

1 Thessalonians

1:1. “Silvanus.” = “Silas” (Acts 15:22). “Silvanus” is Silas’ Roman name and “Silas” is his Hebrew name. As Lenski writes, “From Acts 16:32 we know that Silas was a Roman. The added Roman name of a native Jew was often chosen because of a similarity in sound.” (cp. 2 Thess. 1:2).

“in God” The Greek word *en* (#1722 ἐν) has a wide semantic range. The phrase is ambiguous on purpose, and means many things, all of which are true, because the Christian is “in” God or “in” Christ in many ways. We are “in connection with” God (Lenski), and the connection is due both to our position as children of God by birth and our being connected to God by our life and love. “In” as “in connection with,” or “in relation with,” is one of the foundational meanings of “in” (BDAG). “Christians are not simply people who have heard about God and trust Him. They live “in” Him day by day. All their deeds are done in Him” (L. Morris, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*). Some authors prefer “in union with” (Barnes’ Notes) and that also is a meaning. The spiritual union we have with Christ is intimate indeed, because we are part of his very body (Col. 1:18). In this instance, the phrase “in God” can also be a locative usage, and thus mean “grounded in” God (*Hendriksen New Testament Commentary*; Robertson, *Word Pictures*). Since the locative and dative cases are exactly the same in Greek, only the context can be used to tell the difference, and in situations like this when both meanings are true and apply, the ambiguity is purposeful and can be the figure of speech *amphibologia* (cp. Bullinger, *Figures*).

The phrase “in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” is necessary as a modifier of the word “congregation” because, as a study of *ekklesia* (congregation; church; assembly) shows, there would have been many “congregations” in Thessalonica (see Matt. 16:18 commentary on “congregation”). There would have been some congregations that gathered to worship the Emperor, some to worship the Roman gods or various mystery religions (such as the cult of Isis), and other congregations as well. This epistle from Paul was to none of those “congregations,” but was to the congregation that was grounded in, in relation to, and in union with, God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son.

1:2. “always for you all.” This is the figure of speech, *homoeopropheron* (Alliteration). The Greek is “*pantote peri panton*,” quite an attention grabber.

1:3. “work prompted by faith, and labor prompted by love, and patience prompted by hope.” The Greek reads, “work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope.” We take these phrases to be three genitives of origin, along with Bullinger who also admits the possibility they are genitive of character, and in that case would read “faithful work, loving labor, and hopeful patience” (*Companion Bible*). The reason for translating the genitives rather than leaving them, “work of faith,” etc, was that their meaning is not easily understood in English. As Kitsemaker points out, “What is patience of hope, anyway?” When one reads “labor of love,” it would be easy to miss that love is the spring out from which our labor flows.

We gather support from Ecclesiastes 2:17-26 for understanding these expressions as genitives of origin. The Preacher bewails the fact that his toils are meaningless because he has no hope—the profits of his life will be left for another. Then in 2:17 he states that,

apart from God no one can find any enjoyment in their work or labor. Thus scripture teaches it is one's faith in God that is the source for our energy to work and labor.

1:4, 5. "have come to know." The perfect tense of this verb shows that the action of knowing began in the past and has continued into the present. They have come to know (and still know it).

1:5. "proved to be." The Greek for this phrase is the verb *ginomai* (#1096 γίνομαι), "to come to be; come into existence, or become." However, in this context it is not referring to what sort of men the Paul and company *became*, but how they came to be perceived by the Thessalonians who did not know them at first. Hence, BDAG (definition 7) defines the word in this verse as, "proved to be, turned out to be." Cp. ESV, NASB, and NRSV.

1:6. "despite being." Cp. NET and HCSB translations. The point is that the Thessalonians received the word with joy, even though they had to endure affliction with it. This is what made them an example to other churches (v. 7).

"severe." The Greek word *polus* (#4183 πολύς). *Polus* here indicates the *degree* of affliction experienced by the Thessalonians (BDAG def. 3a). The extent of their suffering was high, much, great; thus we have translated *polus* as "severe." Cp. NIV; HCSB.

1:9. "to serve." The verb is *douleuo* (#1398 δουλεύω), to serve as a bond-servant, not *latreuo* (#3000 λατρεύω), which is to perform religious duties and services. When the Thessalonian believers turned from paganism, they did not just change religious behaviors and functions, they literally changed masters and the whole orientation of their lives.

1:10. "our Deliverer." F. F. Bruce comments: "The present tense of *ruomenon* carries no implication of realized eschatology with it...the participle plays the part of a *nomen agentis* [name of an agent] "our deliverer" (cf. Romans 11:26, in a quotation from Isa. 59:20 LXX, where *ho ruomenos*, "the Deliverer" is practically a divine title)" (*Word Biblical Commentary*. Cp. also *New International Biblical Commentary* and Alford: *The Greek Testament*).

2:2. "bold in our God." How is this phrase to be understood? It could either be a dative of means or of association. If association is intended, Paul means to say we emboldened ourselves "in our blessed connection with him" (Lenski). A dative of means, on the other hand, would indicate they emboldened themselves by means of God, i.e., looking to God was the means by which they emboldened themselves. This latter understanding is more likely.

"after having suffered and having been shamefully mistreated in Philippi." This refers to the record in Acts 16:12-40. In Philippi, Paul and Silas suffered, being seized and dragged before the rulers, having their clothes torn off, beaten with rods, thrown in prison, and feet placed in stocks. They were shamefully mistreated in that this treatment was undeserved—especially since they were Roman citizens—and adding insult to injury, the rulers attempted to quietly cover it up, without giving personal apologies; as Paul said, "They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out (Acts 16:37, ESV).

2:3. "appeal." *Paraklesis* (#3874 παράκλησις) can be translated in large number of ways. Two common ways it has been translated in this verse are "appeal" or "exhortation."

"Appeal" was the more accurate translation in this case. The sense is more of an appeal here because when Paul first came to the Thessalonians they were not yet Christians. You

exhort someone who is already walking in the way, but make *appeals* to someone who is not on the path yet. (See: appendix on Greek Words for Prayer).

“nor.” The repetition of “neither” and “nor” or “either” and “or” is the figure of speech *Paradiastole*.

“impure motives.” Cp. NIV; NRSV; NAB. The Greek is simply *akatharsia* (#167 ἀκαθαρσία), the word for “impurity” or “uncleanness.” In this context, however, to say their appeal did not come “out of uncleanness” means it did not come from internal impurities of motives or desires.

2:5. “flattering speech.” Greek = “words of flattery.” This is an objective genitive, where “flattery” becomes the object of the words spoken.

“greed as a motive.” Cp. HCSB: “greedy motives.” The Greek literally reads “a motive/pretext of greed.” The word *prophasis* (#4392 πρόφασις) can mean both a motive or a pretext. The idea is that Paul did not come putting up a front, with a disguise or pretext to cover up his true greedy motives.

2:6. “from men.” Genitive of origin. The Greek reads “of men.”

“Imposed our weight” is the translation of the phrase “to be with *baros*” (#922 βάρος). *Baros* is a noun meaning “burden;” it also has the sense of a claim to influence, importance, or authority (BDAG). The NASB translation captures the sense of authority well, but misses the notion of burden: “As apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority.” To say we could have “imposed our weight,” on the other hand, gives the impression of burden and authority.

2:7. “gentle.” The Greek word is *epios* (#2261 ἤπιος). We believe “gentle” to be the original meaning, and not “infants,” as some texts have. It makes no sense that Paul would say he was “as an infant” among the Thessalonians, especially if the verse would then say that the infant was like a nursing mother.

2:9. “night and day.” This is according to the custom of starting the day with the sunset, so the first part of a day available to work is the night.

2:10. “purely.” Cp. Williams’ New Testament; NRSV. This is from the adverb *hosios* (#3743 ὁσίως), which Bullinger defines as “being pure from all crime, and religiously observant of every duty” (*Critical Lexicon*, p. 379). The noun form occurs in Acts 2:27; 13:34, 35; 1 Tim. 2:9; Tit. 1:8; Heb. 7:26; and Rev. 15:4; 16:5.

“among you who believe.” For this translation compare NIV and HCSB. We have taken the dative phrase *humin tois pisteuousin* to express sphere—“among you who believe”—rather than a simple indirect object—“to you who believe.” If the expression is taken as an indirect object, then Paul is reminding the Thessalonians how the apostles conducted themselves *towards* the believers, which does not seem to fit the flow of thought as well as the dative of sphere.

2:11. “exhorting you, and comforting *you*, and imploring.” The repetition of “and” is the figure of speech *Polysyndeton*. The “and” emphasizes each part.

“comfort.” The Greek is *paramytheomai* (#3888 παραμυθέομαι). As comfort, its base meaning is to sooth and console but its semantic range can extend to speaking “persuasively and tenderly” (Bullinger). Yet not as persuasive as *parakaleō* (#3870 παρακαλέω), translated here as “exhorting.”

“imploring.” See Ephesians 4:17 note on “implore.”

2:12. We followed the Nestle-Aland verse divisions, dividing verse 11 and 12 at “encouraging,” as all other modern translations do.

“urging.” This word for “urging” is the normal Greek term for “bear witness” or “testify,” *marturomai* (#3140 μαρτυρέω). BDAG lists the second definition of *marturomai* as “implore” or “insist.” The full meaning of the term, therefore, gives the sense of urging from personal testimony. The apostles were personally attesting to the necessity of living a life worthy of God, bearing witness to the rewards of such a life and the severity of the consequences for failing to do so.

2:13. “the word you heard from us.” Literally, “the word of hearing from us” (cp. Robertson, *Word Pictures*). A genitive of relation. The “of God” is a second genitive, a genitive of origin.

There is an additional *kai* (“and” or “also”) at the end of this verse, which we have not brought into the translation. It serves as an intensifier in the Greek, having no lexical purpose that changes the meaning. We felt to leave it in would give the wrong impression in English: “Which *also* is at work in you who believe.” To be “also” at work implies that the spirit is at work elsewhere, which may be true but is not the point of the verse.

2:14. The Greek word, *sumphuletes*, “fellow-countrymen” tells us that Gentiles persecuted the church at Thessalonica (instigated by Jews), even as Jews persecuted the Church in Judea. The Jews had a “reason” for persecuting Jewish Christians, because they were spreading (what the Jews believed were) false doctrines about a false Messiah. But why would the Gentiles, who had thousands of gods, and dozens of philosophies, persecute Christians? The battle is spiritual and the Adversary is behind it.

2:16. “Hindering” is better than “forbidding.” The Greek word can mean either. The Jews really were not in a position to “forbid” Paul and his companions from speaking to the Gentiles, but they sure did hinder the work.

“But the wrath of God has come upon them at last” (Cp. Robertson, *Word Pictures*). The phrase “at last” comes from *eis telos* (#1519 εἰς and #5056 τέλος), literally, “unto the end.” The saying could be understood temporally, as we have rendered it, or it could mean that God’s wrath has come upon them completely, utterly, wholly. Louw-Nida writes: “‘wrath has come down completely upon them’ ... It is also possible to understand *telos*... as a temporal expression... so that this passage may be rendered as ‘and in the end wrath has come down on them’ or ‘and wrath has at last come down on them’” (78.47). We believe the temporal expression is better than the statement of completeness, because in this life God’s wrath never falls *completely* on anyone, he had deferred judgment until the next age. Speaking of the judgement as now is the idiom called the prophetic perfect (see note on “seated,” in Ephesians 2:6). Christ is risen, the Judgment is coming, evil will be avenged. These things are certain.

2:17. “face.” A very Hebraic concept.

“orphaned.” The literal meaning of the Greek. This whole section is full of family terms, displaying the close relationship between Paul and the Thessalonians. The nursing mother, the father, the orphaned child.

“period of time.” The Greek literally reads, “We were torn from you for a time, an hour,” using *kaipos* (#2540 καιρός) and *hora* (#5610 ὥρα). The meaning is that they have been separated for a *period of time*.

2:18. “prevented us.” Paul says Satan “prevented” his entourage from visiting the Thessalonians. The word for *prevented* is *egkopto* (#1465 ἐγκόπτω), and its meanings include to “hinder” or “thwart” (BDAG). The translations are divided as to whether the

meaning here is “prevented” or simply “hinder.” The word occurs five times (Acts 24:4; Rom. 15:22; Gal. 5:7; 1 Thess. 2:18; and 1 Pet. 3:7), sometimes meaning *hinder* and sometimes meaning a hindrance to the point of actual *prevention*. Here, it is prevention, for Paul desiring to come to them was actually inhibited from coming.

“Once and again.” An old Greek idiom meaning more than once.

2:19. “For who is our hope.” “Who” not “what” (as the KJV), because the people are the joy and crown.

“Crown of boasting.” Genitive of relation; the crown about which we boast. The Greek *kauchesis* means “boasting,” or object of pride or boasting. The word *boast* can have two connotations—just like English usage—one can boast in a negative way and in a positive way. Scripture uses both instances (e.g., James 4:16 and Rom. 15:17).

“even you.” The Greek *kai* has overtones of “also you,” meaning that the Thessalonians were “also” along with Paul’s other converts, his joy, but the fact that the next verse says “you are our glory” indicates that the primary meaning is “even.” Paul is not by that trying to exclude his other converts, but is simply emphasizing the joy the Thessalonians will be to him at the Parousia.

“before our Lord Jesus at his coming.” This is the natural reading of the Greek text and there is no reason to change it, as the NIV does. The question is what goes with the prepositional phrase, “in his presence.” Do we boast in his presence (NIV), or are the people “in his presence” at the Parousia? The versions are divided. There is no reason not to leave the Greek word order intact, for the verse makes perfect sense that way. Paul’s boasting is the people, who will be before the Lord Jesus Christ at his parousia, his coming and personal presence.

3:3. “these are bound to come to us.” Literally, “unto this we were set/placed.” “Unto” is the result use of *eis* (See appendix on Greek prepositions). The word for “set” is from *keimai* (#2749 κείμαι), which has the base meaning of being placed somewhere. It is not as though specific sufferings are “destined” or “appointed” for us in a fatalistic sense. Rather it is as Lenski writes, “God placed us in a position where we are bound to encounter affliction.” When we become Christians, we are drawn into God’s battle plans; we become one of God’s valuable pieces battling on the chessboard of life. And in this spiritual battle it is inevitable that afflictions will arise.

3:5. “that is why.” The Greek is *dia touto*, usually translated “for this reason” or “because of this.” Here we went with the translation “that is why” to be clear that the expression refers to what preceded and not what follows.

“for fear that.” There is no specific word for “fear” in the Greek. It comes from the expression *me pōs*, a “marker of a negative perspective expressing misgiving, frequently rendered lest” (BDAG). The “misgiving” being expressed is Paul’s concern that the Thessalonians’ faith had faltered.

“the one who is tempting.” The verb is a present tense active participle in the Greek. It is more than just “the tempter,” as if he occasionally tempts people. The Adversary is actively and aggressively tempting people to destroy them.

3:6. “think of us with affection.” Cp. NET. The point Paul is making is how the Thessalonians are currently thinking of him and the apostles, not that they have some good memories (past) of them. Paul is pleased that they “always think kindly” (BDAG) of them, making pleasant remembrance when they are brought to mind.

3:10. “night and day.” An accurate rendition of the thinking of the time, because the Jewish day starts with sunset.

“complete what is lacking in your faith.” The verb *katartizo* (#2675 καταρτίζω) could either mean “complete” or “restore” (BDAG). Here it should be translated *complete*, for as recorded in the book of Acts, Paul’s time in Thessalonica was cut short when a mob attempted to seize him, and so the new believers sent him away secretly (17:1-11). Thus he did not wish to “restore” the Thessalonians to the faith they once had, but to complete what was lacking in their faith in the first place.

3:11. This verse is good evidence that Jesus is not God. God is the Father, and the Lord Jesus is separate. If Jesus were God, this verse would have read something like, “Now may our God, the Father and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you.” Simple verses like this one, which occur throughout the NT, are strong evidence Jesus is not God.

3:13. “in the presence.” The Greek is *en ho parousia*. The word *parousia* has two definitions: “presence” and “coming,” and it is used both ways in the New Testament. It is used as “presence” in verses such as 2 Corinthians 10:10 and Philippians 2:12. It is used as “coming” in verses such as 2 Corinthians 7:6 and 2 Peter 3:4. When we are in the presence of the Lord, we will be there with all the “holy ones,” both Christians and angels, and “He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men’s hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God” (1 Cor. 4:5b; cp. also Matt. 10:26; Luke 8:17, 12:2). In light of the clear verses that everything done in secret will be revealed, it is astounding that so many people sin in secret as if no one will ever know. At the Judgment, God and the Lord Jesus will know, and so will everyone else.

If *parousia* was to be understood here as coming, it would be his coming at the Rapture, and the “holy ones” would be the angels that accompany Christ. The Old Testament (and thus Septuagint) refer to angels as *hoi hagioi* (the holy; plural; see Meyer).

4:1. “from us.” Genitive of origin. The Greek text reads, “of us.”

“that you excel even more.” Cp. NASB; HCSB; NJB. The verb is *perisseuo* (#4052 περισσεύω), meaning “to cause something to exist in abundance,” and thus by extension it can mean “to excel” in something (BDAG). Paul is urging the believers to live in a godly manner even more and more than they already have, even though their behavior was already exemplary.

4:4. “take his own vessel.” This section has been hotly debated, and we confess that we are still studying it. There are two primary interpretations: the section is speaking of “controlling” ones own body, or the section is speaking of one’s relation to his wife. Although “vessel” can refer to the human body (Acts 9:15; 2 Cor. 4:7; etc.), the wife is referred to as a “vessel” in 1 Pet. 3:7. Besides “vessels,” women were referred to as a “fountain,” “garden,” “spring,” (Song of Sol. 4:12), “cistern,” “well” (Prov. 5:15).

“take.” The Greek is *ptaomai* (#2932 κτάομαι). This is a major key to this section. Robertson (Word Pictures) notes: “Present middle infinitive of *ptaomai*, to acquire, not *kektêsthai*, to possess.” Lenski, Vincent, and others point out that the natural meaning of *ptaomai* is “take,” not “possess” or “control, in which case another word, perhaps *kektesthai* would be used. However, other people assert that the word can mean “possess” in the sense of “control.”

If this section of Scripture is speaking of taking a wife, then the word “take,” which also means “acquire,” has a double meaning in this section. Every Christian man is

to take, or acquire, his own wife to avoid sexual immorality (1 Cor. 7:1, 2), however, beyond that, the man should “take” (i.e., take sexually) his wife with the same sanctification and honor. Thus there is a sense in which the phrase could be translated that each should know how to treat his wife in sanctification and honor. Vincent has: “that every one of you know how to treat his own wife honorably,” (Also cp. Williams, *New Testament*) In a culture where women were regularly brutalized by their husbands, the Word of God states that women were to be “taken” by their husbands in sanctification and honor, not like the Gentiles did, who acted out of the passion of lust, the men forcing their will upon the women simply because they were stronger.

4:5. “lustful passion.” The Greek is literally “in passion of lust.” It is a genitive of character, meaning “in passion characterized by lust.”

4:7. “to sanctification.” We have translated the dative here as “to sanctification” rather than “in sanctification.” This was to avoid the possible confusion that we were called while already “in” sanctification which is not true. Rather, we were called “in connection with” sanctification, that is, God has called us to live in the sphere of sanctity rather than uncleanness.

4:8. “you.” The “you” is plural, it is speaking to “all of you,” i.e. the Church.

4:9. “brotherly affection.” The Greek is *philadelphia* (#5360 φιλαδέλφια), a compound Greek word made up of *philos* (a strong liking, a friendship; see note on John 21:15) and *adelphos* (#80 ἀδελφός), which means “brother.” It is the strong bond of friendship that exists between brothers.

“by God.” The Greek is a genitive of origin: “taught of God.”

4:11. “to live a peaceable life.” Cp. NAB. The verb for quiet, *esuchazo* (#2270 ἡσυχάζω), can sometimes refer to being “silent,” as in Luke 14:4, and sometimes to “refrain from disturbing activity, be peaceable/orderly” (BDAG). This is the sense here. See also note on 1 Tim. 2:11.

4:12. “with respect to.” Cp. Kistemaker. This is the rendering of the preposition *pros* (#4314 πρός), which most translations render as “towards” in this verse. But the most likely meaning is living “with reference/regard to” (BDAG) outsiders, rather than behavior “towards” them.

“have no need of anything.” The versions are split on the translation of this phrase. Some read, “be dependent on no one” (ESV; NIV; NRSV; HCSB; NAB), while others go with the translation “have no need of anything” (NASB; NET; KJV; ASV). The difference in translation comes from the word *medeis* (#3367 μηδείς), which could be either neuter (“nothing”) or masculine (“no one”). Are we to work with our hands so that we have no need of anyone (i.e. not be dependent on anyone), or not have need of anything? We feel the latter translation is more accurate. Working to have no needs logically includes not being dependent on others. However, being dependent on others and working was not mutually exclusive during this time—the culture of the Roman world was based on a patron-client system in which nearly everyone was dependent on others in some form. Given this, we felt “have no need of anything” was the better translation.

4:13. “have fallen asleep,” a passive verb.

“grieve like the rest of mankind.” Death is an enemy, and it hurts very deeply. The natural and proper response to death is grief. Even animals grieve, even if it is for a short time. The orthodox belief that the dead go immediately to heaven to be with Jesus has sometimes caused Christians to try to not grieve, but to rejoice. This is confusing at

best, can be especially harmful to children, who hurt terribly over the death of a loved one, but are told that they should be happy for them instead of being sad, as if being sad was selfish. If it is proper doctrine to rejoice at the death of a Christian, then this would be the place to say it. But no, Paul writes that we should grieve, but not in the same way as the rest of mankind, who believe that death ends any meaningful life. This points also to the Greco-Roman culture of the time. Although there was among some people a concept of an afterlife, even then it was uncertain and not a wonderful place. The majority of the people, however, were uncertain as to whether there even was an afterlife, so death was very bitter indeed.

4:14. “in the same way.” The Greek is *houtos kai*, meaning, just as Christ died and came back to life “in the same manner also” Christians are not lost forever, but will be raised.

“through Jesus.” This is the preposition *dia* with Jesus in the Genitive case, showing agency or means (see appendix on Greek prepositions). God is going to raise the dead by means of Christ, who will give the command for the dead to be raised (John 5:25-29; 6:39, 40, 44, 54).

“bring from the grave.” The word for “bring” could also be translated “lead.” It is from *ago* (#71 ἄγω), “to lead, bring, lead off, lead away” (BDAG). The question arises, lead away from where? The context supplies the answer: these dead saints rise from the grave (v. 16), then together with us will be taken to meet the Lord in the air (v. 17).

“in him.” This is the use of *sun* (#4862 σύν) meaning “in association with” (see appendix on Greek prepositions). This has a double application in the verse. It applies association with Christ to those who have fallen asleep “in him” and to those he will bring from the grave “with him.” Scripture consistently includes us as participants in Christ’s death and resurrection. It says we were “crucified with him” (Gal. 2:19), “died with him” (Rom. 6:8; Col. 2:20; 2 Tim. 2:11), “buried with him” (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12), and “raised” and “made alive with him” (Rom. 6:8; 2 Cor. 4:14; Col. 2:12, 13; 2 Tim. 2:11). (See also 1 Cor. 15:20-23). When referring to Christians being raised from the dead, often the word *sun* is employed, either directly (2 Cor. 4:14) or as a prefix to a verb (Rom. 6:8; Col. 2:12; 2 Tim. 2:11). All these sayings are not to be taken as literal physical happenings, rather they point to an association in (*sun*) Christ’s death and resurrection. Such is also the case here in 1 Thessalonians 4:14. Christ does not bring the dead physically with him since they are in the grave, which is why he is going to raise them. To “bring with him” from the grave is the equivalent of being made alive and raised with him, whereas to have “fallen asleep in him” is to have died in association with Christ’s death.

This verse has been used to teach that when Jesus comes from heaven he brings with him the souls (or spirits) of those who have already died, and then unites them to their dead bodies, which have just been raised. This is not the correct understanding of this verse. First, the verse says nothing of disembodied souls being brought with Jesus. That is an interpretation based on the theology that when a person dies his soul or spirit goes to heaven.

The text says that Jesus will “bring with him **those** who have fallen asleep.” “Those” is those people who have died, not those disembodied souls. It is the people who fall asleep, not the “souls.” If it were the “souls,” then the verse would be saying that Jesus brought with him “those **souls** which had fallen asleep.” That would make no sense, and furthermore, the people who believe that the soul exists in heaven after the body dies

claim that Jesus brings the souls back to earth precisely because they did not “fall asleep” (die).

If God, through Jesus, is going to bring people “with” him, in the context, where did Jesus go? The early part of the verse says, “For if we believe that Jesus died **and rose again**...” Jesus rose again, and the believers who died will also be raised “with” Jesus, not in time but in effect. What happened to Jesus will happen to us. This exact point is made in 2 Corinthians 4:14: “knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.” The Greek, “with Jesus” (*sun Iesou*) is the same in both Thessalonians and Corinthians.

God did not want the Thessalonians to be ignorant about those believers who had died, “or to grieve like the rest of men” (v. 13). If the dead were with Jesus in heaven, then the way to keep the Thessalonians (and the rest of us) from grieving would be to plainly say that the dead were with Jesus. Instead, the comfort that this verse is giving is to say that Jesus died (just like the Thessalonians who had died), and Jesus rose (and we will too). F. F. Bruce comments on the word “with:” “Although later in time, the resurrection of the people of Christ is their participation in his resurrection; they are to be raised from the dead ‘with him’....” (Bruce, Word Biblical Commentary).

Meyer comments on why the text would read “bring with Jesus” instead of “raise with Jesus.” “For the words instruct us not concerning Jesus, but concerning the *koimethentes* [those fallen asleep]; it is not expressed in what manner the return of Christ will take place, but what will be the final fate of those who have fallen asleep. The apostle selects this pregnant form of expression instead of the simple *egerei* [to awaken; to raise up], because the thought of a separation of deceased Christians from Christ was that which so greatly troubled the Thessalonians, and therefore it was his endeavor to remove this anxiety, this doubting uncertainty, as soon as possible.”

Adam Clarke notes: “*will God bring with him*—he will raise them up as Jesus was raised from the dead, in the same manner,...

Even Christian commentators who believe and teach that the spirits of dead Christians will come back with Jesus do not believe that this verse is teaching that doctrine. The noted commentator, Albert Barnes (Barnes’ Notes), writes, “*Will God bring with him*. This does not mean that God will bring them with him *from heaven* when the Saviour comes—though it will be true that their spirits will descend with the Saviour; but it means that he will bring them from their graves, and will conduct them to glory....”

4:15. “the word of the Lord.” This is referring to revelation from God. To declare by a word from the Lord is to speak by direct revelation from God (e.g., Gen. 15:1, 4; 1 Sam. 3:1; 3:7; 15:10-11; 1 Kings 6:11-12; Isa. 38:4-5; Jer. 1:4-5).

4:16. “loud command.” Comes from the word *keleusma* (#2752 κέλευσμα), which the KJV translates as “shout.” However, it is more than a simple shout. This was a common word in ancient Greek—although it is only used once in the N.T.—and it always refers to an order or command of some kind (BDAG). Lenski writes, “The Lord shall descend ἐν κελεύσματι, ‘in connection with an order’...this word is common to designate a loud military command, the shout of a charioteer to his horses, of a hunter to his hounds, of a shipmaster to the rowers... ‘Shout’ in our versions is inexact; the word means a shouted order or command.”

4:17. “together with them.” “Together” comes from *sun* (#4862 σύν). The word “with” is from *hama* (#260 ἅμα), meaning, “at the same time” “simultaneously” with them. Thus, since we go at the same time we will not “precede them” (v. 15).

“in this manner we will always be with the Lord.” The phrase “in this manner” shows the process for how we will be with Lord forever occurs. It is not saying we will be with the Lord in the air forever—as though the verse meant, thus we will always be in heaven with the Lord. It is true that we will always be with the Lord where he is. First we will be with him when we meet him in the air, then we will be with him when he returns to reign on the earth (Rev. 5:9-10; 21:1-22:5). The phrase “in this manner” comes from *houtos* (#3779 οὕτως), which refers to the whole rapture process that precedes it, “in the way described” (Lenski), i.e., “this is how it will happen” (cp. BDAG).

4:18. “encourage.” From *parakaleo* (#3870 παρακαλέω). Comforting is a part of the semantic range of this word, which is why many versions translate it as “comfort.” However, *paramutheomai* (#3888 παραμυθέομαι) (e.g., John 11:19) is the strong word for comfort. Instead of *paramutheomai* God used *parakaleo* here. Hence, encouragement is more of the overtone with strong undertones of comfort (so you do not grieve like the rest).

5:1. “that anything be written to you.” Perhaps more literally, “you have no need to be written to.” But the infinitive “to be written to” requires an object that is supplied: “anything.”

5:2. “will come.” In the Greek the verb for “come,” *erchomai* (#2064 ἔρχομαι), is the present tense; it is the “prophetic or futuristic present tense” (Robertson, *Word Pictures*). Thus, rather than “the Lord comes,” we have translated the phrase “the Lord will come.”

5:3. “ruin.” See commentary on “ruin” in 1 Cor. 5:5.

“will come.” This is the futuristic present, see note on 5:2.

“will certainly not escape.” This is the futuristic subjunctive (Lenski).

5:4. “the Day.” The “Day” refers specifically to the Day of the Lord spoken about in verse two, and therefore we capitalized “Day.”

5:5. “sons of light and the day.” Biblical custom. Light here is an idiomatic way of referring to truth, enlightenment, and what is right. This is in contrast to the night—moral depravity and ignorance—which we are not of. See also Ephesians 5:8.

5:6. “clear-minded.” This is from the verb *nepho* (#3525 νήφω), which is rendered in most versions as “sober.” Although *nepho* can have the meaning of staying sober, as in not being drunk, this meaning is most likely not found in scripture (Louw-Nida, 30.25). The word speaks of more than avoidance of inebriation, it points to having a clear mind and being self-controlled (BDAG). Louw-Nida writes: “It is possible that in 1 Thess. 5:8 *nepho* means lack of drunkenness, but most scholars interpret the use of *nepho* in the NT as applying to a broader range of soberness or sobriety, namely, restraint and moderation which avoids excess in passion, rashness, or confusion” (88.86; cp. 30.25). Hence, we have translated the verb as “clear-minded” rather than “sober,” feeling that the rendering “sober” would cause the reader to only think of drunkenness and miss the deeper meaning of the word.

5:7. “are sleeping, sleep... get drunk, are drunk.” The repetition of different forms of the same word is the figure of speech polyptoton (Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*).

5:8. “clear-minded.” See note on 5:6.

“putting on.” This verb is in the middle voice. The middle voice means the subject of the action acts upon him or herself—the action of the verb is reflexive, it comes upon the subject. E.g., “he washes himself.” Hence, the action of “putting on” the breastplate of faith and love is something you yourself must do. It is not something that happens to you (which would be the passive voice), but something you put on for yourself. An alternate translation would be “clothing ourselves with the breastplate...”

“a breastplate of faith and love.” There is no definite article with breastplate. Hence, it is not *the* breastplate of righteousness that is referred to in Eph. 6:14. Ephesians speaks of “the breastplate of righteousness,” but here Paul speaks of “a breastplate of faith and love.” Breastplates protect the heart. The qualities of righteousness, faith, and love will form a protective barrier around one’s heart, guarding from pain.

“hope of salvation.” The Scripture speaks of our salvation as a future occurrence that is yet to be hoped for—the “hope of salvation.” This is the literal truth regarding our salvation, that it is still future. No one has yet “been saved,” which will happen when we are delivered from physical death and the future judgment coming upon the world. Verse nine reflects on our future salvation by saying we were not appointed (intended) for wrath in this judgment. Because we are ensured to be delivered from these things the Bible often speaks of our salvation as a present and past reality—this is the prophetic present and prophetic perfect idioms (see also notes on prophetic perfect in Eph. 2:6 and cp. Eph. 2:8).

5:9. “appoint.” From *tithemi* (#5087 τίθημι). We have rendered *tithemi* as “appoint” as did the NIV, HCSB, KJV, and ASV. Other versions read “destined” (ESV; NASB; NRSV; NET; NAB). But *destined* gives the wrong impression to the modern reader. It sounds as if the verse means God did not fatalistically destine us to experience his wrath. But *fate* has nothing to do with the verse. Rather, *tithemi* has the meaning of being *placed* for something, *appointed*, often showing the subject’s *intention*. It could be translated “intend” here—meaning God did not intend for us to experience wrath.

“to obtain salvation.” The Greek literally reads, “unto the possession/obtaining of salvation.” This is saying God intended (*tithemi*, see entry above on “appoint”) for us to obtain salvation in the future. The Christian’s salvation is presently guaranteed, but experienced in the future. To speak of “obtaining” salvation does not mean one has to work to meet a standard, or additional necessary conditions for salvation. The point is that God intends for us to receive salvation in the future (for future salvation, see 5:8 note on “hope of salvation”).

5:10. “who died.” The words “who died” are in the genitive case, which connects it to the phrase “our Lord Jesus Christ” and the preposition *dia* in verse nine. *Dia* occurring with words in the genitive can indicate agency or means, as it does here (see appendix on Greek prepositions). We “obtain salvation” (v.9) *by means of*, or through, the death of Jesus Christ. In the Greek the words “who died” are not just a side note describing Jesus—as it can seem in the English—but actually a part of the means by which we obtain salvation.

“in our place.” The Greek preposition *huper* can be used in the sense of substitution, “in place of, instead of, in the name of” (BDAG, 1c). (See also appendix on Greek prepositions; Robertson, *The Minister and His Greek New Testament*, pp. 35-42; and Robertson’s *Grammar*). More than simply dying “for us” Jesus actually died *in our place*; he died in our stead.

“whether awake or are sleeping.” This is the figure of speech double entendre, when a phrase has two meanings. Up to this point, “sleeping” has been used in two senses in the epistle of Thessalonians; it can refer to dead believers who are sleeping the sleep of death (4:13), and to living people who are walking in moral and spiritual blindness (5:6). Now here in 5:10 Paul says whether awake or *asleep*, we will live with the Lord. Which sense of sleeping is meant? The more immediate context is the deprived, living-sleepers of verse six, which uses the same Greek word for sleep as does verse ten, *katheudo* (#2518 καθεύδω). The remoter context is the dead-sleepers of 4:13, who are described with a synonymous word for sleep, *koimao* (#2837 κοιμάω). The meaning is probably both. Whether we are actually dead, or spiritually and morally “dead” (i.e. inattentive and disobedient), we will nevertheless live with the Lord. Seen in this light, this verse becomes a powerful affirmation of the doctrine that one cannot lose his or her salvation.

“will live.” Cp. HCSB; NASB; NET. The subjunctive mood of the verb does not cast any doubt on its fulfillment, but comes from the *hina* clause. Since the subjunctive mood frequently expresses uncertainty, the word “will” is often translated as “may.” However, the subjunctive mood, from which the “may” translation comes, does not always express uncertainty. Here the subjunctive is due to the *hina* purpose-result clause, and hence does not necessarily express any doubt that we will be glorified with Christ. As Wallace writes, “Sometimes the subjunctive acts like a future indicative... When used in result clauses, for example, the subjunctive cannot be said to express “probability” (*Grammar*, p. 462). Seeing this is the case, we have rendered the verb with the future “will” to avoid mistakenly inferring doubt from the subjunctive, which grammatically is not intended here.

5:10. “just as you are doing.” There is a *kai* in this phrase serving as an intensifier, “just as you are *even* doing,” which the NET catches as “just as you are in fact doing.”

5:12. “are leading you in the Lord.” The word for “leading” is an interesting word, *proistemi* (#4291 προϊστημι). “Over you,” as some versions read, is not the best translation. The word means to be placed before, or first, to lead; and inherent in the word is also the sense of having an interest in, caring for, being enthusiastic about (BDAG). This paints a picture of a leader as one who cares for the people, has an interest in them, and who goes out before them (Gk: *pro*) “working hard” (5:11). We express leadership not as an exercise of ecclesiastical authority or according to dominating models of secular leadership, but as one who supports people in love and cares for them.

5:18. “in Christ Jesus.” Meaning, “in connection to Christ Jesus.” As Lenski writes, “This is his sweet gospel will ‘in connection with Christ,’ in connection with all that is embodied in the Anointed One.”

5:19. “Do not quench the spirit.” The word for quench is *sbennumi* (#4570 σβέννυμι), meaning to *put out* or *extinguish*; the word also can mean, by figurative extension, *suppress*, *stifle*. Of course the spirit can never be extinguished in the sense of being totally dissipated, so the lesson of this verse is a warning to not suppress the work of the spirit, especially to not hinder the manifestations, as can be seen in the context (vv. 20-21).

5:20. “treat...with contempt.” This word, *exoutheneo* (#1848 ἔξουθενέω), is often translated *treat with contempt*, *despise*, or *reject*. And all three meanings are inherent within the word. The basic meaning is “to show by one’s attitude or manner of treatment that an entity has no merit or worth” (BDAG). We have translated *exoutheneo* as “treat

with contempt” in nine of its eleven usages, with the exceptions being, “reject” (Acts 4:11) and “have no standing” (1 Cor. 6:4).

5:22. “stay away from.” = *apechomai* (#567 ἀπέχομαι). The sense of this word is much more than “abstain” (e.g. KJV, ESV). To abstain from something is simply not to participate in an activity, even if one is in proximity to the action. For instance, one could be in the company of drunkards and yet abstain from alcohol. But *apechomai* is saying “to avoid contact with” and “keep away from” evil (BDAG). It is not enough to simply refrain from participating in evil actions; one must physically remove himself away from evil.

“form.” The KJV reads “appearance,” which is one possible definition of *eidōs* (#1491 εἶδος). However, the meaning is more than just staying away from everything that *appears* to be evil, it also includes keeping away from every *kind* of evil (NIV). *Eidos* can have the meaning of “a variety of something, kind” (BDAG). The translation “form” captures both senses of appearance and kind.

5:23. “sanctify.” Scripture uses the word *sanctify* in two senses. It is used to refer to the state of holiness we are granted by Christ as a free gift of righteousness (e.g., Acts 26:18; Heb. 10:10), and it is used to refer to the Christian’s allowing Christ to make him more holy by helping to eliminate sinful behavior and energizing good works (e.g., 2 Tim. 2:21). Here, sanctify is used in the sense of becoming more like Christ throughout one’s life. For Paul would not ask God to sanctify completely these believers who already received sanctification when they became Christians. Instead, this is a genteel way of Paul encouraging the Thessalonians to be holy in every area of their life by allowing God into those aspects of their life.

“in connection with.” The *en* is not temporal: “at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (dative of time when). For, as Lenski writes, “the preservation occurs in this life,” i.e., we are preserved *until* the coming, not *at* the coming. We are kept “in connection with” the *parousia* of Christ.

5:27. A strong command to read the Scripture to the congregation, a necessity since very few people could read. See note, 1 Timothy 4:13.

5:28. “be with you.” There is no verb for “be” in the sentence. The Greek reads: “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ—with you!” Like many languages, Greek does not need a “to be” verb for a sentence to be complete. Thus, the sentence “The cow brown” is understood in Greek to mean “The cow is brown.” Nevertheless, the Greek language does have a “to be” verb that can be used for clarity, so if God does not use it, He may be communicating multiple meanings or overtones besides the primary meaning, and that is the case here. This verse, the very end of the epistle, is a wish and prayer for the people, and the essence of it is: “May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you in an active way throughout your daily life.” The believers in Thessalonica had been severely persecuted (1 Thess. 1:6; 2:14), and only had a few weeks of teaching and training from the apostle Paul before he was chased out of the city (Acts 17:1-9, esp. v. 2), so they needed much grace. However, because the “to be” verb was purposely left out of the verse, it can also legitimately be translated, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *is* with you” (YLT). This is a secondary meaning, but one that is throughout the epistle, because the grace of Christ is with us. Our salvation is secure, our hope is assured, and the grace in the lives of the believers of Thessalonica was evident. It is possible to look at this verse as the figure of speech *amphibologia*, where one thing is said, but two things are meant.

