

THE FIRST EPISTLE TO THE THESSALONIANS:

An Expanded Paraphrase

II. PAUL'S APOLOGIA (Ch. 2: 1-3: 13), *continued*
(b) *Narrative of events since Paul left Thessalonica*
(Ch. 2: 17-3: 8)

My dear brothers, when we were forced to leave you, we felt as if we were bereaved of our children—temporarily bereaved so far as bodily presence was concerned, but not in heart and affection. So we were exceedingly eager, we had an overwhelming desire, to see you again face to face. I myself (Paul, that is) would have liked to seize more than one opportunity of coming to see you, but Satan put obstacles in my way. For what do I hope for? What do I rejoice in? What is the crown in which I am going to exult in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His advent? It is you yourselves, of course—you are my joy; it is in you that I boast!

So then, when I could hold out no longer, I decided to stay on alone at Athens, and I sent my brother Timothy, my colleague in the service of God and the gospel of Christ, to confirm and encourage you. I was anxious that your faith should stand firm; I did not want any of you to be disturbed by these afflictions that you have had to undergo. You know yourselves, indeed, that affliction is our appointed lot; in fact, when I was with you, I warned you that we had to suffer affliction, and so it has turned out, as you have good reason to know. So, I say, when I could not hold out any longer, I sent to find out whether your faith was standing firm. I was afraid that the tempter might have tempted you so sorely that the labour I had bestowed on you had gone for nothing!

But now Timothy has come back from you and brought us good news of your faith and love. He says you always have happy memories of us, and that you are as eager to see us as we are to see you. Well, my brothers, this has encouraged me greatly. In all my distress and affliction your faith cheers me. To know that you are standing firm in the Lord is life itself to me.

(c) *Prayer for an early reunion* (Ch. 3: 9-13)

What thanksgiving can I render to God for you, for all the joy which gladdens me on your account in the presence of our God?

Night and day I pray with redoubled earnestness that I may see you face to face and supply what remains to be completed in your faith. May our God and Father, and our Lord Jesus, direct my way to you. And may the Lord make you abound and overflow in love one to another, as I abound in love to you ; so may your hearts be established in spotless holiness in the presence of our God and Father at the advent of our Lord Jesus with all His holy ones.

III. ADMONITION AND ENCOURAGEMENT (Ch. 4: 1-5: 22)

(a) *Exhortation to holy living* (Ch. 4: 1-8)

For the rest, my brothers, let me beg and urge you in the name of our Lord Jesus to conduct yourselves according to the pattern which you received from us, when we taught you how to live so as to please God. I know that you do already conduct yourselves in this way, but I want you to do so more and more. You know what precepts we gave you as spokesmen of our Lord Jesus. What God desires in you is holiness of life. Keep quite clear of fornication ; each of you must learn to control his body in a holy and honourable manner, not living under the power of lustful passions like the pagans who have no knowledge of God. See that no one transgresses in this matter or commits a covetous trespass against his fellow-Christian. The Lord is the one who punishes all such behaviour, as I told you and impressed upon you before. It was for holiness that God called us, not for impurity. Anyone, therefore, who flouts this precept is not flouting men but God, the very God who bestows His Holy Spirit upon you.

(b) *Exhortation to brotherly love* (Ch. 4: 9-12)

As regards love for your fellow-Christians, this is a subject on which you do not need me to write to you. The lesson of love for one another is something which you have already learned from God ; and indeed you are displaying it to all your fellow-Christians throughout the whole of Macedonia. And do please go on acting thus, my brothers, more and more. Make it your ambition to lead quiet lives ; attend to your own responsibilities and earn your own living, as we taught you to do, so that your manner of life may give no offence to non-Christians and you yourselves may have no need to be maintained by others.

(c) *Concerning the Second Coming* (Ch. 4: 13-5: 11)

Now, my brothers, I want you to be perfectly assured in your minds about those of your number who sleep their last sleep. You have no need to mourn for them like those others who do not

share our hope. Since (as we believe) Jesus died and rose again, so also those who have fallen asleep will through the power of Jesus be brought back from death by God, just as He was. What I tell you now I tell you on the authority of an utterance of our Lord's: we who are still alive, who survive until our Lord's advent, will have no advantage over those who have fallen asleep. When the Lord Himself descends from heaven with a shout of command, with archangel's voice and the trumpet of God, the first thing to happen will be the resurrection of the Christian dead. After that we who are still alive shall be snatched away along with them, enveloped in clouds, to meet our returning Lord in the air. Then we shall be with the Lord for evermore. So then, tell one another this for your mutual encouragement.

But there is no need for me to write to you, my brothers, about the times and periods involved in this event. You yourselves know very well that the Day of the Lord is to come like a robber by night. It is when people say, "All is well; all is safe," that sudden destruction comes upon them, like birth-pangs on a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape for them. But you do not live in the dark, brothers; that day will not take you unawares like a robber. You are all sons of light, sons of the day. We do not belong to the realm of night and darkness. So then, let us see to it that we do not sleep as the others do; let us keep awake and be sober. Those who sleep sleep in the night-time; those who are drunk are drunk in the night-time. But let us, who belong to the daylight, be sober; let us wear the breastplate of faith and love, with our hope of salvation as a helmet. God has not appointed us to endure His wrath but to secure salvation from it through our Lord Jesus Christ. For He died for us so that we, whether awake or asleep, should live together with Him. Go on encouraging one another, then, and strengthen one another—just as you are doing.

(d) *General exhortations* (Ch. 5: 12-22)

Now, my brothers, please acknowledge those who work hard among you, your leaders and instructors in the way of the Lord's will; show them the utmost esteem and love because of the work they do. Live at peace among yourselves. And as for you brothers who take the lead among your fellow-Christians, please admonish the unruly, comfort the timid, help the weak, treat all with patience. See that no one does a bad turn by way of requital to someone who has injured him; on the contrary, always aspire to show kindness to one another—and to everyone else. Keep

rejoicing all the time, pray continually, thank God in every circumstance of life ; this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the promptings of the Spirit ; do not belittle prophetic utterances ; but test everything and keep hold of whatever is good, giving a wide berth to every form of evil.

IV. PRAYER, FINAL GREETING AND BENEDICTION

(Ch. 5: 23-28)

Now may the God of peace Himself make you perfectly holy ; may you be preserved complete and spotless, in spirit and soul and body, at the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you to this is faithful: He will accomplish it.

Pray for us, brothers.

Greet all the Christian friends with the kiss of holy fellowship. And make sure—I put you on your solemn honour as Christians to see to this—that this letter is read to all the brothers and sisters
May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.