jesus** second coming, but nowhere do we find thoughts about the meaning of endtime as in the 1<sup>st</sup> Epistle to the Thessalonians (1Thess 2,19; 3,13; 4,15; 5,23).

For the first Christian church **the endtime had already begun**. The final coming of Christ and the final revelation of God were expected to happen very soon. The Thessalonians therefore believed that they will themselves become **living witnesses** of this event. They supported this **statement by Jesus words**: „This will happen in this generation“ (Mk 13,30). Therefore they asked **what would happen to those who had already died**. Can they still be a witness after they died? The Thessalonians have become impatient and the tension between **already** and **not yet** in the eschatological hope for salvation was troubling them. Maybe there were also some martyrs among the dead **that made the Thessalonians very sad** (1Thess 4,13) because they had to give their lives in the time of persecution.

The **expectation of the time of salvation** is an old prophetic hope: „God will make all things new!“ He will turn around this time of need (com. Is 40,2.5). On „**the day of the Lord**“ the enemies will be destroyed and a new life begins. A prince of peace will then be king (Is 9,1-6).

A **highlight was reached in expectation of Parousia** in the Book of Daniel (Dan 7,13f.). In the Book of Daniel we can see the imagination that this **future hope would not become a reality in this world**. This is how the eschatological hope became expectation of Parousia.

**Paul contradicts Jewish Apocalyptic by saying**: „we have no advantages compared to the dead“, those who are still alive will share in the new world just as the dead. This is how Paul comforted those who were afraid to die before Parousia.

**(1Thess 4,15)** A word of the Lord, which means that Paul had received a revelation from God - ... **we as the living will not be first or preferred before the dead and they will also not miss anything**.

The believers – **dead and alive** – will be included in salvation and meet the Lord and see the new creation. Christ will appear with His train (= archangels), the dead will rise and those who are still alive will receive a new body also. The trumpets as sign play an important role in the proclamation of the new era. Paul assures the believers that in case they die before it happens they will not be neglected when the Lord returns (1Cor 15,20.51-53/ Rom 14,7 ff./ 1Pt 1,8).

The believers will be **taken into the rapture** where we will meet the Lord and be with Him forever. **From the air** Jesus will come to earth and destroy the Antichrist with one breath of His mouth and also bring what the prophets had promised and what He Himself had said would be the kingdom of heaven on earth.

Therefore the short sentence- "**We will be with the Lord forever**" will be fulfilled. **A cloud suggested the hidden presence of God in the OT** (Ex. 24,15-18; 40,34-38/ 1Kin 8,10-12). Our Lord Jesus was lifted up in front of the disciples and taken up into a cloud (Acts 1,9). With the clouds and on the clouds the Lord will return (Dan 7,13/ Mt 24,30/ Mk.13,26; 14,62; Rev 1,7).

## **Chapter 5**

(**1Thess 5,1-11**) Therefore he writes in chapter **5,1-3**: „Regarding time my brothers I must not write to you, because you know that the **day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night** ...“ (Jer 5,6/ Zeph 1,4-2,3/ Dan 9,24/ Jer 6,14.15/ Ez 13,10/ Luk 21,34.35). It will be suddenly (also Is 13,8/ Jer 13,21/ Hos 13,13/ Mt 24,37-39/ Lk 17,26-30).

**About the destiny of non-believers** Paul does not give us a full picture. He tried only to answer the questions of the Thessalonians.

(**1Thess 5,4-11**) **Furthermore Paul exhorts the believers to stay watchful**. The Lord comes like a thief in the night. The terms »**sons of light**« or »**sons of darkness**« are missing in the Old Testament. They are known, however, from the scriptures of the **Qumran** and also occasionally used in the New Testament (Lk 16,8/ Joh 12,36/ Eph 5,8). » Whoever is a son of light – and all the believers are – belongs to the light and is saved from the present evil time (Gal 1,4), so that they have nothing to do with darkness.

Further he exhorts them to **stay sober**. Drunkenness belonged to the widely spread moral trespasses (1Petr 5,8; 4,3/ 1Tim 3,3.11/ Eph 5,18/ Tit 1,7; 2,3/ 1Cor 11; 6,10).

(**1Thess 5,9-11**) **This refers to being awake and sleeping**. In the garden Gethsemane when Jesus was wrestling the disciples „**were asleep**“ (Mt 26,43/ Mk 14,40). The smart and the foolish virgins all **fell asleep while waiting for the bridegroom**“ (Mt 25,5-7). While the words concerning sleep (1Thess 5,7) refer to the rest in the night but in 1Thess 5,10 it is referring to those **who have died** (s.a. Joh 11,13).

(**1Thess 5,12-28**) After the tough theological problems had been dealt with Paul also comes to speak about **special questions concerning community life**. In the verses 12 to 22 he gives last instructions for their change and closes with a great prayer in anticipation of our **perfect healing** in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ (Verse 23 and 24) with a request for intercession (Vers 25) and with greeting (Verse 26 and 27) and a prayer of grace (Vers 28).

From the **oldest document of the NT** we can tell how an early Christian church was planted and nourished. There were not yet the offices such as bishop, teacher or deacon. There were only responsible, compassionate people who felt responsible for the other church members. Only two ministries are mentioned "**overseers**" and "**exhorters**" (Tit 3,8/ 1Tim 3,5).

Paul characterizes their ministry in **three words**:

- They **labour** for the church members, which means a practical (1Cor 4,12; 15.10;16,16/ Gal 4,11/ Phil 2,16/ Rom 16,12).
- They **receive them** in the Lord,
- and they **gave them instruction**.

This **leading function and ministry** was not assumed by them out of self-appointment but they served by assignment and in the Spirit of the Lord, which means the gifts that God gave them (1Cor 12,14/ Rom 13,12). Paul exhorted the Thessalonians to use the gifts among each other in peace and harmony (Rom 12,18/ 2Cor 13,11/ vgl. Rom 14,19/ 1Cor 1,10/ Phil 2,2; 4,2) and not to let anything like envy or jealousy disturb the good fellowship.

(**1Thess 5,14-22**) „**We urge you brothers!**“ - this is where Paul is addressing the leading and ministering brethren of the church:

- to care for individuals (Hebr 13,7.17/ 1Tim 5,17/ Col 3,16),
- rebuke those **out of order** (because also among the saints there are some out of order 1Thess 4.11),
- to comfort the **little ones** (the sad 1Thess 1,13.18),
- to care for the **weak** and to go through persecution and tribulations (1Thess 3,2.5.10.13) and
- to be patient and longsuffering (Rom 2,4; 9,22/ Gal 5,22).

**These short exhortations now apply to all believers**. But they are not general corrections. Paul always writes concerning a specific situation.

There are some more **practical aspects of sanctification** in the personal life of individuals:

- **Not do pay back evil with evil** (1Thess 5,15). Not to react natural and carnal when someone hurts or offends you (Pro 20,22/ Rom 12,17.19/ Mt 22,39/ Rom 13,9/ Mt 5,39ff.; 44ff./ Lk 6,27ff./ 1Cor 4,12f.; 6,6). This should be practiced among each other and with all, which means also unbelievers etc. On the contrary he encourages the Thessalonians to chase after good at all times.
- **He encourages them to joy**. It is the „**joy of the Lord**“ (Phil 1,25/ 2Cor 7,4; 8,2; 6,10; 4,4/ vgl. Rom 12,12/ 2Cor 13,11/ Phil 2,17f., 28; 3,1). The emphasis is on „**at all times**“, which means not ceasing even in bad times full of persecution and suffering.
- **Pray at all times without ceasing**, which means constantly and continuously (Rom 12,12/ Phil 4,4.6). It literally means: „**Let nothing stop you from prayer.**“ This also implies **thanksgiving for all and at all time**. Giving thanks is not only a good virtue but a concrete expression of living faith in someone who is born again and a **mark of sanctification**. That is what God truly wants.
- **Do not grieve the Holy Spirit**. This refers to the Holy Spirit and His work such as prophecy (1Cor 14,1). Paul emphasises that prophesy should not be suppressed. It can also be translated: „Let the fire of the Spirit burn“ or „Do not put out the fire!“
- **Prophecy** does not necessarily refer to **future events** but to proclaim the word of God inspired by the Holy Spirit in a language that can be understood. That should uncover everything that is hidden and open the eyes of their hearts so they could find God (1Cor 14,24). The main purpose **of prophetic speech** is the exhortation and comfort that would strengthen the church (1Cor 14,3). Paul urges not to despise the gift of prophecy. He even encourages the Corinthians to seek this gift (1Cor 14,1-5.39).
- **Spiritual people should test all spirits** (1Cor 14,29/ 2Cor 6,14.15). Not necessarily the one who gives the prophecy must test it, **but the one who hears it** (1 Cor 12,10; 14,29-32/ 1Joh 4,1). In another translation it says: **But test every proclamation of the spirit and hold on to that which is good** and stay away from that which seems bad.“
- **Avoid evil of any form! Avoid anything** that even just seems like it **could be wicked**. Not everything that sounds good and biblical is truly biblical. The devil likes to appear as the **angel of light** (comp Mt 4,1-11). „**Evil**“ is Satan, demons, flesh, enslaved, the fallen world, self-centeredness, the old man, etc. ( Mt 6,13).

**(1Thess 5,25) „Brothers pray for us.“** In the beginning of the letter we read of the prayers of Paul, silas and Timothy for the Thessalonians. Now they are asking them for intercession. Also these powerful ministers of God are in need of this ministry **that every saint can and should do** because everybody has access to the Father through Christ and the Holy Spirit (Eph 2,18). Intercession is a helpful support for the ministry of others (2Cor 1,11).

**(1Thess 5,23-28) Blessings and greetings.** Paul summarizes what he had said in chapter 4 (1Thess 4,3.4.7). The **last words of the three missionaries** are: "sanctification and preservation". The Christians are **not supposed to sanctify themselves**, but »He« (1Thess 3,11; 4,16), »the God of peace« (Rom 15,33; 16,20/ 2Cor 13,11/ Phil 4,9/ Hebr 13,20), will do it. God wants us to be sanctified through and through so that we truly carry divine qualities in our personality.

**The good work God has started**, he will also finish (1Cor 1,9; 10,13/ 2Cor 1,18/ vgl. 2Thess 3,3). After He has called and elected them to be **saints** (4,7/ Gal 1,6) He also knows how to preserve them so that they will be blameless and do not have to fear judgment (1,10) but will share in authority and glory (2,12). As in single chapters of the letter, Paul points to the coming return of Christ.

**(1Thess 5,26 )** "Greet all the brothers **with a holy kiss.**" It was a pretty big deal when the master gave a slave and harbour worker or business man such a **brotherly kiss**. It was an expression of „kindness“ and „loving fellowship and friendship“ (com. 1Petr 5,14). The „holy kiss“ was usually practiced **during the early Christian's communion celebrations** (1Cor 16,20/ 2Cor 13,12/ Rom 16,16). This suggests that the letter was supposed to be read to the church before communion.

**(1Thess 5,27) This letter was supposed to be read in the church to all the brothers and sisters.** He is **urging them**, which means he „**makes them responsible**“ before God. This is a strong and unusual term. He puts them under an oath and emphasises that the letter should be read to all and in complete form. In the gatherings generally every individual counts. Every slave and every woman should hear it. Nobody was supposed to be excluded.

(1Thess 5,28) Paul had started the letter with the words **peace and grace**. His last exhortations are also regarding **peace** (5,13.15.23) and with a request for **grace** he finishes his letter. This is how the **final words refer to the greeting in the beginning**. Everything Christians do and what they become is all for „**grace**“.

### **Test questions**

1. What is Paul thankful for?
2. Why is he so concerned about the Thessalonians?
3. What is so special about the church of Thessalonica?
4. During which mission journey was the church planted?
5. How and why did Paul get to Thessalonica?
6. What kinds of problems and questions do the Thessalonians have?
7. How should we handle prophecies?
8. How did Paul answer their questions?
9. What is sanctification?
10. What does Paul recommend to the Thessalonians concerning sanctification?
11. What does Paul encourage the Thessalonians to do?
12. What is fornication?
13. Since when did Paul know Silas?
14. Where did he meet Timothy?
15. Why did Paul defend himself?
16. What are the marks of a Christian ambassador?
17. How should we deal with people who do not live right?
18. How does Paul call and describe the Thessalonians?
19. Why does Paul judge the Jews?
20. Which Jewish misconceptions does Paul address?
21. What did the Gentiles turn away from?
22. How and why did the gospel of Jesus spread from Thessalonica?
23. What do we find out about the community life of this church?
24. When, how and to whom should the letter be read in the church?
25. When and to what place will we be taken in the rapture?

**Please send the answers** to pastor@matutis.de

- ⇒ or to the church bible school, PO box. 65 06 65, D-13306 Berlin
- ⇒ or turn them in at the book table at the church.

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### **Nest lesson – 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians**

And now may the Lord bless you richly with your bible studies.

May prayers are with you.

**Pastor Joh.W.Matutis**

**Another request.** Please recommend this bible training to your friends and relatives, respectively other Christians (cell group leaders, pastors, preachers, youth leaders, counselors, bible students, etc.) Or you could also start your own private bible school based on this material and establish your own bible study group. (Overview of prior material: review <http://www.preach-in.de/content/view/219/83/> )

You could also forward this material to other Christians who are interested in the bible and would like to grow strong in the word of God. Encourage them to participate. It is for free and you don't have make a firm commitment. It can help you to gain great spiritual insight and blessings and also deepen your knowledge of the bible. Thank you.