The theology of 1 Thessalonians

Donfried, Karl P.

https://myrrh.library.moore.edu.au:443/handle/10248/10370

Downloaded from Myrrh, the Moore College Institutional Repository
WARNING

This material has been provided to you pursuant to section 49 of the Copyright Act 1968 (the Act) for the purposes of research or study. The contents of the material may be subject to copyright protection under the Act.

Further dealings by you with this material may be a copyright infringement. To determine whether such a communication would be an infringement, it is necessary to have regard to the criteria set out in Part 3, Division 3 of the Act.
WARNING
This reading is NOT complete.

Copyright restrictions limit the amount included in this file.

To complete the reading the book may be borrowed from the Moore Theological College Library, or purchased through Moore Books.
THE THEOLOGY OF THE SHORTER PAULINE LETTERS

KARL P. DONFRIED
Professor of Religion and Biblical Literature, Smith College

I. HOWARD MARSHALL
Professor of New Testament Exegesis, University of Aberdeen
CHAPTER 2

The theology of 1 Thessalonians

We have had opportunity to review a number of external factors that may have contributed to the writing of 1 Thessalonians, as well as to observe some strategies and goals of the Apostle as he responds to the dilemmas occasioned by these circumstances. Now it is necessary to turn directly to the theological content of Paul’s attempt to encourage and console the Christians of Thessalonica.

ELECTION BY THE LIVING AND TRUE GOD

God is the one who is present among his elect and suffering people and who is leading them to their promised salvation. This thematic emphasis in 1 Thessalonians is intended as a response to the situations created by persecution and martyrdom as well as to the challenge of living the Christian life as God’s elect in the midst of a pagan culture.

The motif of election is a key theological component of this letter. The concept is expressed or referred to in the following texts: 
- kəkələ in 1:1;
- eklogēn in 1:4;
- kalountas in 2:12;
- ekalesen in 4:7 and kalón in 5:24. In all cases except the second these expressions are linked to the verb kaleo (I call). In the case of eklogen it is related to the verb eklego (I choose). In attempting to determine Paul’s intent in using this concept of ‘calling’ or ‘election’, the most telling use of the motif is found in 1:4 – eklogēn. For our purpose Bruce’s more literal translation of eklogē is to be preferred: ‘knowing as we do [the genuineness of] your election, brothers so dear to God’.1 But what does Paul mean when he speaks of their ‘election’ or ‘selection’?

1 F. F. Bruce, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, WBC 45 (Waco, Texas: Word, 1982), 10.
The theology of 1 Thessalonians

There are seven occurrences of the noun eklogē in the New Testament; Paul, in addition to this reference, uses it elsewhere four times (Rom. 9:11; 11:5, 7, 28), and it always has the meaning of divine choice. It is closely related to bahir in the Old Testament, which consistently refers to divine choice or selection (1 Ch. 16:13; Ps. 89:3; 105:6, 43; 106:5, 23; Is. 42:1; 43:20; 45:4; 65:9, 15, 22). In comparing this noun to the terms derived from kaleō in 1 Thessalonians, it can be said that eklogē, meaning God's choice, election or selection, is the prior term, and that kaleō marks the act of realising and actualising this prior divine choice. Paul reminds the Thessalonian Christians that God has chosen them and that as a result of that selection they must now live out the consequences of that choice and accept the privileges and responsibilities of the call into the kingdom of God.

At the heart of the Apostle's proclamation, then, is a God who is described as 'a living and true God' who raised his Son, Jesus, from the dead, and the claim that this action will deliver the Thessalonian believers from the 'wrath' to come. The intention of God goes beyond protecting the Christians from wrath; it involves salvation. Thus Paul can say in 5:9: 'For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ'. The description of the current situation as one of waiting 'for his Son from heaven' underscores a pattern of 'already - not yet'. Already now, in the present, God acts decisively in the revelation, death and resurrection of his Son, but the imminent consummation, the approaching deliverance of 'the wrath to come' and the fulfilment of the promise of salvation is yet to occur.

The Thessalonians have heard and responded to the call of this God, as had Paul and his co-workers before them. Their
response is in the form of having ‘faith [pistis] in him’ (1:8), in turning to him (1:9) and in having courage in him (2:2). They are now members of the ‘called out’ community, the church (ekklēsia), which is always a church ‘in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ’ (1:1) and they are now in fellowship with all the churches of God, including those in Macedonia, Achaia and Judea (2:14). Because of God’s continual presence (3:9, 4:8, 17), Paul gives thanks (1:2, 2:13, 3:9), prays for and remembers (1:2–3) the Thessalonian congregation without ceasing. As a result of these marvellous actions by God on behalf of the Thessalonians and because this living and true God is constantly present, the Apostle can urge the Thessalonians to ‘rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances’ (5:16–18).

For Paul, the God who elected and destined the believers for salvation also possesses a ‘will’ (thelema) which is to guide the Christians during this time of waiting. Not only is rejoicing, praying and giving thanks an expression of ‘the will of God’ (5:18), but also abstaining from ‘unchastity’ (4:3). To do the will of God is to please God (2:4, 4:1) and one dimension of that is ‘to lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory’ (2:12). Pleasing God is doing the ‘will of God, your sanctification’ (hagiasmos; 4:3). For Paul the Thessalonians already know what it means ‘to lead a life worthy of God’ because they have ‘been taught by God’ (theodidaktos; 4:9). Paul’s ethical advice, given at several points in 1 Thessalonians, is thus a reminder of that which they already have been taught by God, the God who gives ‘his Holy Spirit to you’ (4:8). God’s choice of the Thessalonian Christians, then, announced by Paul through the gospel and responded to in faith, is to be realised and actualised, despite all external adversities, through a lifestyle informed by love and established in hope. Thus Paul can transform the non-Christian use of the term ekklesia, into a theologically descriptive title for this audience, viz., those who are called out. They indeed are the ‘called out’ from among the citizens of Thessalonica (1:1) and are ‘called into’ the kingdom.
The theology of 1 Thessalonians

CHRISTOLOGY, ESCHATOLOGY AND THE PROMISE OF SALVATION

Paul's use and transformation of the early Christian tradition

Since the heart of the gospel is about God's action in Jesus Christ, it is not unimportant to ask what Paul actually communicates about Jesus in 1 Thessalonians and what the sources of that information are. In addition to referring to him simply as Jesus in 1:10 and 4:14 and Son in 1:10, one finds a variety of christological titles used in several combinations in this brief letter: 'Lord', 'Lord Jesus', 'Christ', 'Christ Jesus' and 'Lord Jesus Christ'. Prior to reviewing these titles in greater detail it would be well to concentrate on three pre-Pauline christological traditions which Paul has employed in this earliest extant Christian letter: 1:9-10, 4:14 and 5:9-10. Before examining these pre-Pauline traditions, some more general comments need to be made concerning the relationship of these early traditions to the composition of this letter.

The coherence between portions of 1 Thessalonians and the theology of the Hellenistic church is remarkable. In many of its formulations and in its use of traditional materials this letter appears to be more pre-Pauline than 'Pauline'. Repeatedly Paul incorporates traditions circulating in the Hellenistic church, many of which had in turn been appropriated by that church from a variety of sources, including Hellenistic Judaism and, through it, popular Hellenistic philosophy. These traditional elements include: the triadic formula 'faith, hope and love', the language of the popular philosophers and Hellenistic cults in 2:1-12, the anti-Jewish topos of 2:14-16, the paraenetic elements in 4:1-12 and chapter 5 and certain phrases in 4:13-18. These topos suggest that Paul is to be placed within the milieu of the Hellenistic church's missionary movement, the very context in which he received much of his missionary training.

The Pauline contribution to those traditions, which he inherited from Antioch and elsewhere, are found exactly at
The theology of the shorter Pauline letters

those points where the Apostle is shaping these earlier traditions in light of the gospel and his own apocalyptic hermeneutic to meet a difficulty which has developed in the Thessalonian church, viz., that some have died before the parousia. To deal with this dilemma Paul, as can now be recognised in 1:9-10 and in 4:13-18, expands and applies the proclamation of the Hellenistic church. To explain and unfold what it means to wait for Jesus, not only in light of the fact that they have turned to the true and living God from the idols but also because they have just recently experienced some unanticipated deaths, becomes a major goal in 4:13-18. That gospel which came in ‘full conviction’ (1:5) and in ‘the Holy Spirit’ (1:5) and is alive and ‘at work’ (2:13) in the believers must now be dynamically applied to and articulated in an unforeseen situation. We have here one of the first extant instances where Paul the apocalypticist, in light of his emphasis on the impending triumph of God, attempts to draw out the implications of the gospel for a situation hitherto not addressed. In so doing he develops a pattern which is then utilised in his other letters as well. It is precisely at such points of specification and concretisation that one sees the complex relationship between the gospel, which has its origin with God, the interpretation and amplification of that gospel by the pre-Pauline church, and, now, Paul’s attempt to interpret and apply both to a unique circumstance in the life of the Thessalonian church.

Let us now examine somewhat more closely the early Christian traditions about Jesus that Paul receives and makes use of in 1 Thessalonians.

1 Thess. 1:9–10

1 Thess. 1:9–10 can be structured in the following way:
1 ‘you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God,
2 and to wait for his Son from heaven,
3 whom he raised from the dead,
4 Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.’

The phrase ‘his Son’ (ton huion autou) describes Jesus as the coming Saviour from heaven and is not found elsewhere in Paul with this eschatological nuance which Paul can apply in contexts. This, together with the death of Jesus and the parousia, rather than hroumai for the material contexts referring to the future, is again probable to the formula, which is belonging to the Hellenistic tradition, and modified it (e.g., ‘Jesus’) in the light of the Christian needs.

1 Thess. 4:14

By using a well-known rhetoric that would not have you ignorant and indicate they wish to convey in chapter 4 that Paul wishes to convey in the Thessalonian congregation’s erroneous conclusion from 1:9–10 in 4:14 that there would be no deaths before the resurrection been contradicted by the refutation of this perspective that found at the end of chapter 3 between the Christians and the Thessalonians.

The formula ‘we believe (lēsous apethanen kai aneste)’ was formula since Paul consists of anistēmi. This phrase repeats more precisely: essentially, it has been added. This pre-Pauline formula serves as the foundation of the new view, viz., that the death and resurrection belief that Christians will be alive. The essential core of the material.

3 As we will observe below, the pre-Pauline amplification of 1
shaping these earlier traditions, Pauline letters

The theology of 1 Thessalonians

with this eschatological nuance despite the wide range of meaning which Paul can attribute to the title ‘Son’ in other contexts. This, together with the absence of any reference to the death of Jesus and the fact that Paul uses the verb sozo rather than hruamai for the meaning ‘to deliver’ in eschatological contexts referring to the final return of Jesus, makes it once again probable that Paul is using here an earlier fragment belonging to the Hellenistic church, which itself incorporated this material from the missionary literature of Jewish Hellenism and modified it (e.g., ‘whom he raised from the dead, Jesus’) in the light of the Christ event and its own missionary needs.

1 Thess. 4:14

By using a well-known rhetorical device (praeteritio) in 4:13 (‘we would not have you ignorant’), the Apostle and his associates indicate they wish to convey some new information. It is here in chapter 4 that Paul wishes to specify more exactly the content of 1 Thess. 1:9-10 in view of the unexpected deaths in the Thessalonian congregation. It is possible that some drew an erroneous conclusion from this earlier statement, viz., that there would be no deaths before the parousia, a view which had been contradicted by the Thessalonian persecution. Paul’s refutation of this perspective begins with a contrast similar to that found at the end of chapter 1, where a contrast is made between the Christians and those ‘who have no hope’. The formula ‘we believe that Jesus died and rose again’ (lēsous apethanen kai aneste) is undoubtedly a pre-Pauline formula since Paul consistently uses the verb egeiro rather than anistemi. This phrase repeats the content of 1:10, but does so more precisely: essentially, however, no new information is added. This pre-Pauline formula, ‘Jesus died and rose’, serves as the foundation of the new information which is to follow, viz., that the death and resurrection of Jesus is the basis for the belief that Christians will be united with Christ at his parousia. The essential core of the new information is that ‘God will

As we will observe below, the pre-Pauline phrase ‘who died for us’ in 1 Thess. 5:10 is a similar Pauline amplification of 1 Thess. 1:9-10.
Theology of the shorter Pauline letters

bring with him those who have fallen asleep', (4:14) and this is confirmed with a word from the Lord (4:15). According to this word, when the Lord descends from heaven on the last day, 'the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air' (4:16-17).

Ludemann is correct in defining Paul's hope in this letter as a parousia-hope, and not primarily a resurrection-hope. Further, he is to be followed when he urges that the introduction of the disclosure about the resurrection of the prematurely deceased Christians does not decisively alter Paul's earlier view that the union of Christians with Christ will be at the parousia. This new information functions to preserve the eschatological hope of the early Paul and it does not introduce a new doctrine of resurrection-hope. That follows only in 1 Corinthians.

There is a noticeable consistency between Paul's assertions in 1 Thess. 4:13-18 and in 1 Cor. 15, even though 1 Corinthians moves beyond his previous assertions. The problem in Corinth is not death due to unexpected persecution but arises from reflections about the mystery of death itself in a Hellenistic context. Thus in 1 Cor. 15:50 it is stated that 'flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God'. Because of Paul's imminent expectation of the parousia in 1 Thessalonians and the unique predication of the Thessalonian Christians, there is found neither any detailed reflection on the enigma of death itself nor any response to the challenges presented by Hellenistic dualism.

This pattern of consistency with previous assertions as well as the expansion and the more precise articulation of such assertions in view of a different, contingent situation is a characteristic of Pauline thought which can be observed at many points in his letters. An example of this, relevant to our discussion of 1 Thess. 4 and 1 Cor. 15, is Paul's use of christology. In both letters it is christology that shapes the anthropological dimension. In 1 Thessalonians, on the one hand, it is the connection with Jesus' resurrection and Christ which leads to Paul's fundamental act of inclusion - an event which will soon be completed on the other hand, where Paul problem of death itself as well as the heavenly Lord as in 1 Thess. 5:9-10 involves the transformation of the dead, on the last day.

1 Thess. 5:9-10
We have already suggested that 'Christ died for us' is a pre-Pauline phrase used to further specify and answer the crisis confronting the Thessalonian Christians: the historical death of Jesus, which is now interpreted soteriologically as the death of Jesus (hyper hēmôn). This is the soteriological lit de θανάτου which the death of Jesus involves.

The phrase under examination with Rom. 5:6, 8:3 and 14:15 concludes that all are dependent on Jesus' death formula). The formula 'Christ died for our sins, so that it serves to comfort the Thessalonians, on the one hand, it is the connection with Rom. 5:6, 8:3 and 14:15) so that it serves to comfort the Thessalonians, on the one hand, it is the connection


5 Klaus Wengst, Christologische Formeln in Gerd Mohn, 1972), 32-3.
The theology of 1 Thessalonians

1 Thess. 5:9–10

We have already suggested the phrase ‘our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us’ is a pre-Pauline formula and that it too was used to further specify and amplify 1 Thess. 1:9–10 in light of the crisis confronting the Thessalonian Christians. In this text the historical death of Jesus, specifically referred to in 2:14–15, is now interpreted soteriologically by means of the phrase ‘for us’ (hyper hēmôn). This is the first time in the extant Christian literature that the death of Jesus is interpreted in this way, viz., soteriologically.

The phrase under examination has remarkable similarities with Rom. 5:6, 8:3 and 14:15 and 1 Cor. 15:3, and Wengst has concluded that all are dependent on a pre-Pauline Sterbensformel (death formula).5 The formula in its original form probably read ‘Christ died for our sins’ and in 1 Thess. 5:10 the Apostle undoubtedly modified this tradition (as he did similarly in Rom. 5:6, 8:3 and 14:15) so that it would apply to the unique situation in Thessalonica concerning the unexpected deaths of some. For that reason it reads, quite uniquely: ‘our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us so that whether we wake or sleep we might live with him’. Paul takes up this formula and adapts it so that it serves to comfort the Thessalonians in their distress. The emphasis is shifted from ‘our sins’ to the Christian’s incor-

5 Klaus Wengst, Christologische Formeln und Lieder des Urchristentums, SNT 7 (Göttersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1972), 32–3.
The theology of the shorter Pauline letters

poration with Christ: thus 'our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us so that whether we wake or sleep we might live with him'. In each of these emphasised words a unique linkage between the believers and their Lord is accentuated. Here, then, Jesus' death is interpreted soteriologically in the sense of giving life, which is the result of serving 'a living and true God' (1:9). The living God, through his Son, gives life at all times, now and in the future. Thus hope, such a prominent theme in 1 Thessalonians, is rooted in this life-giving God who gives salvation, viz., life now and eternally for those who are en Christō through the death of Jesus.

By way of summary, what can we say about Paul's use of the three traditional formulae present in 1 Thess 1:9-10, 4:14 and 5:9-10? 1 Thess. 1:9-10 may well represent part of the proclamation that Paul delivered during his original visit to Thessalonica. This message must now be amplified and concretised in light of the unexpected deaths of some who are en Christō within the community of believers. He does this in two steps. By taking up the traditional phrase 'we believe that Jesus died and rose again' in 4:14 and explaining it further, he can reach the conclusion that the dead are not excluded from salvation at the parousia because 'God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep'. This is then summarised and broadened in 5:9-10 through an innovative interpretation of a pre-Pauline soteriological formula so that it will become evident that all who are en Christō, whether dead or alive, live in communion and fellowship with him.

Paul and the teachings of Jesus

Paul's obvious use and transformation of the early Christian tradition leads to an urgent question: to what extent did Paul, in this his first letter, have access to and make use of the teachings of Jesus? In 1 Thessalonians there are two passages that may be relevant in answering this question: 2:11-12 with its use of the term 'kingdom', a concept central to teaching of the historical Jesus, and 4:15 with its reference to a 'word of the Lord'.

1 Thess. 2:11-12

Paul writes: 'we exhorted each other and charged you to lead a life into his own kingdom and glory kingdom of God' language in 6:9-10, 1 Cor. 15:24, 1 Cor. 15:28 of God' also occurs in 2 Thess. Thessalonians is Pauline in the strict sense volume. In most of these passages, 15:24 and 1 Thess. 2:11-12, 'kingdom', and this may go to God and may wish to avoid.

Prior to these verses Paul's co-workers as well as himself, In the 1 Thessalonians "calls you into his own kingdom" within the community of believers. He does this in two steps. By taking up the traditional phrase 'we believe that Jesus died and rose again' in 4:14 and explaining it further, he can reach the conclusion that the dead are not excluded from salvation at the parousia because 'God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep'. This is then summarised and broadened in 5:9-10 through an innovative interpretation of a pre-Pauline soteriological formula so that it will become evident that all who are en Christō, whether dead or alive, live in communion and fellowship with him.

1 Thess. 1:3) Paul reveals Christian life as eschatologic...
Paul writes: ‘we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory’. Paul also uses ‘kingdom/kingdom of God’ language in Gal. 5:21, 1 Cor. 4:20, 1 Cor. 6:9-10, 1 Cor. 15:24, 1 Cor. 15:50 and Rom. 14:17. ‘Kingdom of God’ also occurs in 2 Thess. 1:5. Whether or not 2 Thessalonians is Pauline in the strict sense will be taken up later in this volume. In most of these passages, with the exception of 1 Cor. 15:24 and 1 Thess. 2:11-12, the phrase ‘kingdom of God’ is used. In the 1 Thessalonians passage one finds only the reference ‘kingdom’, and this may be because Paul has just referred to God and may wish to avoid redundancy.

Prior to these verses Paul has praised the conduct of his co-workers as well as himself, a conduct that results from the gospel that he preached to them. This same gospel also invites the Thessalonian Christians ‘to lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory’. In the verse that follows, 2:13, Paul praises their positive response to the message he proclaimed among them. Thus, the invitation ‘to lead a life worthy of God’ is couched in a context of double praise. In addition, they are reminded that the God who has elected them has elected them for ‘his own kingdom and glory’. It is not unimportant to note that the verb ‘to call’ (kalein) is in the present tense, thus emphasising the present and continuing nature of the event in which they now participate and which will be brought to fulfilment in the future.

In all probability Paul used the word ‘kingdom’ during his missionary activity in Thessalonica, urging and counselling the new Christians that since God has called and continues to call them they are expected to live a life that is constantly transformed by the gospel. In 5:5 Paul reminds them that already now ‘you are all sons of light and sons of the day’; as a consequence, ‘let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation’ (5:8). By repeating the triadic formula ‘faith, love and hope’ in 5:8 (note 1 Thess. 1:3) Paul reveals again his understanding of the Christian life as eschatological, as ‘already, not yet’. Already
now, partially and proleptically, through Christ and his gospel, God's rule and glory have broken into this transient world and are at work in the Thessalonian Christians because they have 'turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven' (1:9-10). The newness of their life in Christ has already begun and will be completed on the last day. As a result he can declare that 'God has ... destined us ... to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ' (5:9).

The use of the adverb axios (literally, worthily) in 1 Thess. 2:12, fairly infrequent in the Pauline corpus, may suggest that Paul is dependent on an early Christian baptismal tradition, a suggestion strengthened when one notes the similar use of this adverb in Phil. 1:27, Eph. 4:1 and Col. 1:10. Such a baptismal context may lie behind the kingdom references in 1 Cor. 4:20-1 and 1 Thess. 2:11-12. If this is indeed the case, then Paul can hardly be consciously referring to a saying of Jesus when he refers to the 'kingdom of God'. Our own study of all the kingdom references in Paul parallels the conclusions reached by F. Neirynck when he maintains that elsewhere in the Pauline letters there is no certain trace of a conscious use of the sayings of Jesus. Possible allusions to gospel sayings can be noted on the basis of similarity of form and context but a direct use of a gospel saying in the form it has been preserved in the synoptic gospels is hardly provable. Neirynck continues that 'Paul's knowledge of a pre-synoptic gospel, of the Q-source or pre-Q collections has not yet been demonstrated since the paucity and anonymity of such possible allusions make it doubtful whether Paul was specifically referring to them as sayings of Jesus.

A similar conclusion is reached by Nikolaus Walter: Paul quotes no sayings of Jesus but he is familiar with the Jesus tradition. He observes that in the extant Pauline letters the Jesus tradition is used primarily in paraenetic contexts and in those sections in which Paul is dependent on a vision of the apostolic ministry. Walter would add 1 Thess. 2:1-12: Paul cites the Jesus tradition not as a conscious reflection and that that that teaching of freedom, viz., he can refer to 1 Cor. 9:1-18.

The Jesus–Paul debate is not, of course, a lost saying of Jesus (agraj word proclaimed by the risen Lord through the Apostle include a char isattestation of mystical apocalypticism. But that does not necessi that free and continuous with regard to some central context. Rather, these w taken through baptismal formulae and traditions of the Lord' are limited to v. 15, the problem is the origin of this saying, a lost saying of Jesus (agraj saying of the historical Jesus word proclaimed by the risen Lord through the apostles of the period, and that we have heard the risen Lord through the apostles.

Our assessment of Paul's teaching is thoroughly shaped and is dependent on a vision of mystical-apocalypticism. Paul, the Apostle include a char isdependent on a vision of mystical apocalypticism. Paul, the Apostle include a char isdependent on a vision of mystical apocalypticism. Paul, the Apostle include a char his freq
The theology of 1 Thessalonians

those sections in which Paul either defends or reviews his apostolic ministry. Walter cites 1 Cor. 4:11-13 and 9:14; we would add 1 Thess. 2:1-12. It is also noteworthy that when Paul cites the Jesus tradition it is usually without detailed reflection and that that tradition can be used with enormous freedom, viz., he can refer to it and yet not be bound by it (e.g., 1 Cor. 9:11-18).

The Jesus–Paul debate is an enormously intricate one and we do not wish to minimise its complexity by making these tentative comments and suggestions. It is likely, however, that the kingdom of God references in the Pauline corpus support those scholars who would wish to show that a fundamental unity and continuity between Jesus and Paul can be detected with regard to some central themes which are common to both. But that does not necessitate the view that Paul is directly dependent on the teachings of Jesus as reflected in the synoptic tradition. Rather, these words and themes seem to be transmitted through baptismal/paraenetic and other liturgical formulae and traditions of the earliest church.

1 Thess. 4:15

The phrase ‘the word of the Lord’ in v. 15 introduces new information to the Thessalonian Christians. The first problem that needs to be resolved is whether the contents of this ‘word of the Lord’ are limited to v. 15, vs. 15-16 or 15-17. The second problem is the origin of this material. Options include that it is a lost saying of Jesus (agraphon), that Paul has freely adopted a saying of the historical Jesus, that the Apostle has modified a word proclaimed by the risen Lord in the post-resurrectional period, and that we have here a prophetic announcement from the risen Lord through the prophet Paul.

Our assessment of Paul is that of an ecstatic prophet thoroughly shaped and influenced by the milieu of Jewish mystical-apocalypticism. Factors supporting this perspective of the Apostle include a charismatic understanding of apostleship dependent on a vision of the risen Christ (Gal. 1:11-17), his attestation of mystical ascensions to the heavenly worlds (2 Cor. 12:1-10) and his frequent use of Jewish mystical vocabu
The theology of the shorter Pauline letters

lary, such as symmorphous, to describe the transformation experienced by the ones who are in Christ. Based on such an evaluation of Paul we would understand this ‘word of the Lord’ as one transmitted by the heavenly Lord to the prophet Paul. We are dealing, then, with a prophetic expression, and not one stemming from the historical Jesus.

According to the recent argument of Helmut Merklein9 it is likely that the prophetic utterance is to be limited to v. 15b: ‘We who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep’. Verses 16–17 are further elaborations of the prophetic declaration using a variety of traditional apocalyptic motifs. By means of an instructive comparison of 1 Thess. 4:13–18 with 1 Cor. 15:50–8, Merklein has discovered a number of parallels between these two chapters that give further support to limiting the prophetic word to v. 15b as well as allowing us better to comprehend it and its interpretation. With regard to 1 Thessalonians we note the following unfolding of the pattern: in 4:14a dimensions of the gospel, already familiar to the recipients, are expressed; in 4:14b an introductory and transitional thesis is presented that must be confirmed and expanded by the yet to be announced prophetic word and its further elaboration; in 4:15b a hitherto unknown eschatological mystery is disclosed, although such prophetic revelation does not stand in contradiction in the gospel to which it is always subordinate; in 4:16–17 the interpretation of the prophetic word seeks to clarify matters not immediately evident from the gospel itself as a result of issues prompted by local, contingent situations and is not intended as a further dogmatic expansion of the gospel; in 4:18, the concluding part of this prophetic discourse, the basic intention of consolatio is unmistakable: ‘Therefore comfort one another with these words’.

This analysis of 1 Thess. 4:15–17, then, reveals that embedded in v. 15b is a prophetic word transmitted by the heavenly Lord to the prophet Paul, with vs. 16–17 providing a


further interpretation of this: no evidence that this is a word from Jesus. Merklein’s study goes far to undermine the basis for supposing that Paul uses sayings of Jesus as they are discovered. Rather, the words and traditions Jesus appear to be transmitted into baptismal/paraenetic, liturgical traditions.

Christological titles

Christological titles – i.e., the titles of Jesus – are dynamic, not static, named by the generating process of the Christian tradition. Certainly Paul was aware of the tradition that preceded him. He had to communicate his thoughts and experiences which are being expressed in the titles of Jesus that impose more developed meanings on extant Christian writing. One should take seriously the insights which are being expressed in extant Christian writing. One should also take seriously the insights which are being expressed in extant Christian writing.

Lord Jesus Christ

The christological title ‘Lord Jesus Christ’ is comprehensive that Paul uses a number of titles – ‘Jesus’, ‘Son’, ‘Christ’ and ‘Lord’. It is found five times in 1 Thessalonians 4:14a.

For this reason our discussion of the meaning of christological titles is incorporated with ‘Lord’ and its various references to ‘Jesus’ is incorporated with ‘Christ’ and its various references to ‘Jesus’.

Lord Jesus Christ

The christological title ‘Lord Jesus Christ’ is comprehensive that Paul uses a number of titles – ‘Jesus’, ‘Son’, ‘Christ’ and ‘Lord’. It is found five times in 1 Thessalonians 4:14a.
Pauline letters
describe the transformation of Christ. Based on such an understanding, this ‘word of the Lord’ to the prophet Amos is prophetic expression, and not an actual word of Jesus.

According to Helmut Merklein, this ‘word of the Lord’ to the prophet Amos is prophetic expression, and not an actual word of Jesus. Therefore, we must conclude that 1 Thessalonians does not provide any basis for supposing that Paul is directly dependent on the teachings of Jesus as they are discovered in the synoptic tradition. Rather, the words and themes reminiscent of the teaching of Jesus appear to be transmitted to Paul through a variety of baptismal/paraenetic, liturgical and miscellaneous ecclesial traditions.

Christological titles and their function

Christological titles – i.e., the processes by which the earliest Christians came to understand and interpret Jesus as they did – are dynamic, not static, and to a large extent they are determined by the generating power of the situation to which they are addressed. Certainly Paul inherits these titles from the tradition that preceded him, but he employs and shapes them to communicate his thoughts to the various contingent circumstances for which he writes. Thus the context in which these titles are found can disclose much about the theological intentions which are being expressed by them. Since the definition of christological titles evolves, one must be watchful not to impose more developed meanings upon earlier ones. Such caution must be heeded especially with regard to this earliest extant Christian writing. One must examine the exact context in which these titles appear in 1 Thessalonians and the significance Paul intends to connote by their use.

Lord Jesus Christ

The christological title ‘Lord Jesus Christ’ is the most comprehensive that Paul uses and all others – ‘Lord’, ‘Lord Jesus’, ‘Jesus’, ‘Son’, ‘Christ’ and ‘Christ Jesus’ – can be related to it. It is found five times in 1 Thessalonians: in 1:1 and 3; and in 5:9, 10 For this reason our discussion of the titles ‘Christ’ and ‘Christ Jesus’ will be incorporated with ‘Lord’ and its variants. The term ‘Son’ has been reviewed in our discussion of the pre-Pauline traditions.
The theology of the shorter Pauline letters

23 and 28. We now turn to these five passages for a more detailed examination.

1:1, ‘To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.’ There are many assemblies of the Thessalonians (ekklesiai Thessalonikeon), political and religious, but only one that gathers ‘in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ’. This assembly, this church, is rooted in the God who is identified as Father, and in Jesus Christ who is confessed as Lord. Accordingly, these references in 1:1 serve not only as identifiers over against pagan Thessalonica, viz., that this ekklesia (an appellation that had not yet existed in the vocabulary of Christians) is Christian, but also as a liturgical reminder that they are the elect of God through this Jesus whom they call Lord and are now, because of this event, in a new, living relationship with God. This solidarity between the believer and the Lord is reinforced by the references to the dead en Christo in 4:16. Given the total context of the en references in 1 Thessalonians,11 Deissmann can be followed when he suggests that already here, at the beginning of this letter, Paul is suggesting that Christians are united ‘within the pneumatic body of Christ’.12 Thus we are inclined to see an incorporative force in the en, and not simply an instrumental one which understands the preposition as merely indicating that the Christian community was brought into existence by God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul, indeed, given the overall goals of this letter, wishes to remind these Thessalonian Christians that they are participants in Christ’s risen life and are members of his church. While recognising that the frequency of incorporative language is more characteristic of the later letters, we cannot overlook that these and other incorporative phrases are already present in 1 Thessalonians, as, for example, the reference to living ‘with him’ (syn auto), whether awake or asleep, in 5:10.

11 See 1 Thess. 2:14, 2:8, 4:16, 5:12.
The theology of 1 Thessalonians

1:3, ‘... remembering before God the Father your work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.’ The Apostle lifts before the God who is present among the believers the quintessential gifts which he has given to his people whom he has chosen, and he especially reminds his audience that their steadfastness of hope is therefore always a hope grounded in the gift ‘of our Lord Jesus Christ’. The Greek text reads, literally, ‘of our Lord Jesus Christ’, and it is best to take this as an objective genitive after ‘hope’, which is a key theme in this communication. Those ‘in Christ’ have placed their hope in him, a hope that will be realised at his parousia. Precisely because their hope is grounded in and will be fulfilled in Christ they need ‘not grieve as others do who have no hope’ (4:13).

5:9, ‘For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us ... ’ Even though the context is eschatological and one that looks forward to the parousia, the prepositional phrase ‘through our Lord Jesus Christ’ looks back to the death of Jesus as the foundation of the promised eschatological hope of salvation. Although the phrase ‘who died for us’ is likely pre-Pauline, Paul has received this tradition and made it his own.

5:23, ‘May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.’ As in 1:3 and in certain other references to the term ‘Lord’ or ‘Lord Jesus’, the full reference here to ‘our Lord Jesus Christ’ refers to the parousia, a major theme in this first Pauline letter.

5:28, ‘The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.’ This farewell greeting relates back not only to the prayer formula of 5:23 but also to the opening epistolary greeting in 1:1. As a result of this communication, the Thessalonians’ understanding of ‘grace’ will have been immeasurably deepened and enhanced, particularly by enriched understanding of hope and the relationship of both the living and the dead to the parousia.
These five reverences to ‘Lord Jesus Christ’ are indeed extensive in their range of meaning. They are anchored in the promised eschatological hope of Jesus’ parousia, a hope anchored in his death and a hope in which the Thessalonian Christians already participate. As one would expect, this christological title overlaps with those we will next examine, ‘Lord’ and ‘Lord Jesus’.

**Lord and Lord Jesus**
Paul uses the christological titles ‘Lord’ and ‘Lord Jesus’ primarily with regard to five areas of concern: suffering, eschatology, being in the Lord, ethics/exhortation and the gospel as the word of the Lord. Let us review briefly these five contexts in which ‘Lord’ and ‘Lord Jesus’ function as one way to gain access to the theological themes present in 1 Thessalonians.

**Suffering**
Although the use of the titles ‘Lord’ and ‘Lord Jesus’ in connection with suffering is minimal, occurring only in 1:6 and 2:15, these are indeed powerful references. The Apostle reminds the Thessalonians that their situation of suffering is not unique: Paul, their Lord and the churches in Judea have had to deal with rejection. It is in this sense that they ‘became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction [thlipsis], with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit’. Not only have Paul and the Lord served as such an example (typos; 1:7) but the Thessalonians themselves have become examples to the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. 1 Thess. 2:15 (‘killed both the Lord Jesus …’) functions in a similar context of suffering and imitation. Thus the references to the suffering of the Lord himself, of Paul and of other Christian congregations serve as a fundamental encouragement for the Thessalonian Christians, who find themselves in a difficult situation. Some are certainly pondering whether continued fidelity to the gospel that Paul preached is worth the risk.
Eschatology All of the christological references in this category (2:19; 3:13; 4:15, 16, 17; 5:2) refer explicitly to the parousia. A similar reference to the parousia was also encountered in 5:9–10 with regard to the title the ‘Lord Jesus Christ’. There the ‘Lord Jesus Christ’ is described as the one who died for our salvation and who will appear again at the final consummation of history, and there it is emphasised that whether we are awake or asleep this coming Lord is present both now and at the future judgment. Such strong accent on the parousia will shape the christology of 1 Thessalonians.

Paul’s application of this theme to the Thessalonian situation allows us to recognise why he does not discuss in this, his earliest, letter such concepts as body, flesh or death or, for that matter, life, sin, freedom and law, not to mention the absence of words having the root dik; (righteousness/ justification) or staur- (cross/crucify). What the Apostle does discuss, and with much frequency, is parousia and the relationship of parousia to sanctification (hagiasmos, 4:3, 4, 7 and hagiazein, 5:23). For those who have been elected by God, sanctification is the process of being made holy that will result in salvation rather than wrath (5:8–9). This is why he emphasises the necessity for being ‘blameless’ (3:13, 5:23). Thus Paul uses the concept sanctification synonymously with the term ‘to serve God’ and then further applies this to the concrete situation in Thessalonica in 4:1–8 through his discussion of ‘licentiousness’ (porneia, 4:3) and ‘transgression’ (pleonexia, 4:6). Earlier we noted that the response to God’s election of these Christians was not only ‘to wait’ but also ‘to serve a living and true God’ (1:9). In other words, there is a very keen relationship between eschatology and ethics in 1 Thessalonians; in fact, it seems clear that the intimate relationship between eschatology and ethics is at the heart of Paul’s consolation and encouragement.

Being in the Lord The christological phrase ‘in the Lord’ is used three times in 1 Thessalonians: 3:8; 4:1 and 5:12. The reference 13 Except dikaios in 2:10, to be discussed below.
in 3:8, 'for now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord’, appears to have more in common with such incorporative phrases as ‘in Christ’ (2:14; 4:16; 5:18) and ‘in the Holy Spirit’ (1:5) than with the primarily instrumental/representational usages in 4:1 and 5:12. These latter references occur in a more specifically ethical context and we will discuss them in the section that follows. In 3:8 the phrase ‘in the Lord’ has more the sense of incorporation into a Spirit-led existence and participation in a community guided by the Lord.

The terms ‘in the Lord’ (as used in 3:8), ‘in Christ’ and ‘in the Holy Spirit’ are derived from a pre-Pauline baptismal tradition in which the emphasis on salvation is accentuated. Yet for Paul these concepts are embedded in his manner of seeing and interpreting things apocalyptically and their meanings can only be derived from that perspective. We have already encountered the use of ‘in Christ’ in 1 Thess. 4:16. There it affirms that the communion with Christ inaugurated at baptism will not conclude with death but will continue right up to the final meeting with the Lord at the parousia. Here, too, Paul takes the original soteriological-ontological sense of ‘in Christ’ and links it specifically to the eschatological hope that he is attempting to communicate to the downcast Thessalonian Christians.

This new state of being ‘in Christ’ becomes the basis for Paul’s ecclesiology, as we will discuss in greater detail further on. Ekklesia means to be constituted in Christ (1:1) in anticipation of the parousia. In this sense Paul’s use of ‘in Christ’ in 2:14 (‘For you brethren became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus which are in Judea’) can carry a broader ecclesiological meaning. In this latter reference the imitation of Christ in terms of suffering in persecution is emphasised and in 3:8 the motif of holding firm to the end (to ‘stand fast in the Lord’) is accentuated. What allows one to be ‘in Christ’ or ‘in the Lord’ and to remain ‘in Christ’, or ‘in the Lord’, particularly during adverse conditions, is the working of God’s Spirit. Spirit, in the sense of God’s Spirit, occurs in 1 Thess. 1:5 and 6, 4:8 and 5:19. It is not only a sign of God’s election and a source of one’s soteriological and ontological comfort and especially, a wellspring of Spirit.

Since the Spirit continues to work (note the use of the present perfect) the advocate and sustainer of God’s covenant community, He functions as the advocate and sustainer of the Church in its beginning, in and through the parousia. Therefore Paul wants to remind the Thessalonians that the Spirit will not be quenched.

In various ways, then, the eschatological hope allows the Apostle both to appropriate to the context of ethical exhortation the Christological tradition he is seeking to maintain. Thus the term ‘Lord’ or ‘Lord Jesus’ in the context of ethical exhortation, used in 1 Thess. 4:16 (‘Finally, brethren, we beseech you in view of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, and of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven . . .’) ‘in the Lord’ functions as both authoritative representative of the Church and who expects fidelity. Hence the term ‘Lord’ or ‘Lord Jesus’ here is authoritative representative of the community and who expects fidelity. Thus the term ‘Lord’ or ‘Lord Jesus’ here is used in the context of ethical exhortation. Having already acknowledged the incorporation of the community into the life of Christ through baptism, it is now necessary to emphasise that or ral use of 3:8. In general terms, the instrumental/representational use of 3:8 (as in 3:8) places the emph
The theology of 1 Thessalonians

The coming Lord is present now not only as comforter but also as the Lord who exercises sovereign authority and who expects fidelity from all who bear his name. Thus the term ‘Lord’ or ‘Lord Jesus’ is used several times in a context of ethical exhortation (3:11, 12; 4:1, 2, 6; 5:27). Paul uses the phrase ‘in [en] the Lord Jesus’ at 4:1 and 5:12. In both 4:1 (‘Finally, brethren, we beseech you and exhort you [para-kaloumen] in the Lord Jesus, that as you learned from us how you ought to live and to please God, just as you are doing, you do so more and more’) and 5:12 (‘to respect those who labour among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you …’) ‘in the Lord’ functions primarily instrumentally (i.e., as authoritative representative) and within a wider context of ethical exhortation. Having said this, it is important, nevertheless, to emphasise that one should not exclude the locative, incorporative dimension from 4:1 and 5:12 in the same way that one should not overlook the ethical context in the incorporative use of 3:8. In general, one may suggest cautiously that the instrumental/representational sense of ‘in the Lord’ (as in 4:1 and 5:12) may imply more the situation ‘in which Jesus demands the obedience of his people … ’ whereas the incorporative sense of ‘in Christ’ (as in 4:16) or ‘in the Lord’ (as in 3:8) places the emphasis more on the new community

Pauline letters

Paul, in the letter to the Thessalonians, emphasizes the incorporation of the believers into Christ through the baptismal experience. This incorporation is not just a one-time event but is a continuous presence of Christ in their lives, as seen in 3:8, where 'in Christ' and 'in the Lord' are used. The hope of the parousia, or the second coming of Christ, is accentuated throughout the letter, particularly in 4:16, where 'in Christ' and 'in the Lord' are used to emphasize the anticipation of Christ's return. The Spirit is seen as a source of comfort and sustenance, as in 5:19, where Paul warns that the Spirit should not be quenched.

Ethics/Exhortation

The ethics of the Thessalonians are focused on living a life in accordance with Christ's teachings. The use of 'in Christ' and 'in the Lord' in various contexts, such as 3:8, 4:1, 5:12, and 4:16, reflects the emphasis on living in Christ's presence and following his commands. The incorporation of the believers into Christ is seen as a significant aspect of their faith, and this is reflected in their ethical conduct.

Soteriological and ontological placement 'in Christ', but also, and especially, a wellspring of joy in the midst of suffering. Since the Spirit continues to be given to them in the present (note the use of the present participle didonta in 4:8), it serves as the advocate and sustainer of the Christian congregation from its beginning, in and through persecution, right up to the parousia. Therefore Paul warns in 5:19 that the Spirit dare not be quenched.

In various ways, then, we can observe how Paul's parousia-hope allows the Apostle both to actualise and to transform the christological tradition he receives in ways that are appropriate to the crisis in Thessalonica.
achieved by the death of Jesus.\(^\text{14}\) For 1 Thessalonians such a distinction is likely.

At 4:2 Paul employs the phrase ‘through [\textit{dia}] the Lord Jesus’ (also at 5:9 with the full title ‘Lord Jesus Christ’). Does this use of \textit{dia} differ significantly from the instrumental/representational use of \textit{en} discussed above? To find a satisfactory interpretation for the phrase ‘through [\textit{dia}] the Lord Jesus’ in 4:2 (‘For you know what instructions we gave you through [\textit{dia}] the Lord Jesus’) is not made easy by the lack of consensus in the literature. Yet the simplest interpretation may also be the most likely, especially when one recalls that \textit{dia} used with a genitive of person often refers to the initiator of an action. Therefore a probable meaning of this verse is that Paul gave these instructions not by his authority but by the authority of the Lord Jesus – i.e., they originate with the Lord Jesus. This usage, then, is virtually identical to the instrumental/representational use of ‘in the Lord’. What instructions does the Apostle have in mind?

Earlier we attempted to indicate the importance of the religious cults of Thessalonica for an understanding of the social environment in which the Pauline congregation finds itself. Even a general knowledge of the cults in Thessalonica allows us to understand with more precision such references as 1 Thess. 1:9, ‘you turned to God from idols’, or 1 Thess. 4:5, ‘not in the passion of lust like heathen who do not know God’. 1 Thess. 4:1–9 is filled with what we might refer to as ‘high density’ ethical language and is also likely to be understood against this broader background. The most frequent use of \textit{peripateo} (to walk) in Paul is to be found in the Corinthian letters (1 Cor. 3:3, 7:17, 2 Cor. 4:2, 5:7, 10:2, 12:18). The specific reference ‘to please God’ (\textit{areskein theo}) is found only in Rom. 8:8. The reference to ‘instructions’ (\textit{parangelias}) is found only here in the Pauline letters, and the verbal form, besides in the Thessalonian letters themselves, only in 1 Cor. 7:10 and 11:1. The only other reference to ‘the will of God’ (\textit{thelema tou theou}) in a specific ethical context is Rom. 12:2. To ‘disregard the Holy Spirit has no exact parallel in the New Testament.

Taking into consideration the intensity of the school background just discussed, Eadie’s conclusion: ‘One of the most weightiest authorities he distinguishes the behaviour of the Corinthians from that of their former pagans in a benediction (2 Cor. 13:14) and also in a benediction (2 Cor. 13:14), its use in the catalogue of the weightiest authorities helps us to understand the specific ethical language of 1 Thessalonians, pages 97–98.


\(^{17}\) AD 170–235 De natura animalium
For 1 Thessalonians such a passage through [dia] the Lord Jesus Christ'. Does this refer to the instrumental/representations does the Apostle the importance of the 'Pauline letters' in a specific ethical context of 'doing the will of God' is in Rom. 12:2. To 'disregard' (athan) God who gives you the Holy Spirit has no exact parallel anywhere in the writings of Paul, with the possible exception of Gal. 2:21, where he talks about setting aside the grace of God. Further, Paul does not often use the full title 'the Holy Spirit' except for the most solemn occasions such as in Rom. 5:5; 8:14; 15:13, 16 and 19, or when he uses the term in a catalogue (2 Cor. 6:4) or in a benediction (2 Cor. 13:14). Finally, the reference to 'unchastity' (porneia) is again found only in the Corinthian correspondence (1 Cor. 5:1; 6:13, 18; 2 Cor. 12:21), except for its use in the catalogue of vices in Gal. 5:19. All of this suggests that Paul is, in fact, dealing with a situation of grave immorality, not too dissimilar to the cultic temptations found in Corinth. Thus, Paul's severe warnings in this section, using the weightiest authorities he possibly can, is intended to distinguish the behaviour of the Thessalonians as Christians from that of their former pagan life which continues to find ritual expression in the various cults of the city.

Given this background and context, can we suggest a meaning for the word to skeuos (literally, vessel) in 1 Thess. 4:4? Taking into consideration the ambiguity of the reference and the intensity of the scholarly discussion, as well as the cultic backgrounds just discussed, it is difficult to agree with John Eadie's conclusion: 'One may dismiss at once the more special meanings assigned to it, as membrum virile.' 15 This seems difficult to sustain, since both Antistius Vetus 16 and Aelianus 17 use the term skeuos as referring to the membrum virile and, given the strong phallic symbolism in the cults of Dionysus, Cabirus and Samothrace, such a reference is hardly surprising. The additional verb ktaomai which Paul uses would suggest the phrase means something like 'to gain control over the skeuos'.

15 John Eadie, Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians (New York: Macmillan, 1877), 127.
17 AD 170–235 De natura animalium 17, 11; Arndt-Gingrich, 754.
The specific meaning of this term would surely not be lost on the Thessalonian audience nor its wider meaning of ‘gaining control over the body with regard to sexual matters’. The reference to pragmati (matter) in 4:6 would certainly refer back to this intended meaning.

Finally, one should not overlook the obvious parallels between the following texts and the mystery cults: 1 Thess. 5:5–7 with its reference to darkness and drunkenness and 1 Thess. 5:19–22, where Paul explicitly urges his hearers not ‘to quench’ the Spirit but ‘to test’ it. Quite clearly the Apostle does not wish the gift of the Spirit to be confused with the excesses of the Dionysiac mysteries; for Paul the Spirit does not lead to ‘Bacchic frenzies’ but to joy precisely in the context of suffering.

**Word of the Lord**

For the sake of completeness in this survey of christological titles in 1 Thessalonians, we need to mention two other references to ‘Lord’: 1:8 and 4:15. Both are used in the context of ‘the word of the Lord’. Since both of these usages are examined elsewhere in our analysis of 1 Thessalonians, we refer the reader to those sections.18

Before reviewing the remaining christological titles, let us briefly summarise our observations concerning the several variations of the title ‘Lord’ in 1 Thessalonians. In all cases they are anchored in the historical person Jesus, his life, suffering, death and resurrection. He is present in the midst of the Thessalonian church as the living Lord whose words and exhortations are authoritative until the consummation of all things and the complete implementation of salvation at the time of his parousia. In its most general sense, the title Lord does appear to express a mystical presence of Christ in the church, through whose activity the church exists.

**Jesus Christ, Christ Jesus and Son**

We have already had opportunity to note the references to Jesus in the pre-Pauline traditions cited in 1:10 and 4:14. There is, however, a second reference to Jesus in 4:14 and one which

---

The theology of 1 Thessalonians

The Spirit-filled gospel

In 1:8 Paul writes: ‘For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your presents certain problems for translation: kai ho theos tous koi methentes dia tou Iesou axei syn autó. The issue is whether dia tou Iesou goes with koi methentes which precedes this phrase or with axei which follows it. If we understand the structure of the sentence in the latter sense, the translation would read: ‘For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died.’ But, if the dia tou Iesou is to be taken with the second half, as this translation suggests, then there is an element of redundancy in the syn autó phrase. Pobee, however, is to be followed in reading hoi koi methentes dia tou Christou, that is, seeing dia tou Iesou connected with hoi koi methentes.\(^{19}\) He understands the dia as expressing attendant circumstance, viz., those who have died on account of faith in Jesus. In this case one would make the following translation: ‘For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, God will bring with him those who have died on account of Jesus.’ Pobee’s conclusion with regard to this phrase is that it ‘refers to the Christians who died in their zeal for Jesus as was demonstrated by their patient endurance of persecution, before the parousia of Christ. The attendant circumstances of the death were the persecutions raging in the church of Thessalonica’.\(^{20}\) This is possible and it fits nicely with our overall conclusions concerning the Thessalonian crisis. As attractive as this proposal is, however, one should, finally, not discount the possibility that dia may simply refer to those who were ‘in relationship with’ Christ at the time of their death.

The church as a response to the gospel

The Spirit-filled gospel

In 1:8 Paul writes: ‘For 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.' Here the phrase ‘the word of the Lord’ simply means the gospel (see 2:9), which Paul can also describe as ‘the word of God’ in 2:13. Since he had referred to the Thessalonians’ imitation of himself and the Lord in suffering just a few verses before (1:6), he may well continue using the term ‘Lord’ not only as a reference to the risen One to whom the church is responsible now and on the last day but also as a reminder that he whom they declare as Lord is also the One who was despised and suffered at the hands of human beings. Despite the difficulty of their situation, the gospel, especially because it is the word of the suffering and risen Lord, has burst forth from Thessalonica in such a powerful way that the Thessalonians have become an example (typos, 1:7) to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. Perhaps Paul is wishing to suggest that they were not only a model in suffering but also, precisely because of their willingness to suffer, an actualisation, even if imperfectly, of that hope which is present in their midst now, although its consummation still lies in the future.

Even though we have mentioned this fact previously, it needs to be repeated in this context: given the brevity of 1 Thessalonians, it is at first surprising to realise that the term ‘gospel’ (euangelion) is used six times (1:5; 2:2, 4, 8, 9; 3:2) and its synonym, ‘word’ (logos), three times (1:6, 8; 2:13). This is a rather large number when compared with, for example, appearances of these terms in Romans.21 In 1 Thessalonians Paul makes the following assertions about the gospel as word of God:

1 that the gospel was proclaimed in Thessalonica, not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and in full conviction (1:5), i.e., it is a performative word and it is actively at work (energetai) in and among the believers (2:13); as a generating centre it is foundational for the existence of the church.

2 that the Thessalonian Christians received the word in the midst of affliction (1:6). In so doing they became imitators of

21 Euangelion occurs nine times in Romans (11:1, 9, 16; 2:16; 10:16; 11:8; 15:16, 19; 16:25) and logos, specifically as ‘word of God’, appears only once (9:6).
cry everywhere, so that we need not say 'the word of the Lord' simply which Paul can also describe as 'the one had referred to the Thessalonians the Lord in suffering just a few will continue using the term 'Lord' risen One to whom the church is next day but also as a reminder that Lord is also the One who was hands of human beings. Despite the gospel, especially because it risen Lord, has burst forth from ful way that the Thessalonians (pos, 1:7) to all the believers in maps Paul is wishing to suggest is in suffering but also, precisely to suffer, an example, an actuali- hope which is present in their situation still lies in the future. tioned this fact previously, it context: given the brevity of surprising to realise that the term times (1:5; 2:2, 4, 8, 9; 3:2) and see times (1:6; 8; 2:13). This is a compared with, for example, Romans. In 1 Thessalonians letters about the gospel as word of witnessed in Thessalonica, not only in the Holy Spirit and in full performative word and it is in and among the believers et it is foundational for the Thessalonians received the word in the doing they became imitators of are described as 'the Evangelists' 5; 2:2, 4; 3:2) and see times (1:6; 8; 2:13). This is a compared with, for example, Romans. In 1 Thessalonians letters about the gospel as word of (11:1, 9, 16; 2:16; 10:7; 11:28; 15:16, 19; God, appears only once (9:6).

The theology of 1 Thessalonians

Paul and his associates, as well as of the Lord. In addition, by receiving the word in the midst of affliction they received it with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit (1:6); this in itself is a sign of hope even if the Thessalonian Christians had not fully recognised it as such. Paul also acknowledges this existential situation when he asserts in 2:2 that he declared to them 'the gospel of God in the face of great opposition'.

3 that the word has proceeded out of Thessalonica to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. As a result, whether intentionally or not, the Thessalonian church became a missionary base for the gospel (1:8).

4 that this gospel has been entrusted to Paul in a special way by God (2:4).

5 that this gospel is something which is 'shared' by Paul with the Thessalonians and it is proclaimed without burden to them because Paul 'worked night and day' (2:8–9). In other words, he did not make demands on his new converts, even though he was an apostle.

6 that Timothy is God's servant in (en) the gospel of Christ. It is Paul's hope as well as Timothy's that when the Christian community in Thessalonica is more thoroughly rooted in the gospel the result will be a firmer establishment, encouragement and stabilisation of their faith in the midst of their current afflictions.

The gospel of faith, love and hope

In 1 Thessalonians Paul describes the central content of the gospel in terms of election. As a further specification of this gospel of election, Paul uses the triadic formulation 'faith, love and hope' in 1 Thess. 1:3 and 5:8. While reviewing each element of this triadic formula separately, we need to remember their intimate coinherence within this letter and the other Pauline letters as well. The discussion that follows, then, will allow us the opportunity to place 1 Thessalonians within the broader context of the entire Pauline corpus, a theme that will be developed more fully in chapter 3.
Faith

Paul uses this term as one who grew up as a Pharisee and he is using it to a congregation in Thessalonica partially composed of Hellenistic Jews and 'God-fearers'. The New Testament and the Greek Old Testament express the understanding of faith principally with two terms (pistis, pisteuein), which are related to the primary Old Testament verb ‘to be true’ or ‘be trustworthy’ (Hebrew 'āman). Although the Old Testament concept is considerably broader than this term and its cognates, yet 'āman remains the most profound expression to describe faith in the Old Testament.

In the apostle Paul one finds the broadest and most profound articulation of the Old Testament understanding of faith in early Christianity. Faith has as its object God (1 Thess. 1:8) and results in a turning away from idols so as ‘to serve a living and true God’ (1 Thess. 1:9). The Old Testament theme of faithfulness is dominant. Since God has called the Thessalonians they are no longer to be involved in idolatry and must avoid the continuous temptation to apostasy. Further, for the Christian Paul, God’s salvific manifestation towards those whom he has called (1 Thess. 1:4) is through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Thess. 4:14). This act of God in Christ is proclaimed (Rom. 10:17: ‘So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ'; also 1 Thess. 1:8, 2:2) and is received by faith (1 Thess. 1:8, Rom. 3:25); this faith rests in the calling and power of God (1 Thess. 1:4, 1 Cor. 2:5), who has acted in human history. Those who have received the good news of God’s act in Christ, namely, the gospel, are called ‘believers’ (1 Thess. 1:7). There is only one gospel (1 Cor. 15:11) and its goal is salvation (1 Thess. 5:9, 1 Cor. 12:1); its security does not rest in political propaganda (1 Thess. 5:3) but in complete trust of God.

For Paul the concept of faith is a dynamic one. Thus, he can refer to the ‘activity of faith’ (1 Thess. 1:23), an activity that manifests itself in love (Gal. 5:6 ‘faith working through love'; also 1 Thess. 1:3; 3:6; 4:9, 10; 5:8). Faith involves ‘progress’ (Phil. 1:25); it is not something static, captured once for all, but involves striving (Phil. 1:27); it increases (2 Cor. 10:5) and it is an energy at work in believers. This last reference emphasizes activity and future consummation; they do not arise from the heart. Since faith is not a static virtue it can be established (1 Thess. 3:2) and is 'fulfilled on the last day (1 Thess. 4:13–18; 1 Cor. 15:44). This specific hope of faith in Christ as an anticipation of the first fruits of God’s promise, the resurrection of Christ, which is fulfilled on the last day (1 Thess. 4:14: ‘we believe that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead and has been raised'; also 1 Cor. 15:12, 15:20). Essential for Paul is the conviction that God assigns his wishes (Rom. 12:2, 6; 1 Cor. 15:24), for it is possible not only to assert that ‘not only has the word gone forth everywhere, so that the gospel was preached among all nations’ (Acts 13:51; 1 Thess. 1:8). Yet no matter what the apostles, the obedience of faith is expected (1 Cor. 15:24; Phil. 2:6).

For Paul refers to faith in the last reference: ‘faith, hope and love’ (1 Thess. 5:12). On the one hand, faith must be active and dynamic. On the other hand, faith is grounded in hope, which is the first fruits of God’s promised resurrection of Christ, which Paul has received (Rom. 15:19). The specific hope of faith in Christ as an anticipation of the first fruits of God’s promise, resurrection of Christ, which is fulfilled on the last day (1 Thess. 4:13–18; 1 Cor. 15:44). This specific hope of faith in Christ as an anticipation of the first fruits of God’s promise, resurrection of Christ, which is fulfilled on the last day (1 Thess. 4:14: ‘we believe that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead and has been raised'; also 1 Cor. 15:12, 15:20). Essential for Paul is the conviction that God assigns his wishes (Rom. 12:2, 6; 1 Cor. 15:24), for it is possible not only to assert that ‘not only has the word gone forth everywhere, so that the gospel was preached among all nations’ (Acts 13:51; 1 Thess. 1:8). Yet no matter what the apostles, the obedience of faith is expected (1 Cor. 15:24; Phil. 2:6).

For Paul refers to faith in the last reference: ‘faith, hope and love’ (1 Thess. 5:12). On the one hand, faith must be active and dynamic. On the other hand, faith is grounded in hope, which is the first fruits of God’s promise, resurrection of Christ, which is fulfilled on the last day (1 Thess. 4:14: ‘we believe that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead and has been raised'; also 1 Cor. 15:12, 15:20). Essential for Paul is the conviction that God assigns his wishes (Rom. 12:2, 6; 1 Cor. 15:24), for it is possible not only to assert that ‘not only has the word gone forth everywhere, so that the gospel was preached among all nations’ (Acts 13:51; 1 Thess. 1:8). Yet no matter what the apostles, the obedience of faith is expected (1 Cor. 15:24; Phil. 2:6).
is an energy at work in believers (1 Thess. 2:13). Particularly this last reference emphasises that the origin, continued activity and future consummation of faith rest solely in God’s initiative; they do not arise from the desires of the human heart. Since faith is not a static possession, Paul urges that faith be established (1 Thess. 3:2) and made firm (1 Cor. 16:13, 2 Cor. 1:24), for it is possible not only to have deficiencies in faith (1 Thess. 3:10, Rom. 14:1) but also to believe in vain (1 Cor. 15:2, Rom. 11:20). Essential for Paul’s understanding of faith is the conviction that God assigns to each the measure of faith he wishes (Rom. 12:3, 6; 1 Cor. 12:9). To the Thessalonian church it was given with such generosity that Paul can proudly assert that ‘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’ (1 Thess. 1:8). Yet no matter what that measure of faith is, the obedience of faith is expected from all (1 Thess. 4:1-8; Rom. 1:5, 16:16).

Paul refers to faith in the context of the triadic formula ‘faith, hope and love’ (1 Thess. 1:3, 5:8, 1 Cor. 13:13). On the one hand, faith must be active in love; without love faith is empty. On the other hand, faith must be constituted in hope, as hope is grounded in faith, so that faith recognises that the first fruits of God’s promises manifested in the death and resurrection of Christ, which is part of the content of faith (1 Thess. 4:14: ‘we believe that Jesus died and rose again’), will be fulfilled on the last day (1 Thess. 5:9; Gal. 5:5; Rom. 6:8, 15:13). The specific hope of faith is rooted in the resurrection of Christ as an anticipation of the fulfilment of the last day (1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 15:14, 17; 2 Cor. 4:14). Yet this faith that is received in baptism (note the baptismal context of 1 Thess. 5:1-11 and Gal. 3:27-28) and allows one entrance into the church (1 Thess. 1:1) is a faith that has as its model the suffering and death of Jesus (1 Thess. 1:6, 2:15). Therefore during this earthly sojourn faith may well be called forth to a cruciform existence (1 Thess. 3:1-5, Rom. 8:18, Phil. 1:29). Further, this new act of God in Christ received by faith involves new existence not only for the believer but for the
church itself (1 Thess. 4:5, 9-12; 4:13; 5:5; in Romans, it is expanded to include the promise of a new existence for the world, Rom. 8:18-25).

**Love**

In order to understand Paul's perspective on love, it is important to remember that not only in 1 Thess. 1:3 and 5:8, but also in 1 Cor. 13:13 and Gal. 5:5-6, love is linked with faith and hope. Love is a possibility only because God has elected those who are 'in Christ' (1 Thess. 1:4: 'For we know, brethren beloved by God, that he has chosen you') and because the believer has responded to God's salvific act in the death and resurrection of Christ with faith (Rom. 5:8: 'But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us'; see Gal. 2:20). Love is given to the believer by God as a gift — they have been 'God-taught' as a result of the performative word at work in the believers (1 Thess. 4:9) — to be exercised in the present (1 Thess. 4:10) as a sign of the future consummation of that new creation that God has begun in Christ, the fulfilment of which is expected in hope. This relationship of love to hope is also emphasised in Rom. 5:5: hope 'does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given us'.

Love is the primary term describing the result of faith both for the believer and the community in Christ. Because Christ has died, the Holy Spirit has given the believer (1 Thess. 1:6) the gift of love and joy. Paul can write to the Corinthians that the 'love of Christ controls us' (2 Cor. 2:4). Paul is emphatic that love does not originate in the human heart. It is not a human possibility, it is a divine gift. It is Christ who now lives in the believer (1 Thess. 2:13, Gal. 2:20); therefore the believer must actualise this love of Christ even 'more and more' (1 Thess. 4:10). Faith works through love (Gal. 5:6) and it must increase and abound (1 Thess. 4:12). Love must be concerned not with self-elevation and boasting, but with the needs of the body of Christ, its weak members as well as its leadership (1 Thess. 5:12-15).

**Hope**

The broadest use of the word developed concept of hope in the Pauline letters. Already in return to four times (1:3; 2:19, 26; 5:5) the formula of 'faith, love, and hope' affectionately bonded to this one. 'For what is our hope or joy or crown at his coming? Is it not even you, Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not even you, grieve as others do who have not yet attained'? As we have already noted, their reaction rose to the problem of those among them who had died.

The fact that hope appears as an independent term only in 1 Thessalonians but also what more loosely, in Gal. 5:5, that process of new life in Christ is fulfilled at the consummated salvation of the body. Thus hope emanates from faith (arrabhôn, 2 Cor. 5:5) that what is already brought to consummation on the personal level (2 Cor. 5:5) is nurtured by hope. The believer to actualise faith through love with the Thessalonians is that which comes from faith; it is this component of 1 Thess. 3:1-10, especially 3:18, understanding that hope provides the already/not-yet of the salvation for the believers, provided they remain in Christ (Rom. 11:22, 1 Cor. 1:9). Baptism will be completed when the day (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

The Apostle's perspective with the Thessalonians is foundational for what is possible. For the later Paul, writing 22 See further Karl P. Donfried, The Dyn
The broadest use of the word for hope (elpis) and the most developed concept of hope in the New Testament is found in the Pauline letters. Already in 1 Thessalonians hope is referred to four times (1:3, 2:19, 4:13, 5:8), twice in the triadic formula of ‘faith, love, and hope’ (1:3, 5:8). Paul, who is so affectionately bonded to this community of Christians (2:19: ‘For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you?’), warns them not to ‘grieve as others do who have no hope’ (4:13; see also the deutero-Pauline text in Eph. 2:12) and then proceeds to relate, as we have already noted, their confession that Jesus died and rose to the problem of those among them who had just recently died.

The fact that hope appears as part of the triadic formula not only in 1 Thessalonians but also in 1 Cor. 13:13, and somewhat more loosely, in Gal. 5:5–6, suggests that it belongs to that process of new life in Christ that begins with faith and is fulfilled at the consummated salvation event of the last day. Thus hope emanates from faith and it reflects the guarantee (arrabôn, 2 Cor. 5:5) that what God has begun in Christ will be brought to consummation on the last day. The ‘good courage’ (2 Cor. 5:6) nurtured by hope as a gift of the Spirit allows the believer to actualise faith through love (Gal. 5:6). The problem with the Thessalonians is that hope had become uncoupled from faith; it is this component which is ‘lacking’ in their faith (1 Thess. 3:1–10, especially 10). Basic for Paul is the understanding that hope provides the essential linkage between the already/not-yet of the salvation event in Christ: hope assures the believers, provided they remain faithful to the kindness of Christ (Rom. 11:22, 1 Cor. 15:2), that what has begun in baptism will be completed when they meet the Lord on the last day (1 Thess. 4:13–18).

The Apostle’s perspective with regard to hope in 1 Thessalonians is foundational for what is said in his later correspondence. For the later Paul, writing over against different situations

and polemical challenges, the differentiation between justifi-
cation (a term not used in 1 Thessalonians) and salvation is
fundamental to his understanding of hope: justification marks
the beginning of the new life in Christ and sustains it to the
end; salvation is the consummation of the gifts already experi-
enced as a foretaste in baptism and in the living of the new life
in Christ. This is precisely the point in Rom. 5:1-3, a most
crucial text. What the Christian has obtained in this life is
access, not completed entrance, to God’s grace, and the Apostle
rejoices in the ‘hope of sharing the glory of God’ at the future
consummation. This confidence is already expressed in 1
Thess. 5:9: ‘For God has not destined us for wrath, but to
obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ’. A sign that
the believer has access to this grace now is that ‘you yourselves
have been God-taught to love one another’ (1 Thes. 4:9), a
theme which is reiterated in Rom. 5:5: ‘God’s love has been
poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been
given to us’. Thus Paul can assert that the ones in Christ who
have ‘the first fruits of the Spirit groan inwardly as we wait for
adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.23 For in this
hope we were saved’ (Rom. 8:23-4). Rom. 8:18-25 is also an
important text, for it shows, as all the authentic Pauline refer-
cences to salvation do, that salvation has a future orientation
and is not yet consummated (see, for example, Rom. 5:9-10
and Phil. 3:7-14). As Paul develops the theme of hope in the
letters which follow 1 Thessalonians he demonstrates that
God’s revelation in Jesus Christ affects not only individuals,
but creation itself which God has subjected in hope ‘because
the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and
obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God’ (Rom.
8:19-21).

The gospel as the foundation of the church

Some interesting surprises await the careful reader of 1 Thess.
1:1 ‘Paul, Silvanus and Timothy, to the church of the Thessa-
lonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to

23 Compare here 1 Thess. 5:23.
The theology of 1 Thessalonians

The differentiation between justification (righteousness) and salvation is based on hope: justification marks Christ and sustains it to the living of the new life described in Rom. 5:1-3, a most obtainable grace, and the Apostle describes the new life already expressed in the theme of hope in the First Letter. He demonstrates that this ‘called out’ community is ‘in God and in Christ’ as a result of the proclamation of the gospel.

In 1 Thessalonians the followers of Jesus are described as a ‘church’ (ekklesia), as a ‘called out’ community, for the first time. They are the elect because the church is called out by God through the Spirit-filled gospel; as a result God gives his Holy Spirit to you’ (plural) (4:8). This is why Paul can state that this ‘called out’ community is ‘in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ’ (1:1). This new state of affairs is possible because ‘Christ died for us’ (5:9-10) and because of their faith (1:8, 2:13). Most often Paul refers to this new relationship in God and in Christ simply as en Christo (2:14, 3:8, 4:16, 5:12). As we stated above, we see in the use of en Christo an incorporative meaning and not simply as instrumental one. In other words, this phrase means not only that the Christian community was brought into existence by God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ through the preached word, but that there also exists a mystical and spiritual union with the Father and the Son made real through participation in the church as the eschatological ‘called out’ community which waits for the last day.

24 The name proper to a particular Roman gens (people).
25 Several possible reasons have been suggested in the commentaries. Not to be overlooked is the inscription OEEZAEOMREGON (of the Thessalonians) found on both the Augustus and Cabrius coins. Is Paul consciously attempting to differentiate the Christian community from both the civic and religious cults in Thessalonica?
26 Note the different uses of the phrase in Rom. 2:17 and 5:11.
The context for Christian living and learning is provided for in this 'called out' community. In it those who are God-taught (4:9) receive God's sustaining and nurturing will and sanctification as they wait to inherit the kingdom (2:12). Although awaiting the future consummation, these believers are cognizant that this sanctified life must be lived out in the present; as members of this new, eschatological community at the end-time they must become exemplary in their love for one another. They are to build up one another as well as to engage in manual work because of the outsiders (4:9–12). There must not only be a respect for the opinion of those outside the community, but there must be a healthy distance from them. Those outside of the 'called out' community are described in a variety of ways: as idolaters (1:9–10), as those who oppose the gospel (2:14, 16), as those who do not know God (3:5) and as those who are without hope and, as a result, grieve for those who have died (4:13).

The church of the Thessalonians is in relationship to the Father, to the Son and to the Holy Spirit (1:1–5), to other churches (1:8, 2:14) and to the Apostle who first declared to them the gospel of God. Paul not only gives thanks for this community (1:2, 2:13, 3:9) but also prays for, consoles, exhorts, remembers and agonises over them (1:2–13, 3:1). The intensity of the relationship between the founder and the believers is due to the fact that through their baptism they belong to one and the same eschatological family. Family structures, although transformed in Christ, are basic to the internal structure of the community and the community's relationship to the Apostle. Because this is the case Paul can employ traditional kinship patterns in his association with the Thessalonian family; he is in solidarity with them as brother, father, nurse, orphan, or beloved.

Although family structures lie at the heart of this new family in Christ, can anything further be said about the structures of authority within this Thessalonian fellowship in Christ? Even though Paul does not accentuate the 'demands' (1:7) that Silvanus, Timothy and he might have made of the Thessalonians, and even though he uses the phrase 'apostles of Christ' (1:7) in the plural, which customise his individual apostolic authority and the approval with which he has such an apostle, he can be gentle, consoling: admonish and adjure (emorikizō).

As Paul has encouraged, the Thessalonian Christians, so they must, in turn, one another up [nikodomeite] 'Building up' will become a standing of the church in 1 Corinthians 17, 26 and elsewhere. To build up the believers to encourage one another i.e., to produce spiritual maturity runs throughout this final part. Paul turns in 5:12–13: 'But respect those who labour among you, and be submissive to them, and be zealous at the building up of the church, i.e., to produce spiritual maturity. 27 From these verses it is apparent that Paul's concern for the Thessalonian church, and that it is a leadership 'in self-aggrandisement or power' who had suffered on behalf of the kind of influence they 'labour' on behalf of the others are 'those who ... admonish persons who 'toil, govern and bearers of the congregation's emporiment'. Although this is an authoritative claim of Harnack's position given by the inclusion of the future

---

and learning is provided for those who are God-taught; nurturing will and sanctifying will and sanctifying the kingdom (2:12). Although these believers are cognizant, they have lived out in the present; as a spiritual community of the heavenly in their love for one another as well as to engage others. In their love for one another as well as to engage others (4:9-12). There must be a distinction of those outside the community who are described in a healthy distance from them. Those who oppose the church in 1 Corinthians (8:1; 10:23; 14:3-5, 12, 17, 26 and elsewhere). To 'build up' the church is for the believers to encourage one another to grow in sanctification, i.e., to produce spiritual maturity and stability, a theme that runs throughout this final part of the letter. But such a task requires leadership and guidance and it is to this subject that Paul turns in 5:12-13: ‘But we beseech you, brethren, to respect those who labour among you and are over you [proistemenoi], just as you are doing’ (5:11). ‘Building up’ will become a key metaphor for Paul’s understanding of the church in 1 Corinthians (8:1; 10:23; 14:3-5, 12, 17, 26 and elsewhere). To ‘build up’ the church is for the believers to encourage one another to grow in sanctification, i.e., to produce spiritual maturity and stability, a theme that runs throughout this final part of the letter. But such a task requires leadership and guidance and it is to this subject that Paul turns in 5:12-13: ‘But we beseech you, brethren, to respect those who labour among you and are over you [proistemenoi] in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work.’

From these verses it is apparent that there was leadership in this Thessalonian church, whatever form it may have taken, and that it is a leadership ‘in the Lord’. It is a position not for self-aggrandisement or power, but one of service in the Lord who had suffered on behalf of all. This becomes the model for the kind of influence they are to exercise. These persons ‘labour’ on behalf of the others, they are ‘over you’ and they are ‘those who ... admonish you’. Harnack argued that these persons who ‘toil, govern and admonish’ are specifically ‘office bearers of the congregation’ who presumably had an ‘appointment’.27 Although this is an overstatement of the evidence, that the proistemenoi are more than helpers is strongly suggested by the inclusion of the function of ‘warning’ or ‘exhorting’

27 A. von Harnack, ‘KONZE’, ZNW 27 (1906), 1-10. See further the positive evaluation of Harnack’s position given by E. Earle Ellis, Prophecy and Hermeneutic (Tübingen: Mohr, 1978), 5-7.
The theology of the shorter Pauline letters

(nouthetauntas) among their responsibilities. Horsley’s examination of an inscription from Ephesus (ca. 162-4) that uses the term *proistēmi* suggests ‘the ease with which Graeco-Roman urban dwellers accepted the compatibility of the two notions of benevolent actions and structured authority’.28 Also not irrelevant to his discussion is the reference to this same verb in 1 Tim. 3:4–5, where the role of the *episkopos* (bishop) is being reviewed: ‘he must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way, for if a man does not know how to manage [prostēnai] his own household, how can he care for God’s church?’ Given the kinship and familial dimensions of Paul’s relationship to the Thessalonian congregation, this role of leadership within that family should come as no surprise. Paul served as both benefactor and authoritative leader to this new family in Christ and it is essential that these functions continue in his absence. As these responsibilities are carried out by the leaders in their midst the Thessalonian Christians are to esteem them ‘very highly in love’ (5:12).

CONCLUSIONS

During the early forties, the Thessalonian Christians had experienced suffering and death, probably as a result of an ad hoc persecution that resulted from the perceived threat posed by this community to the existing religious/civic cults of the city. By his emphasis on election the Apostle assures these Christians that they have been chosen and loved by the God whose Son suffered, died, was raised and will come again in glory. It is this God who is present in their midst, encouraging, strengthening and calling them to fidelity. This declaration, with its emphasis on hope in the *parousia* of Jesus, will allow them to endure with assurance the daily tribulations that confront them. Through his application of various early Christian traditions and by his transmission of a prophetic word, Paul affirms that the proclamation of the death and resurrection of Jesus is a pledge not be forgotten at the Christological titles us issue of suffering and Jesus. In addition, the called-out community expectations and expectations the midst of a hostile of faith, love and hope it calls the church into believers to serve as hope it is assured of daily threaten to disa 1 Thessalonians thus nary manner by our of this letter is to co encouraged people.

The theology of 1 Thessalonians

63

tion of Jesus is a pledge that those who have died in Christ will not be forgotten at the parousia; they will, in fact, rise first. The christological titles used in this letter illumine and interpret the issue of suffering and hopelessness in light of the parousia of Jesus. In addition, these titles point to the theme of a new, called-out community in Christ as well as to the ethical implications and expectations of such a new, corporate existence in the midst of a hostile and pagan world. The Spirit-filled gospel of faith, love and hope is the foundation of the church: in faith it calls the church into being, in love it permits the fellowship of believers to serve as a proleptic kingdom community and in hope it is assured of victory despite all the contrary signs that daily threaten to disable it. Our examination of the theology of 1 Thessalonians thus confirms what was suggested in a preliminary manner by our rhetorical analysis: the goal and intention of this letter is to console and encourage a desolate and discouraged people.