
1 Thessalonians

A Model Church

Bible Commentary by Joshua Fox

www.joshfox.co.uk

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Overview

Gospel Ministry

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Key Themes:

- Gospel journey - A 'gospel journey' is shown in this letter. It describes how the gospel came to the Thessalonians, the ministry of the apostles and their bond to the Thessalonians, the necessary fruit of the gospel, the hope of our gospel future and the habits of waiting which should be present.
- Family love - The sincere love that Paul has for the Thessalonians is strongly shown. Paul likens himself as both a father and mother to the Thessalonians, and was torn away (orphaned) from them.
- Future Hope - Each section/chapter ends with a reference to the return of Christ. It is Paul's constant hope and encouragement and clearly something he wants to pass on to other believers, including us.

1 Thessalonians 1 - The Work of the Gospel

1 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:
Grace to you and peace.

2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers,

- We get to see the real heart of Paul here for other believers, and especially to those he ministered to. He thanks God for them, mentions them in prayer and remembers them before God.
- As believers we would do well to have a greater spiritual concern for each other, to remember each other in our prayers and thank God for each other.

3 remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

- Paul remembers three things of the Thessalonian church:
- 'work of faith'
 - work = ergon (ergonomics - efficiency in work) speaks of a profession/work. The result of the gospel in our lives is that we have a 'work of faith'. Our lives become characterised by gospel centred activity
 - Illustration - looking at my busy diary and wondering what on earth I would do with my time if I wasn't a Christian!
- 'labor of love'
 - labor = kopos (beating, sorrow, trouble) speaks of being heavy hearted because of our love for others. It is a love that we labor in and allow ourselves to become heavy hearted by the sin and darkness in this world
 - It is also a deep love for God that allows us to endure suffering and hardship because we love him.
 - We use this as a phrase about hard work which we enjoy or love. Our faith/life is a labour of love!
- 'steadfastness of hope'
 - This speaks of a constant, enduring and patient hope. Hope is crucial because it provides purpose and meaning to all that we do, to our work of faith and labour of love
 - The steadfastness of our hope is what ensures that we live productive and fruitful lives. One who is not steadfast and who is wavering will be unproductive because our hope fuels and motivates our faith
 - Hope says "it will be worth it"

4 For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.

- Our salvation (election) is shown by the evidence and work of the gospel in our lives
- 'not only in word' - it was not just the words of Paul and the apostles which brought salvation, it wasn't just their well reasoned argument and winning them though logic and persuasion

- The evidence of the gospel should be power, the presence of the Holy Spirit and full conviction - it is not just something we believe to be true in our heads, but that we know to be true in our spirits and feel to be true in our soul
- In this way, the gospel is all consuming, it consumes our entire being

You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

- Paul makes it clear and will explain further (in chapter 2) that they did not come with trickery but were transparent and sincere with their message.
- The great reception of the gospel is down to the presence of the Spirit, not the performance of their preaching

6And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, 7so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.

- Another evidence of true gospel work is that received the word in much affliction, yet with great joy. They were willing to suffer hardship straight away on account of the gospel, and yet this was accompanied by a deep joy from the Spirit
- In this way the Thessalonians imitated/mimicked both the apostles and even the Lord Jesus Christ, by embodying the word of God with great joy despite much affliction
- The Thessalonians became an example/model to other believers - the work of the gospel in their lives is a useful example of how to discern true gospel work - this is what true gospel work looks like!

8For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything.

- The word of the Lord 'sounded forth' from them, but this was not through preaching, just the knowledge that they had fully received the word! Paul then says 'your faith has gone everywhere', not that the gospel has gone everywhere. True gospel work is influential and creates ripples
- It can never be underestimated what the effect of true gospel passion has. Other people's faith are stirred to action and hearts are opened to the gospel just with the knowledge that others are fully embracing the word with all their heart, soul and mind
- Let us be known as a people who embody the living gospel, that our faith would go everywhere and influence many

9For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 10and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

- One final piece of evidence of true gospel work is putting away sin, turning from idols (the images of sin) to serve the living and true God
- The image of turning is like being in a car and realising you are going in the wrong direction, so then needing to turn around to go the other way. This is what life looks like when we pursue holiness, we put sin behind us.
- We do this being conscious of God's wrath to come on sinners, but placing our hope in Jesus Christ who delivers us from that wrath
- A major theme in this letter to the Thessalonians is the coming of Jesus Christ, and having a sure expectation of that reality.

1 Thessalonians 2:1-16 - Gospel Workers

1For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. 2But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.

- BOLDNESS
- One of the qualities of the gospel work of Paul and the apostles was their boldness in declaring the gospel.
- Despite suffering, shameful treatment and conflict they were bold in their message, which meant that their time was not in vain. Boldness amidst adversity ensures that we make the most of the opportunities given to us by God
- Their boldness was not in themselves but 'in our God'. We need to have a greater boldness in what God might do in, through and around us if we trust him.

3For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, 4but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.

- GODLY CHARACTER
- Here we see that the godly message of the gospel is complemented by the godly character of the apostles. The character of the apostles was not wayward, impure or deceitful but rather truthful, sincere and transparent.
- Paul and the apostles had been 'approved by God and entrusted with the gospel'. This is certainly true of their role as the first communicators of the gospel, but also applies to us that we would be approved/tested by God and be entrusted with the gospel
- Paul and his companions spoke 'to please God', not man. Even though the gospel saves sinners it is God's message, him who tests us and him whom we please. Therefore we must not dilute the gospel message simply to 'please people'

5For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness. 6Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others,

- NOT SELF-SERVING
- We see that the ministry of Paul was not self-serving, they did not come to flatter people for their personal gain or glory. We cannot and should not flatter people into the kingdom, and neither is their involvement in our ministry proof of their belonging to the kingdom.
- There is a danger that we 'try too hard' to win people through gimmicks and flattery, and we only ever win them for ourselves, not God. All churches and leaders are susceptible to the temptation to seek glory, to be the biggest and best church in town.

though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. 7But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.

- GENTLE
- Paul could have made demands in his authority as an apostle but chose to be gentle, like a mother taking care of her baby
- We must be gentle and not demanding, especially as leaders

- Paul uses the word 'nurse' (nursing mother) as one who gives nourishment (where the word 'nurse' comes from) - the job of leaders is to nourish their people, not burden them

So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

- HEART & SOUL
- The apostles had such a yearning for the Thessalonians that they were willing to give their hearts and souls for these people
- Many noble people will give of their time, money and energy for a cause, but it is a special thing for someone to give their heart and soul to something
- We need to be a people who give our hearts and souls for others

9For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.

- NOT A BURDEN
- Even though the apostles could have received money, food or other means of support from the Thessalonians during their ministry, they didn't, as not to be a burden on them
- We must ensure as believers, that our lives are not burdensome to others in any way, in emotion or deed. Coming across as a burden only detracts from the gospel, as people move away from us they also move away from the gospel

10You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. 11For you know how, like a father with his children, 12we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

- FAMILY
- The Kingdom of God is a family, not an organisation - this is not about submitting to one another out of power or rank, but doing so being part of the family of God
- Discipleship comes through exhortation, encouragement and calling each other to walk in a manner worthy of God - we deal with each other like family

13And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.

- EMBRACING THE WORD
- Paul shows that one true mark of gospel presence and genuine believers is that they embrace and submit to the word of God
- They do not see it simply as the 'word of men' which is prone to error and can be held lightly, but that it really is the 'word of God' and so there is a far greater weight and authority to it

14For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, 15who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind 16by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might

be saved—so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them at last!

- WILLINGNESS TO SUFFER
- Paul says that the Thessalonians became ‘imitators’ of other churches because of the same suffering and rejection they experienced
- Whilst it is not our intention to face rejection or hardship in life, we accept that this does happen - simply because the human nature is opposed to the gospel
- Yet we do not yield to this to please man and make ourselves happy, because as Paul has already said, we seek to please God who tests our hearts

1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13 - Our Glory & Joy

17But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, 18because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us.

- We see here such a personal sense of affection from Paul for the Thessalonians, he was 'torn away' but not in his heart. He even mentions himself by name, that this desire was not just of his role or team, but himself personally!
 - We must endeavour to love each other genuinely and sincerely and not simply as 'projects'
- 'satan hindered us' - Paul points out that it was specifically Satan who had prevented Paul returning to 'establish and exhort them' in their faith (3:1). Satan (the adversary) is adverse towards the growth of the gospel and building of God's kingdom

19For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? 20For you are our glory and joy.

- What is surprising here is that in answer to his own question, Paul's states that his hope, joy, crown and boast is not Jesus...but the church!
- We can understand this in relation to Paul's ministry, he had been entrusted to communicate the gospel to the gentile nations, so the effectiveness of his ministry would be like a crown to him when Jesus returns.
- However, we can also mirror this same attitude by imitating God's attitude towards the church. For Paul, the church is his glory and joy, not just because it's his ministry, but because it's God's glory and joy.
- Titus 2:14 - God is purifying for himself a people that his very own, eager to do what is good
- The church is God's glory and joy, and since we are part of that it becomes our glory and joy too, especially in the context of adversity which this is. There is a greater glory and joy for the believer who overcomes the adversity of satan in their faith.
- People need to hear the gospel not just for the saving of their souls, but for God's greater glory and joy!

3:1Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, 2and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith,

- 'bear it no longer' - the great question on Paul's mind is whether the young faith of the Thessalonians would stand under trial. They were desperate to know whether their faith would continue and so ensured they were established and exhorted

3that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. 4For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know.

- This deep concern for their faith is in the context of affliction (pressure)
- Paul says that they were destined for affliction. This is not clear whether he is referring just to himself (and the apostles) or the Thessalonians too, but really we can see that all believers in Jesus are destined for some degree of affliction

- We have to realise that the enemy Satan, the world which we live in and even the bodies we are clothed in are inclined to sin and want us to deny Christ.

5For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain.

- Affliction often manifests itself in temptation.
- I wonder if the greatest threat for the church in the western world is not direct affliction or persecution, but the temptation to live out a comfortable and diluted faith

6But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you—

- The Thessalonians still mimic the faith of the apostles

7for this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith. 8For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord.

- Paul is not just encouraged and comforted to know about the Thessalonians faith but he also says 'for now we live'.
- It's like Paul is saying "this is the life" or "this is living now", knowing that the Thessalonians are standing fast in the Lord.
- We can see that the faith and growth of the church was central to his life. It makes sense that if other believers were his glory and joy, then for those believers to be standing fast in the Lord would make Paul 'live'.

9For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, 10as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?

- Again, Paul is filled with joy for the Thessalonians faith and feels thankful to God simply because of his joy!
- His goal and ambition is to supply what is lacking in their faith, he desires them to fully mature in their faith for God's glory and joy. As the body of Christ comes together we supply what is lacking in each others faith

11Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, 12and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, 13so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

- Paul prays two things here for a purpose - that God might direct their way to them and to increase in love for one another, treasuring each other in fellowship
- For what purpose? - so that God might establish us as a blameless and holy people before God

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12 - Attractive Holiness

1Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. 2For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

- 'More and more' indicates that our sanctification and the manner in which we please God is not something that we arrive at or can complete, but that we strive to grow in more and more
- It is not enough to simply say that our lives 'are pleasing' to God, but that our lives would become more and more pleasing to God as we strive to deal with the smaller and less noticeable sins of our lives
- This is how we are to encourage each other in our walks with God, that we affirm and acknowledge what is pleasing to God in their lives and actions, and yet spur them on for more

3For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; 4that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, 5not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God;

- Sexual immorality is something we have to abstain from, the desire and opportunity will always be present, however small. It is something we must continually choose to separate from
- Abstain means "to have by separating from", in that in abstaining from sexual immorality we have a healthier and holier marriage or celibacy. Abstinence is about choosing the greater rather than succumbing to the lesser
- 'Control his own body' literally means 'own his own vessel'. Abstinence is a continual and present choice because our bodies (vessels) are full of desires which need to be controlled and mastered. Paul likely uses the word for vessel (skeuos) here instead of body (sōma) to create that sense of disconnection between the will and the body. Our bodies are simply vessels filled with desires, and either they will master/own us or we will master/own them
- The other alternative is to allow our bodies to overwhelm us in their passionate desires, the types of desires which grow and grow if not challenged and subdued. This would be the practice of 'Gentiles who do not know God'. When God is not in the equation of life, then we are left only being able to listen to and gratify the desires of our bodies

6that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. 7For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. 8Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

- Sexual immorality is not just transgression against God but often against others too, particularly in the context of adultery whereby we clearly wrong someone else by having sexual relations with their spouse
- The Lord is described as an 'avenger' in this context of adultery, and the Thessalonians have been solemnly warned about this before. The transgression of adultery greatly offends God's heart because it is a picture of how humanity has

given itself in adultery to sin, running the once perfect unity that God had with his people

- God has not called us 'based upon' our impurity but called us 'in' our sanctification. This is not describing what we have been called to, but where we have been called from. Despite our impurity, God has already begun to sanctify us, and it's in this sanctification that he is calling us
- Therefore, to disregard acts of holiness is to disregard the work which God is doing in us through sanctification, by the Spirit. God has begun the process of sanctification and we either walk in line with that or reject it.

9Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, 10for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more,

- Paul has already shown how the Thessalonians love each other and are examples of this to others. They have been 'taught by God' through the process of sanctification, as sanctification is like sitting at the feet of Jesus and learning his ways.
- Despite loving others well, Paul encourages them to do this 'more and more'. There is always more to be done in the way of brotherly love, not just in opportunity but also in practice.

11and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, 12so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

- To live quietly is not to live excluded from others, but quietly and peacefully amongst others, minding one's own affairs and working faithfully. It is to live a life free from chaos, conflict and complaint and instead to live in peace, patience and joy. This is attractive holiness.
- Being dependent on no-one is not about being self-reliant and separated from others either, but that our lives might be a blessing, not a burden to others

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 - Resurrection Reality

13But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.

- The Thessalonians must have expressed some concern and uncertainty about friends and family who had died, and the uncertainty of their souls
- We need not grieve brothers and sisters who have died, because we have hope. We look forward to something greater in the future and something beyond death
- Having a perspective of hope rather than an 'end' in death changes our outlook on life. Suddenly death is not an ending but a doorway into a greater and more beautiful reality

14For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.

- Because Jesus has died and risen again, he has made a way and made it possible for us to do this!
- God brought Jesus back from the grave and so will bring us too
- When Jesus said 'the gates of hell (hades) will not prevail against the church', he meant that death cannot contain the church. We will be resurrected and the gates of death will be burst open!
- This could also mean that God will bring the souls of deceased believers back with him when he returns, that the dead in Christ will return with him and be united to their bodies.

15For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.

- God is coming back for the dead first, those who have died first in Christ will be raised first in Christ.
- So in death we are not alone, but we join a long line of believers through the ages who have placed faith in Christ and who are awaiting their resurrection

16For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God.

- The beauty and mystery of the gospel is not that we ascended to heaven but that the son descended to us. Here at his second coming, Christ descends once more to his bride, the church.
- With a shout, the voice of an archangel and the sound of a trumpet
 - Shout - the shout of the multitude of heavenly hosts
 - Archangel - the archangels (highest authority) will be doing the Lord's bidding and announcing his return
 - Trumpet - sounding the victory that the Lord has won over Satan and death
- This is the return of the King!

And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

- Meeting the Lord in the clouds resembles a people from a city going out to receive a king/dignitary and welcome him back
- Christ is coming to establish his rule on earth and so we will meet the Lord 'in the air' and so welcome him back to establish his throne
- The clouds/air is also symbolic of the divide between heaven and earth. Christ is coming to remove this divide that heaven and earth may be one once more

18Therefore encourage one another with these words.

- Thinking and meditating on these events should bring encouragement
- We can have encouragement that the king is returning, there is no fear in death
- So we anticipate and look forward to the return of our king

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 - Children of the Day

1 Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you.

- God will bring about the day of the Lord in the right 'season' (proper/opportune time). It will not be random but come at the right time
- God is waiting for all things to come to a head and reach their fulfilment and then the end will come

2 For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.

3 While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

- The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night, unexpectedly for those that are asleep. This and the next verse show that the 'suddenness' of the day of the Lord is only for the unsaved who are spiritual asleep and cannot discern the times and seasons
- The spiritual sleep will be partnered with 'peace and security' for the unsaved. There will be no sense of concern or anxiety but a naive ignorance of the times and seasons. Generally, most societies are becoming more at peace and secure over time, beckoning the day of the Lord
- The day of the Lord will come like labour pains to a pregnant woman, transferring her from long term pregnancy to painful and irreversible labour. Just as a pregnant woman waits for the inevitable painful birth of her baby, so the world waits for the inevitable judgement

4 But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. 5 For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness.

- As we are children of the day, the day of the Lord will not come as a surprise to us. We belong to the light and so will see things happening in the light
- This suggests that the day of the Lord will not come so suddenly as we often think, there is a sense that we should be able to discern and expect it's arrival

6 So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. 8 But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.

- Since we belong to the day and have a spiritual awareness of the times and seasons, it is fitting that we remain awake and sober, being spiritually sensitive and aware of what God is doing in the world.
- Sleep and drunkenness are symbols of spiritual insensitivity. Drunkenness is like a living symbol of the spiritual dullness in the world. People dull their senses through drink, just as they are also dulled to the person and plans of God.
- Paul mentions elements of the armour of God (ref Isaiah 59), as we identify ourselves as children of the light and day. To be spiritually sober is to express faith, hope and love. These things characterise our lives, make us sensitive to the person and plans of God, and identify us as children of the day.

9For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. 11Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

- People who are in darkness are destined for darkness, just as those who are in light are destined for greater light. This is not of our own doing or making, but because Jesus tasted the darkness of death for us.
- As children of the day, whether we are asleep or awake (dead or alive) we will live in light with him.
- To be spiritually awake and sober is not something we can just assume, but something we must persevere in through the strength of the Holy Spirit. Because of this, we must encourage and build each other up to remain awake and sober.

1 Thessalonians 5:12-28 - Sanctified Through & Through

12We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, 13and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.

- Sanctified through leaders
- This is about acknowledging and appreciating leaders who labor, labouring to teach the word, labouring to pastorally care, labouring in prayer. The labor deserves acknowledgement, not just the role. Too many leaders go unacknowledged doing far more than what people see
- We all need people over us to protect and guide us, and also to admonish us (setting our minds straight). We need shaping and shepherding as people and it is the role of leaders to do so
- Leadership/pastoring is a high calling and it is right to esteem people highly who labor in this important kingdom work
- This relationship between the leader and his people needs to be at peace. The leader needs to deal gently and the people need to deal respectfully, a peaceful relationship is a fruitful relationship

14And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. 15See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.

- Sanctified through each other
- We are also sanctified through each other as we do life as a community and body of the Lord.
- This is not just about agreeing with each other but being willing to shape each other, even admonishing/warning those who are idle/disorderly
- Sanctification can be a positive work as well (not just negative pruning), such as encouraging the fainthearted/timid and helping the weak
- Often the work of sanctification is in how we respond to evil, not that we should reciprocate it but respond with goodness and kindness instead. The reality of our sinfulness is that we may wrong each other but we shape each other by responding with goodness and kindness instead
- Paul finishes this letter by saying 'greet each other with a holy kiss'. It's hard to remain angry and bitter with someone when greeting them with a kiss!

16Rejoice always, 17pray without ceasing, 18give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

- Sanctified through thankfulness
- The praying without ceasing here is nestled between always rejoicing and giving thanks in all circumstances. The pattern of 'always, not ceasing, in all circumstances' is the context for rejoicing, praying and thanking. So the prayer here is really about prayers of thankful rejoicing. These are the kind of prayers that we say throughout the day whilst taking joy in and thanking God for his grace and numerous blessings.

- What is more, is that this is God's will for us, thankfulness! Paul writes to the Colossians that part of pleasing God in every way is 'giving joyful thanks' to him (Col 1:12). We do not often consider that simply giving thanks to God is part of his will for us, but it really is. Our thankfulness shows gratitude for the revealed kindness of God to us through the gospel, and that is God's very desire; a people who are pleasing and thankful to him.

19Do not quench the Spirit. 20Do not despise prophecies, 21but test everything; hold fast what is good. 22Abstain from every form of evil.

- Sanctified through the Spirit
- Instead of quenching the Holy Spirit, we need to stoke the 'fire' of the Spirit and increase our sensitivity to Him.
- Just as we often sit round a fire and gaze at the flames, we need to allow our hearts to sit in the presence of God and gaze at the Holy Spirit, being sensitive to his promptings
- We should be a people who are eager to receive a prophecy from the Holy Spirit, but yet do so with integrity and a sharpened mind, testing everything to make sure it is good.
- The Holy Spirit sanctifies us by speaking into our lives, often through other people
- The shaping and sharpening of the Spirit helps us to abstain from every form of evil. One might ask, how on earth can we abstain from EVERY form of evil when it is everywhere, but that is the role of the Spirit as he works in our lives

23Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

- God is one who sanctifies us completely (through and through), this is not an instantaneous event but a regular process. The NIV iteration of 'through and through' invokes a healthy picture, of something being washed through again and again. Like dirty clothes or dishes being put through another wash cycle to really cleanse them through and through.
- This is the work of the Spirit, a continual washing process. "...He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit" Titus 3:5
- 'spirit, soul and body' - here we get an emphasis on God's concern for our bodies and the need for resurrection. There is not just a desire to keep our spirits and souls blameless but indeed our whole being. When we sin we often sin against our own bodies
- God is faithful, God is the one who sanctifies and he will surely do it!

25Brothers, pray for us.

26Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss.

27I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.

28The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

- Paul asks for the prayers of the Thessalonians, even apostles need the prayers of others for God to complete his sanctifying work in their lives. The greatest thing we need, apart from Christ, is prayer.
- Paul encourages them to greet each other with personal and physical affection. This is not just a cultural statement from antiquity but an encouragement to remain close

and love each other. It's difficult to hold a grudge with someone and embrace/kiss them at the same time.

- Paul is insistent that the letter is read to all the brothers to make sure everyone's questions and concerns are met, and that no-one is left uninformed.