

OVERVIEW & OUTLINE

1 Thessalonians

The evangel according to Paul

“To make known the secret of the evangel” (6:20)

BOB EVELY

2011.

“... for the Lord Himself will be descending from heaven with a shout of command, with the voice of the Chief Messenger, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ shall be rising first. Thereupon we, the living who are surviving, shall at the same time be snatched away together with them in clouds, to meet the Lord in the air ...”

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

*All Scriptures taken from the Concordant Literal New Testament
and the Concordant Version of the Old Testament unless otherwise noted.
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About the Author

Paul begins by identifying himself as the writer of this letter (1:1) Let us recall the commission Paul received on the road to Damascus: *He is a choice instrument of Mine, to bear My name before both the nations and kings, besides the sons of Israel.* (Acts 9:15-16) And we know from Acts that Paul did go first to the synagogues to proclaim Christ to the Jews, and then to the Gentiles. Peter, John, James and other New Testament writers had a commission to Israel only. Paul alone was commissioned to go to the Gentiles.

We cannot assume Paul's message to the Gentiles was the same as the message proclaimed by the others unto Israel. Paul stressed that the gospel he proclaimed was not received from man, *but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ.* (Galatians 1:11-12) If he preached the same gospel, why would he not have studied under the Twelve who had heard and observed Christ Himself during His earthly ministry? And why would Paul refer to his proclamation as "my evangel" instead of "the evangel?" (Romans 2:16; 16:25-26). Paul notes that he had been entrusted with the evangel of the Uncircumcision, and Peter had been trusted with the evangel of the Circumcision. (Galatians 2:7). He did not say that his was the evangel to the Uncircumcision; but of the Uncircumcision. It was a different message, and this can be clearly seen if we examine the details. Paul is the only one to have mentioned the rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4:13, or the expectation of the body of Christ in the celestials in Ephesians 2:6. Israels' expectation was always upon the earth, not in the celestials or heavens.

Paul was abandoned by nearly all at the end of his ministry (see 2 Timothy 1:15; 4:16; Acts 21:20). Note in the Acts passage that when Paul returned to Jerusalem he was opposed not by unbelieving Jews, but by believing Jews who were zealous for the law – a clear signal that Paul's message was different than that of the Twelve, and as a result Paul was opposed by Jewish *believers*.

Paul, in his writings, refers to a mystery that had been previously concealed, but which he was now revealing as God had instructed him. ... *His body, which is the ecclesia of which I became a dispenser, in accord with the administration of God, which is granted to me for you, **to complete the word of God** ... the **secret** which has been **concealed** from the eons and from the generations, yet now was **made manifest** to His saints ...* (Colossians 1:24-16) ... *by revelation the secret is made known to me ... the secret of the Christ, which, in other generations, is not made known to the sons of humanity ...* (Ephesians 3:3-5)

Clearly Paul was commissioned to address a group not previously addressed by the Twelve (the Gentiles), with a different message that had been revealed to him not by man but by Christ Himself.

OPENING REMARKS

The Address on the Envelope (1:1)

From: *Paul and Silvanus and Timothy ...*

To: *The ecclesia of the Thessalonians* [See *ecclesia* in glossary]

Paul's Unintermittent Prayers (1:2) ... Paul gives thanks to God for the Thessalonians' work of faith, toil of love and endurance of expectation. This is not a selfish petition, but strictly God-centered.

Concerning the Evangel (1:5) ... it came not just in word but also in power, in holy spirit, and in much assurance. [See *evangel* in glossary]

PAUL BRINGS THE EVANGEL

The Thessalonians were in the midst of affliction (1:6), but they received the evangel with **joy**. They became **models** for all believers. And in response to the evangel they turned back from idols to be slaving for the living and true God. Furthermore, they were **waiting for the Son out of the heavens** ... *our Rescuer out of the coming indignation* (v. 10)

The ecclesia is saved from indignation. Remember that indignation was coming upon the world (Romans 2:9), on the *day of indignation* that is set by God (Romans 2:5). But the believer is saved from this coming indignation (Romans 5:9) ... by *our Rescuer out of the coming indignation* (1 Thessalonians 1:10). We within the Body of Christ are saved from the coming indignation not because we are better than others of humanity; but because God has elected to choose a subset of humanity ... giving them the ability to believe and perceive that which He has revealed ... and enabling them to serve as a complement of Christ in this age and in the ages to come; toward the end that God's will for mankind be accomplished; that all mankind be saved and come to a realization of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4).

Paul spoke the evangel with vast struggle (2:1), not out of deception, uncleanness or guile ... but as tested by God to be entrusted with the evangel. He sought **to please God, not men**. He was not flattering in expression so as to seek glory from men.

Paul's example ... not burdensome (2:6). He could have been a burden as an apostle, but instead *became gentle in your midst*. **He worked** night and day so as not to be burdensome, while heralding the evangel of God ... benignly, justly and blamelessly ... consoling and comforting the Thessalonian believers. In other words, Paul worked to support himself, and did not derive his income from preaching the evangel ... thereby allowing complete freedom to proclaim the evangel with pure motive, seeking only to please God.

Walk worthily (2:12) was Paul's entreaty. Far from threatening the believers if they failed to have faith, Paul simply encourages them to *be walking worthily of God, Who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.*

Paul's word is the word of God (2:13) ... *in accepting the word heard from us, from God you receive, not the word of men, but according as it truly is, the word of God, which is operating also in you who are believing.*

We note here a distinction between the believer and unbeliever. While the word of God may be heard by those who are not believing, it is **operating** in the believer. This must be so, in order to equip the believer for the task to which he is called by God.

There was suffering among the believers (2:14) ... *you suffered ... by your own fellowtribesmen, according as they also by the Jews ...* The Thessalonian believers were not, then, persecuted by unbelieving Jews ... but by believers who were *forbidding us to speak to the nations that they may be saved...*

PAUL'S DESIRE TO COME

Satan hindered Paul's coming (2:17). Paul tried more than once to come to the Thessalonians, but Satan hindered him. The Deceiver plays a part in events that take place upon the earth, but never to the extent that God's plans are thwarted.

Timothy is sent (3:1) to **establish** the believers, to **console** them for the sake of their faith ... that they **not be swayed by their afflictions**. Paul was concerned about their faith, *lest somehow the trier tries you and our toil may be coming to be for naught* (3:5). Timothy consoles Paul when he reports *the evangel of their faith* (3:6). [See *evangel* in appendix]

Paul desires to come to adjust deficiencies in their faith (3:10). While Paul was encouraged by the steadfastness of their faith, there were still deficiencies that needed to be corrected and strengthened. At least one of the deficiencies is referred to ...

Superabound in love ... *for one another and for all ... to establish your hearts unblamable in holiness in front of our God ...* (3:12-13) It is not just for fellow believers that love should superabound, but for **all**. And it is this superabounding love that will cause the believers' hearts to be unblamable in holiness (set-apart-ness) before God. [See *holy* in appendix]

BEHAVIOR WITHIN THE ECCLESIA

Be walking and pleasing God as you accepted from us (4:1). To some extent the believers had been walking properly, but Paul adds, **be superabounding** *yet more* (4:2).

For this is the will of God: your **holiness** (4:3). [See *holy* in appendix] Some of the specific distinct behaviors that God calls His people to are noted. *Be abstaining from all prostitution* (4:4). Keep your own vessel *in holiness and honor, not in lustful passion* as those of the nations who are not acquainted with God (4:4-5). Not circumventing and overreaching your brother in this matter (4:6). This statement amidst the current context would imply that those within the ecclesia were, at times, driven by passion for those who were married to others. *For God calls us not for uncleanness, but in holiness* (4:7).

You are **loving one another**, but be **superabounding** yet more (4:10). Be quiet ... **engaged in your own affairs** (4:11).

Work with your hands ... *that you may be walking respectably toward those outside, and you may have need of nothing* (4:12).

THE EXPECTATION OF THE ECCLESIA (RAPTURE)

We do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are reposing, lest you may sorrow according as the rest, also, who have no expectation. (4:13) It is not that the believer does not sorrow. He sorrows in a different way than those outside the ecclesia, because he possesses an expectation that those outside do not recognize. The believer *knows with certainty* what will take place in the ages to come. This, then, is one of the distinctives in believing.

For, if we are believing that Jesus died and rose, thus also, those who are put to repose, will God, through Jesus, lead forth together with Him. For this we are saying to you by the word of the Lord, that we, the living, who are surviving to the presence of the Lord, should by no means outstrip those who are put to repose, for the Lord Himself will be descending from heaven with a shout of command, with the voice of the Chief Messenger, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ shall be rising first. This is the expectation that is recognized by believers. There will come a day when the trumpet sounds and the believers who had previously died will be resurrected.

Thereupon we, the living who are surviving, shall at the same time be snatched away together with them in clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. And thus shall we always be together with the Lord. Commonly known as "the rapture," here is the moment when Christ calls the body of Christ to be with Him. Those still living at this time do not die, but are *snatched away* into the

clouds to be with the Lord ... reunited with those who had previously died who are resurrected and also snatched away.

So that, console one another with these words. Knowing this day is coming is our *expectation* and it enables us to mourn our losses differently than those outside the ecclesia that do not share this expectation. This is not to say that those outside the ecclesia will not also be resurrected. This will occur at a subsequent time. But because the body of Christ has been called, in part, to serve God's purposes in the heavenly realm in the ages to come, we are called *first* on this day described to the Thessalonians. [See *expectation* in glossary]

THE DAY OF THE LORD

The **Day of the Lord** will come as a thief in the night. Others may say that all is peaceful and secure, yet **extermination** will come. But the ecclesia is not in darkness about these events, and can therefore be **watching** and **sober** (and not drowsing). So while others may be ignorant about what will take place when the Day of the Lord comes, the believer is not.

*Yet we, being of the day, may be sober, putting on the cuirass of **faith and love**, and the helmet, the **expectation of salvation**, for God **did not appoint us to indignation** but to the procuring of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for our sakes, that, whether we may be watching or drowsing, we should be living at the same time together with Him.* (5:8-10)

From this description we see that the Day of the Lord is not the same event as the Snatching Away (or Rapture). It is a time when there will be extermination (death) and indignation. But the believer can have faith and love, because *God did not appoint us to indignation* (5:9). First will come the snatching away of the ecclesia, whereupon we will be with the Lord ... and then will come the Day of The Lord upon the earth.

And with this knowledge ... this expectation of what lies ahead ... *whether we may be watching or drowsing, we should be living at the same time together with Him.* (5:10) Our salvation and rescue from indignation is not dependent on our being watchful. We are called to be watchful and sober (not drowsing and drunk), but even if we fail to be watchful we are living with Him ... both figuratively in the present age, and literally once we are snatched away to be with Him.

CHURCH ORGANIZATION

Now we are asking you, brethren, to perceive those who are toiling among you and presiding over you in the Lord and admonishing you, and to deem

them exceedingly distinguished in love, because of their work. (5:12) Here is a glimpse at the structure within the ecclesia at this time. There were those **presiding** over others, whose task included *admonishing* the believers as appropriate. But while we see glimpses like this of “church organization,” it is far from what the modern day church has become with its bureaucratic structure and the power vested in its leaders. The ecclesia of Paul’s day was very informal and loosely structured.

BEHAVIOR WITHIN THE ECCLESIA

Among the instructions given to the ecclesia ...

- Be at peace among yourselves
- Admonish the disorderly
- Comfort the faint-hearted
- Uphold the infirm
- Be patient toward all
- See that no one may be rendering evil for evil
- Always pursue that which is good for one another as well as for all
- Be rejoicing always
- Be praying unintermittingly
- In everything be giving thanks
- Quench not the spirit
- Scorn not prophecies
- Yet be testing all, retaining the ideal
- Abstain from everything wicked to the perception

Relative to Paul’s statement concerning prophecies, this is an indication that the letter to the Thessalonians was an earlier letter than Colossians, where Paul indicates that he was charged with *completing* the word of God. Once Paul completed that commission, could it be that prophecy was no longer required, since the word from God had been completed?

CLOSING

*Now may the God of peace Himself be hallowing you wholly; and may your unimpaired spirit and soul and body be kept blameless in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ! Faithful is He Who is calling you, **Who will be doing it also.** It is not by human effort that the believer lives a holy life. It is God *Who will be doing it.* Remember, *holy* in the Scriptures simply means set-apart, distinct or different. But it is God that deems something or someone set-apart. He has deemed the body of Christ set-apart, and those within the body remain set-apart regardless of their behavior. It is God that has declared certain things or certain ones to be set-apart, and He will be *wholly* setting us apart through His works, not our own.*

Among Paul's other closing remarks ... *pray concerning us ... read this epistle to all the holy brethren.*

SUMMARY.

This letter to the Thessalonians finds the ecclesia in the midst of affliction.

- ✓ *Paul writes to encourage them to stand firm in the faith*
- ✓ *Paul reminds them of their expectation/hope (4:13)*
- ✓ *He encourages proper behavior among the ecclesia*

APPENDIX: KEY WORDS

Distinctives in Believers: Why has God chosen a certain, select group from mankind (the body of Christ in this present age)? What makes this group different from the rest of mankind?

- All mankind may hear the word of God, but the word of God is *operating* in the believer. (1 Thes 2:13)
- The believer has *expectation* ... a knowledge with certainty as to what will occur in the ages to come ... the *resurrection*. (1 Thes 4:13)

Ecclesia: The Greek *ecclesia* is most always translated *church* in our Bible versions, except in those cases where the notion of *church* does not fit. This inconsistency in translation causes us to lose valuable insights provided by God, and requires that we place great faith in the translators and not in the word of God itself. *Ecclesia* means called-out-ones ... those whom God has called out of the larger group of humanity for some specific purpose. But just as there are different presidential administrations enforcing different policies in our political realm, so also there are different administrations in God's workings in the world. In his letters, Paul speaks of the specific administration of God that was granted to him, in which he proclaims that the body of Christ is the specific ecclesia, or group of called-out-ones, for which he became a dispenser of good news. The Body of Christ was not introduced by any other person in the Scriptures, either before or after Paul. It was Paul's specific commission. Peter and others within the Twelve addressed the believers among Israel ... that was the called-out-group (ecclesia) they addressed. Paul had a *different* commission, in a *different* administration, and the body of Christ was the called-out-group (*ecclesia*) that he addressed.

Evangel: The Greek *evangel* is most always translated *gospel* in our Bible versions, except in cases where our notion of *gospel* does not fit the context. We therefore place great faith in the translator, and in orthodox teachings, when we use our English Bibles to understand what the *gospel* is. The fact is that *evangel* simply means *good news* ... nothing more. We have a tendency

to think there is a single *gospel* for all eras, and when we hear the word we immediately conjure the notion that has indoctrinated us. But the good news can, and does, differ from one context to another. In 1 Thessalonians 3:6 for example, *evangel* simply refers to the good news that Paul received concerning the faith of the Thessalonian believers. Whenever we see the word *evangel* (or *gospel* in our English versions) we should always ask ourselves what the good news consists of in that context.

Expectation (Resurrection): There are a number of passages that refer to the resurrection of various groups of people at different times.

Resurrection event #1 (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18): The dead in Christ will be raised, along with those in Christ who are alive, when “the rapture” occurs. This event is not revealed elsewhere in the Scriptures, but only by Paul who was given the gospel of the Uncircumcision (Galatians 2:7-9). Paul writes that those in Christ will be *snatched away* to meet the Lord in the air. This is a different event from when Christ returns to the earth to reign. Israel awaits His return to the earth, to restore the kingdom unto Israel (see Acts 1:6-7). But the body of Christ awaits Him to snatch us away to meet Him in the air. Israel’s expectation is to serve God upon the earth when Christ reigns. Our expectation is to serve Him in the celestials (the heavens), where we will be a display of His grace in the oncoming eons (Ephesians 2:6-7).

After this resurrection of the body of Christ, the time of God’s indignation (The Great Tribulation) as foretold in the book of Revelation will occur. Note that the body of Christ is to be rescued out of the coming indignation (1 Thessalonians 1:10). God did not appoint us to indignation (1 Thessalonians 5:8-9). At the conclusion of this time of Tribulation, Christ will return to the earth (Revelation 19:11 and following). Thrones will be setup, and there will be a judgment of those living at the time of Christ’s return (Revelation 20:4 and Matthew 25:31).

Resurrection event #2 (Revelation 20:4-5): The passage tells us this is “the former resurrection” Those who have been executed because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and who do not worship the wild beast or its image, and who did not take the emblem (mark) of the beast will be resurrected. These will live and reign with Christ a thousand years (Revelation 20:5). While the body of Christ is reigning in service to God in the heavens, the group described here from among Israel will reign in service to God upon the earth.

After the thousand year reign, Satan will be loosed (Revelation 20:7) and will deceive the nations, mobilizing them for battle. The Adversary (Satan) will be cast into the lake of fire to be tormented for the eons of the eons (at least two eons, out of all the eons).

Resurrection event #3 (Revelation 20:11-15): The sea and hades give up their dead. They are resurrected and stand before the throne and are judged in

accord with their acts. Those not found in the scroll of life are cast into the lake of fire. (Note that the duration of their time in the lake of fire is not mentioned as it was for the Adversary.)

Then we see this present heaven and earth coming to an end, and the creation of a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21:1). Some time after this, when all are subjected to God, will come the “consummation” (1 Corinthians 15:20-28). This is the climax of history. As in Adam all are dying, so also in Christ are all made alive. Christ reigns until all enemies are under His feet (subjected to Him), and the last enemy (death) is abolished. Christ is then subjected to God the Father, as God becomes All in all.

Holy: If we examine the word *holy* or *hallowed* in every instance where we find it, we observe its meaning is to be *set apart* or *differentiated*. God is holy (set apart), and He designates certain people or things as holy; not because they have any special merit, but because God has chosen them to be used in some fashion for his purposes. The clothing to be used by the priests in the Old Testament were not necessarily *better* than other clothing, and the animals deemed to be *clean* were not necessarily *better* or more righteous than other animals. But God chose certain clothing and certain animals to be *set apart ... to differentiate* his people from other peoples of the earth. And when one is designated as holy, God defines certain behaviors for that individual that are acceptable, and that differentiate that one from others. So holy does not mean better or more righteous than others. Holy simply means set apart or differentiated from others. In the Old Testament God delivered to Israel (His set apart people) the Law; but Israel found it impossible to keep the Law. As it turns out, the Law was used to show the people their helplessness to be righteous based on their works, and it led them to Christ. In Galatians, Paul would tell the believers that they were freed from the Law. The elements of the Law were no longer requirements for God’s people, although Paul continues to encourage the believers to live a life that was worthy of God’s grace that had been given to them freely. So in the Old Testament, God’s people (Israel) were set apart, and they were expected to follow very detailed set-apart behaviors to be righteous. In the present era, through God’s grace the set-apart people (body of Christ) are *holy* regardless of behavior. Certain behavior is described as acceptable and other behavior as unacceptable, but regardless of behavior those within the body of Christ are saved and continue to be God’s holy people.

A word about Bible translations: Today there are many different Bible translations to choose from. Many of the newer ones have been written for commercial purposes, so as to make a financial profit. And translators that try to make the Bible easier to read integrate their opinions and theologies into the translation, making them *interpretations* instead of translations. Many different Hebrew or Greek words are translated using a single English word, making it impossible to recognize distinctions without using laborious study helps. The translators have done this because they have determined there is no practical difference between the various Hebrew and Greek words; but

what if they are wrong? Similarly, a single word in the Hebrew or Greek is often translated using many different English words with drastically different meanings. Here the translators assume to know that God was using a single word to refer to very different ideas. Could the translators be wrong in their assumptions?

I appreciate the Concordant Version, not because I trust the translators more than other translators, but because of the methodology used. Great care is taken to allow the reader to distinguish between different Greek or Hebrew words. Whenever possible, an English word is only used for a single Greek or Hebrew word, and each Hebrew or Greek word is translated using the same consistent English word or idea. There is a keyword concordance in the back of the New Testament that allows the reader to look at all other instances where the same Greek word was used, thereby checking the translation.

This methodology may make the translation more difficult to read, but it also preserves the distinctions made in God's Word in the original languages, and it prevents the bias of the translator from creeping into the translation as much as is humanly possible.

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