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Oropeza, B. J.

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Jews, Gentiles, and the Opponents of Paul

The Pauline Letters

B. J. OROPEZA

Apostasy in the New Testament Communities

VOLUME 2

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1 and 2 Thessalonians: Persecution, *Parousia*, and *Porneia* in a New Congregation

Paul's original mission to Thessalonica is presented in Acts 17:1-10, and he may have written to the Thessalonian church either from Athens or Corinth (cf. Acts 18:5; 1 Thess 1:1; 3:1). The first epistle to the Thessalonians may be Paul's oldest extant letter if written about 51 CE. It was probably written only several months to about a year after the Thessalonians first converted to the gospel of Christ as proclaimed by Paul. In favor of this view, among other things, is that: 1) Timothy is sent to Thessalonica from Athens and his safe return to Paul has taken place, coinciding with Paul's stay in Corinth in Acts (1 Thess 3:6; cf. 3:1; 2 Thess 3:1; Acts 18:5); 2) Silas is also with Paul, but only during his so-called second missionary journey (2 Cor 1:19; Acts 15-18); and 3) there is no mention in the letter of a special collection, which is typical of the letters he writes during his third mission (1 Cor 16:1-4; 2 Cor 8-9; Rom 15:25-32). The congregation members in Thessalonica, then, are newly converted to the gospel message of Paul, and their turning away from idols suggests they are Gentiles (1 Thess 1:9).

A number of interpreters reject Paul's authorship of 2 Thessalonians. Generally speaking some of the primary reasons include: 1) the eschatology argues against an imminent return of Christ as promoted in 1 Thess 5:1-11, which may be the letter mentioned in 2 Thess 2:2; 2) a pseudonym or forgery may be detected from 2 Thess

1. For discussion and date of the letter, see Söding, "Erst Thessalonicherbrief," 180-203; Malherbe, *Thessalonians*, 55-74.
2. 1 Thess 3:1-2; cf. Acts 17:15-34.
3. 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1; cf. Acts 18:5.
4. See further arguments and responses to rejoinders in Best, *Thessalonians*, 7-12.
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3:17; 3) on a literary level, it seems to be dependent on 1 Thessalonians; 4) the letter lacks the personal tone of Paul in 1 Thessalonians.5

Scholarship, however, is by no means unanimous on this rejection.6 Support for Paul's authorship include these reasons: 1) Polycarp already refers to this letter in the early second century, and there is insufficient time and no compelling situation for a pseudonym or forgery to gain widespread acceptance in Thessalonica before this time. 2) No persuasive explanation accounts for the “man of lawlessness” sitting in the temple of God (2 Thess 2:2) if, assuming this letter's pseudonymity, the temple was already destroyed in 70 CE. Figurative/symbolic interpretations of this temple sound like cases of special pleading. 3) The apparent tension in eschatological perspective between Thessalonian correspondences may be seen in other early Christian sources that emphasize both visible signs and unknowability regarding the end times/parousia (e.g., Mark 13; Matt 24). Such sources, incidentally, are alluded to in both 1 Thess 5 and 2 Thess 2 (see below). Paul could speak of both the imminence of the second coming and yet speculate about the possibility of his own death prior to that time (e.g., Phil 1:21-23; 4:5). 4) Stylistic and linguistic elements may in fact be Pauline, and the difference in tone may only confirm situational differences between the two letters. If the Corinthian correspondences or early and latter portions of Romans were examined by the same scrutiny applied to the Thessalonian letters, we wonder if major portions of these letters would likewise fail the test of Paul's authorship. 5) The forgery hypothesis based on 2 Thess 3:17 is a rather odd notion given that Paul's signature could be compared and verified by ancient readers (cf. Gal 6:11; 1 Cor 16:21; Phlm 19). Moreover, it would seem contradictory of the author of 2 Thessalonians to affirm in a positive way Paul's earlier correspondence to the Thessalonians (2 Thess 2:15) if this author intended to refute the previous correspondence's eschatology in 2 Thess 2:1-12. These are some of the main reasons why the view that 2 Thessalonians is written by someone other than Paul remains unconvincing.

This chapter will read the Thessalonian correspondence together, and we suggest that the second letter was written by Paul perhaps within months of the first.7 The reason for the second letter, as some scholars have posited, may be due to

5. Relevance to our main agenda does not permit more thorough explanations here. For non-Pauline authorship see, e.g., Trilling, Untersuchung zum zweiten Thessalonicherbrief; Hughes, Early Christian Rhetoric, 75-95; Menken, 2 Thessalonians, 27-43.

6. For Pauline authorship see, e.g., Jewett, Thessalonian Correspondence, 5-17; Malherbe, Thessalonians, 349-75; Wanamaker, Thessalonians, 17-28; Marshall, Thessalonians, 28-45; Frame, Thessalonians, 39-54.

7. Alternatively, Wanamaker, Thessalonians, 37-45, defends that 2 Thessalonians was written earlier than 1 Thessalonians, a view that raises criticisms from Green, Thessalonians, 64-69; and Witherington, Thessalonians, 14-16. In favor of 1 Thessalonians being written first, I add this to the discussion: Paul's
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the Thessalonians misinterpreting the first letter on the imminence of the second coming (2 Thess 2:1–2). Then again, some false utterances may have taken place in the congregation, and Paul's signature at the end of the letter intends to safeguard against the possibility of a forged letter in his name. He must, in any case, correct the congregation's imminent perspective on the end times.

PERSECUTION AT THE HANDS OF COMPATRIOTS

(1 THESS 1:6–9; 2:14–16; 3:3–5; 2 THESS 1:4–5)

In hyperbolic fashion Paul commends the Thessalonians for their exemplary model of faith despite opposition; they became examples to other believers "in every place" (1 Thess 1:6–8). The θλιψις they experience is not merely referring to mental anguish but external opposition. They suffer at the hands of their own compatriots, and yet they continue to persevere in faith (1 Thess 2:14; 3:1–8; 2 Thess 1:4, 6). The tone of 1 Thessalonians in the first half of the letter is primarily one of encouragement and thanksgiving due to the Thessalonians' perseverance despite afflictions. As recent converts who turned from idolatry to serve the God whom Paul proclaims (1:9), they could easily doubt their new faith due to societal pressures. Paul's positive words reinforce the congregation's perseverance through external harassment. Their faithfulness through hardships seems to increase their hope in being delivered from future divine punishment on judgment day (1:3, 10; cf. 5:23). Problems in the congregation and warnings against potential apostasy become more evident in the later chapters. The apostle often considers persecution and afflictions to be beneficial for, and positive confirmation of, both his own and other believers' divine calling, though more often than not his optimism regarding suffering has his own hardships in view rather than those of his congregations (e.g., Rom 8:18–39; 2 Cor

8. For discussion on these options, see Jewett, Thessalonian Correspondence, 181–86, who sides with the misinterpretation view. Mitchell, "1 and 2 Thessalonians," 58–62, posits the danger of apostasy to paganism/idolatry in 1 Thessalonians and "misrepresentation of the authentic Pauline teaching about the end times and appropriate behaviour" in 2 Thessalonians. On the false utterance view see especially Giblin, Threat to Faith, 243–44, cf. 151.

9. See Still, Conflict at Thessalonica, 208–212, who argues, among other points, that the Thessalonians' imitation of the apostles in this regard (1 Thess 1:6), example to other churches (1 Thess 1:7; 2 Thess 1:4), and comparative suffering with the Judean Christians (1 Thess 2:14) make better sense if θλιψις refers to external opposition rather than mental anguish. Contrast Malherbe, Thessalonians, 115.

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1:3-7; 11:23-12:10; Phil 1:27-29; Col 1:24). Such affliction builds the endurance of the Thessalonians and marks them out as worthy for God's kingdom (2 Thess 1:4-5; cf. 1 Thess 2:12). Paul also considers the affliction to be inevitable (1 Thess 3:3-4) perhaps in anticipation of prophetic traditions that predicted an increase of tribulation or "messianic woes" before the end takes place (cf. Dan 12:1; 4 Ezra 5.1-12; 2 Bar. 70.2-10; Jub. 23.13-14; Mark 13:7-13; Matt 24:6-14).

The apostle's words in 1 Thess 3:5 are atypical—he confesses here an anxiety over the possibility that the Thessalonians may be abandoning their faith as a result of their afflictions. When he departed from the city, and prior to the return of Timothy who was sent in order to comfort them and determine their condition (1 Thess 3:1-6), Paul feared that the Tempter, that is, Satan (cf. 1 Cor 7:5; Mark 1:13; Matt 4:1), might have tempted them to abandon their faith, and his missionary labor among them would have been "in vain" (1 Thess 3:5; cf. Gal 4:11; 2 Cor 6:1; Phil 2:16; 1 Cor 15:58). Clearly Paul believes the Christ-confessors in Thessalonica are susceptible to committing apostasy. As recent converts, if such calamity were to occur, this would make them precipitate defectors.

Malina and Pilch see Paul's laboring in vain as conveying shame and "a mark against his honor as change agent." Perhaps so, but Paul seems more concerned about the Thessalonians' welfare than his own reputation. The nature of Satan's temptation for this church could hardly be anticipating Paul's exhortation material against sexually immoral behavior (1 Thess 4:1-8). Rather, Paul was plagued by deep concerns about their succumbing to the temptation of falling away from their faith because of persecution, and such apostasy would have rendered his missionary efforts among them to be useless. Satan apparently influences outsiders to hinder God's work (2:18; 3:5), and he likewise was instigating the Thessalonians' unbecoming by his own actions (cf. Acts 14:22; Matt 10:16-25; John 16:33).


13. Jervis, Heart of the Gospel, 25-26, 29, maintains that Paul's own suffering increases his holiness (1 Thess 2:2-4, 9-10), but it is not clear if he makes this connection for the Thessalonians also.

14. Bruce, Thessalonians, 149.


16. Mitchell, "1 and 2 Thessalonians," 54, lists four options that may be causing the temptation: 1) "general pressure" from outsiders who may cause the Thessalonians to regress to a "status quo," 2) aggressive persecution, 3) other missionaries who cause the congregation to doubt Paul's legitimacy, or 4) a combination of the above. Of the four options, number 3 is the only one that does not involve some form of harassment, and it is also the weakest alternative given that nothing explicit in the context of 3:5 seems to support it.

17. Mitchell, "1 and 2 Thessalonians," 54, lists four options that may be causing the temptation: 1) "general pressure" from outsiders who may cause the Thessalonians to regress to a "status quo," 2) aggressive persecution, 3) other missionaries who cause the congregation to doubt Paul's legitimacy, or 4) a combination of the above. Of the four options, number 3 is the only one that does not involve some form of harassment, and it is also the weakest alternative given that nothing explicit in the context of 3:5 seems to support it.
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believing compatriots to harass them. The Thessalonians were primarily comprised of Gentiles who turned from τῶν εἰδώλων to serve the living God (1:9). This turning (ἐπιστρέφω) refers to their conversion and may relate to other Jewish traditions that sometimes use ἐπιστρέφω to refer to the Gentiles turning to God (cf. Isa 19:22; Jer 18:8–11; Jos. Asen. 11.10–11).20 Tobit 14:6 has Gentiles turning to God and burying their idols. Paul's use of the word εἰδώλων refers to an image or idol, but in light of his Jewish sentiments he probably assumes that the Thessalonians were committing idolatry and serving false deities before turning to the true and living God.21 At the same time he assumes that non-Christian Gentiles do not know the one true God, and this has led to their immoral behavior (cf. 1 Thess 4:5; Rom 1:18–32). Doubtless Paul instructed these converts to embrace his position regarding their former relationship with other deities, and there is no indication in the letter that they are struggling with the concept of one God. In a broad sense Ezekiel may serve as a backdrop to his thinking when the prophet discusses the restoration of God's people in the eschaton via God's Spirit and their turning away from idols to serve God (cf. Ezek 11:18–20; 37:14, 23). Like Israel of old, the Thessalonians are identified as God's elect people and cleansed of idolatry through the Spirit in the new era (Ezek 36:25–29 LXX; 37:14).22 Given this background and his apprehension in 1 Thess 3:5, Paul's worst nightmare would be for his Gentile converts to turn away from God as a result of persecution and turn to idols once again in order to be reconciled with their Gentile neighbors who reject the God of the Jews and followers of Christ.23

The encouraging report from Timothy that the Thessalonians are standing firm in Christ assuages Paul's fears about their committing apostasy (3:6–8). Because of their perseverance, there is no need to warn the believers of divine judgment; the wrath of God is something that will overtake their persecutors instead of them (1 Thess 5:3, 9; 2 Thess 1:6–9). By the time he writes 2 Thessalonians, his confidence in them remains, and he assures the congregation that the Lord will be faithful to protect them from Satan, the evil one (2 Thess 3:3–5). Later on, however, we read

negative decision against believers.

20. See further, Malherbe, Thessalonians, 119.
21. 1 Cor 8:4; 10:19; 12:22; 2 Cor 6:16; cf. Exod 20:1–5; Deut 5:6–9; Lev 19:4; Num 25:2; 1 Macc 1:43; Wis 12:27; T. Reub. 4.6; Josephus, Ant. 9.373; Philo, Spec. 1.332. See more references in Cheung, Idol Food, 39–81.
22. See Thielman, Paul & the Law, 77. On their election in relation to Israel, see further, Marshall, "Election and Calling," 262.
23. That is, "pagans," but the term conveys a derogatory connotation for some, and so I use it sparingly.
that his anxiety over the potential apostasy of converts in his churches generally remained a burden for him (cf. 2 Cor 11:28–29).

Luke's version of Paul's mission to the Thessalonians locates Paul in the synagogue where both Jews and Gentiles join him (Acts 17:1–4). If Gentiles who were formerly idolaters predominate the congregation by the time Paul writes 1 Thessalonians, Acts does not mention their idolatry prior to conversion. This leads Bart Ehrman to suggest that Luke only knew about Paul's mission to this city in a general way without knowing the details. On the other hand, the "god-fearing Greeks" (σεβομένων Ἑλλήνων) in Acts 17:4 may not have been strictly monotheists when Paul first meets them. Rather than being proselytes or Gentile monotheists, they may have been sympathetic towards the Jewish God and certain Jewish practices without entirely abandoning polytheism.

The emerging Christians in Thessalonica were probably seen as subversive to family, government, and local religion. Although there is evidence of entire households converting to the early Christ communities, the gospel message at times set family members against each other when some members believed and other did not (cf. Luke 12:49–51; Matt 10:34–39; Origen, Cels. 3.55). This also may have been the case in certain Thessalonian households. It probably surprised and disturbed friends and family members that loved ones were converting to this new and strange religious group that encouraged its practitioners to shun the traditional worship and customs associated with local deities. Their peculiar behavior of holy living caused them to decline from certain social activities and pleasures, and this likewise may

24. Gaventa, Thessalonians, 3, suggests that "the harsh polemic of 2:14–16 against the Jews (or Judeans) is difficult to imagine if Paul is addressing a group of Jewish Christians or even a group consisting of both Gentile and Jewish Christians." Paul, however, is Jewish Christian himself, and he obviously does not think that such language offends his colleagues Silas, who is also Jewish Christian (cf. Gillman, "Silas," 6.22–23), and Timothy, who may be half-Jewish (Acts 16:1), even though they assist him in writing this letter (1 Thess 1:1). The Thessalonians probably already agreed with Paul's view.


26. See argument further in Woyke, Götter, 132–57, who reads from Philo three groups of Gentiles attracted to ancient Diaspora Judaism: circumcised proselytes, monotheists in thought and practice ("Gesinnungsproselyten"), and sympathizers who in some sense acknowledged a creator and yet still believed in other gods (cf. Philo, QE 2.22; Spec. 2.165; Ebr. 33–40).

27. See Barclay, "Conflict in Thessalonica," 512–30; and Still, Conflict at Thessalonica, 226–67, from where the threefold subversion is derived. Interestingly, Tacitus brings up that Christians are haters of humanity (Tacitus, Annals 15.44). On the Christians as politically subversive, see Pliny, Letters 10.96. For outsider perceptions of early Christians, see Wilken, Christians. Other reasons why non-Christians persecuted Christians are explored by De Ste. Croix, "Early Christians," 7–38.

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have troubled their compatriots (cf. 1 Thess 5:23; 1 Pet 4:3–4). Beyond alienation of close relationships, the emerging Christians could be viewed as social deviants upsetting the status quo of the Pax Romana by abandoning political and religious customs. The Thessalonian believers are accused of rebelling against the decrees of Caesar and civic deities (cf. Acts 17:7–8), and the persecution they experience in Paul’s letter may reflect such accusations.29 In later decades the Christians’ exclusive claims about Christ and one true God were interpreted negatively as atheism by outsiders (cf. Mart. Pol. 3.2; 9.2; 12.2; Diognetus 2.6; Justin, 1 Apol. 4–6, 13; Tertullian, Nat. 1.1–3). Such factors as these seem to have contributed to the persecution of the Thessalonian church.

The persecution they face, however, should not be misunderstood in terms of later decades and centuries when Rome imprisoned, torturing, and killed Christians. The Thessalonians do not face an official pogrom of this sort but local mistreatment characterized by social discrimination and harassment; in addition, they may have also experienced mob action and criminal accusations (cf. Acts 17:5–10). Some of them may have experienced physical harm also, but there is not enough evidence from Paul’s letters or Acts to suggest that the death of some of the church members in Thessalonica involved martyrdom (1 Thess 4:14–18).30 If such were the case, we might expect Paul to praise these martyrs much the same way he celebrates others who have risked their lives for the gospel’s sake (cf. Phil 2:25–30; Rom 16:3–4).31 To be sure, Paul compares this congregation’s affliction to the Lord’s (1 Thess 1:6), but the central point of comparison is their shared affliction, not necessarily death. Paul and his colleagues, all who are still alive, also participate in this affliction.

Malina and Pilch think the believers in this community are experiencing a conflict with Thessalonian Israelites.32 In Acts some Jews from Thessalonica oppose Paul and instigate a conflict in the city (Acts 17:5–7). In Luke’s narrative, however, it seems to be a mob of Gentile riffraff that becomes the focal point of oppression for the local congregation (17:5). There is no mention in 1 Thessalonians that the congregation was suffering affliction because of Jewish oppressors. Rather, the Thessalonians suffer persecution from their compatriots (συμφιλείτης) in a manner similar to the Judean Christ-followers who suffer at the hands of their own countrymen (1 Thess 2:14–16). Paul writes that the persecutors of these Judeans will not escape divine

30. Contrast Donfried, “Cults of Thessalonica,” 349–50, who suggests the persecution led to death, and for support he points out persecution by the “sword” in Rom 8:35–36. In Romans, to be sure, Paul may be referring to early martyrs even prior to the persecution of Nero (e.g., Acts 7:54–60; 12:1–4), but this does not necessarily mean that any occurred in Thessalonica during Paul’s travels.
31. Rightly on this point is Barclay, “Conflict in Thessalonica,” 514.
32. Malina and Pilch, Letters of Paul, 43.
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judgment; God's wrath in fact has finally come upon them (2:16c: ἐφθασεν δὲ ἐν τοῖς ἁπάντοις ἡ ὁργή εἰς τὸ λείον). There is no substantial reason to support 1 Thess 2:13–16 as an interpolation; God's wrath (2:16) does not refer to the temple's destruction but possibly to the slaughter of Jerusalemites that happened around 49 CE, and perhaps Claudius's expulsion of Jews from Rome which occurred that same year.35 Paul's harsh tone, in any case, is not against all Jews but only unbelieving Judeans hostile toward Judean Christ-followers, including himself (1 Thess 2:15–16). In this manner the language is not much different than Jewish condemnations against other Jews who are perceived as apostates and traitors (e.g., 2 Macc 6:1–17; T. Levi 6.5–11; 1QH 10[2], 21–29). Nevertheless, such calamities as a general slaughter in Jerusalem or expulsion from Rome seem to be far too sweeping as types of judgment and would not seem to target only the persecutors. Hence, there remains a possibility that 2:16 finds it ultimate fulfillment on judgment day when, from Paul's perspective, those who persecuted the Christ-followers will experience divine wrath (cf. Rom 12:14, 18; Phil 1:28)

PAUL'S OPPONENTS? (1 THESS 2:1–12)

Relevant to the situation in Thessalonica is the question of whether Paul is defending himself against accusations from church members or other Christians in 1 Thess 2:1–12.36 Some interpreters suggest his words reflect an apologetic against internal criticisms over his leadership in this congregation or his lack of demonstrating spirituality.37 John Frame suggests that Paul is refuting accusations against being deluded, deceptive, immoral, and flattering the congregation to cover his greed (2:1–6; cf. 1:6). Paul seems to be defending himself against those Paul does not name, it seems the local congregation in Thessalonica suffered from a similar experience as the Thessalonians (1 Thess 2:16). For an overview of various positions see Sumney, "Studying Paul's Opponents," 33–38.

33. On the aorist of ἐφθασα as "arrived" and εἰς τὸ λείον as "finally" or "at last," see esp. Green, Thessalonians, 148–49.
34. Some scholars believe 2:14–16 to be a post-Pauline interpolation due both to its anti-Jewish tone and a postulation that the wrath which has already arrived refers to the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE, an event that took place several years after Paul's death. On the interpolation view see Pearson, "1 Thessalonians 2.13–16," 79–94; Richard, Thessalonians, 125–27. See criticisms of this view in Schlueter, Filling Up the Measure.
37. E.g., Schmithals, Paul and the Gnostics, 140, who sees the opponents as Gnostics; Jewett, Thessalonian Correspondence, 102–4, 149–57, 176–78, who views the opponents as millenarian radicals; Sumney, Servants of Satan, 214–52, concludes that for both 1 and 2 Thessalonians no opponents are in view. See also Rigaux, Thessaloniciens, 59, 72; and Best, Thessalonians, 22, who considers the enemy to be "vague." For an overview of various positions see Sumney, "Studying Paul's Opponents," 33–38.
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1:5). This perspective, however, is a mirror reading of the text in which Paul's words are assumed to be a denial of accusations posed by opponents. To be sure, some resistance between certain members and their local leaders is evident in 5:12–13, but this problem may have little to do with accusations against Paul's own character or style of leadership. The apostle and his colleagues were successful in their founding mission to the Thessalonians as evinced by the fruitful behavior of the converts (1 Thess 1:4–8, 9; cf. 2:1–2, 4, 9). The letter stresses the Thessalonians' salvific well-being, confirmation as believers, and exemplary conduct and continuance of walking in faith, hope, and love despite opposition. If they persevere through affliction, then his missionary efforts among them would not be in vain (1:2–3; 2:1, 13–14; 3:5–9).

Rather than presenting a self-apologetic in 2:1–12, Paul may be highlighting his own exemplary conduct as an imitative model for the Thessalonians to emulate (cf. 1:6; 2:14). As Paul and coworkers endure suffering, so do they; and as Paul's behavior is gentle, blameless, and dedicated to laboring among them, so also they must be gentle and labor before others if they are to stand blameless before God at the parousia (2:2, 7, 9–10; cf. 4:11–12; 5:23).

Abraham Malherbe argues for a paraenetic emphasis in 1 Thess 2. If we compare the apostle's words with those of Dio Chrysostom against Cynic philosophers, the apostle makes statements similar to Chrysostom's "ideal philosopher" (e.g., Or. 32). Paul, wanting to "firm up" his relationship with the Thessalonians, distinguishes himself from philosophers and charlatans of bad repute. This letter nonetheless gives high approbations of the Thessalonians in the first three chapters, and so we question the extent to which the early sections function as paraenetic. The rhetorical arrangement of 1 Thess 1–3 combines narratio with an emphasis on thanksgiving (cf. 1:2–3; 2:13; 3:9–13). Indeed, as certain scholars have argued, the letter resembles epideictic rhetoric, which demonstrates a pattern of praiseworthy and blameworthy

38. Frame, Thessalonians, 90. Morris, First and Second Thessalonians, 70–71, is also similar.
40. So Marshall, Thessalonians, 149.
41. See Merk, "1 Thessalonians 2:1–12," 98–99, who connects this thought with confidence in the Thessalonians' divine election. This view nonetheless must be tempered with Paul's lack of confidence in them prior to Timothy's report (1 Thess 3:5).
42. Differently, Marshall, Thessalonians, 62–63, interprets "in vain" (2:1) as "lacking in content" rather than "lacking in effect," but even so he claims that a Greek thinker would not make this either/or distinction.
44. For criticism of Malherbe's view see Mitchell, Review of Letters, 1–12; Witherington, Thessalonians, 17–20.
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conduct. Our view is that epideictic rhetoric in chapters 1–3 alters to a combination of epideictic and deliberative in chapters 4–5, so that praise turns into persuasive speech by the end of the letter. Paul’s ultimate concern at any rate is not to present himself as a stellar rhetorician who orchestrates an impressively composed epistle that is built entirely on one species of rhetoric. Rather, as a pastor-missionary, he is more concerned about his audience’s well-being than whether or not his rhetoric is perfectly composed. Thus he praises their behavior in the early part of the letter and attempts to correct sexual misconduct, bad work ethics, and misconceptions about death and the end times in the latter part of it.

Whatever else 2:1–12 might mean, Paul refers to his past friendship with the Thessalonians, sets apart his gospel from delusional and idolatrous teachings of non-believers, and presents himself as a model for the Thessalonians. If he seems to protest too much against being a bad servant and leader, it may be his way of discouraging the Thessalonians from such a track. Then again, it is just possible that Paul’s intention includes some preventative maintenance against this congregation buying into false accusations against his ministry from outsiders (esp. 2:3–5), namely, those who came against his ministry in Thessalonica (cf. Acts 17:5–8). To offset such accusations, he may be reinforcing his excellent conduct before the Thessalonians, telling them what they already know and affirm to be true. The only opponents in Thessalonica are outsiders, non-Christian neighbors of the Thessalonian congregation that have been harassing its members. It is rather doubtful that Paul faces personal opposition from within the congregation itself.

COMFORTING CONGREGATION MEMBERS AND WARNING THE ATAKTOI: PREVENTATIVE MAINTENANCE AGAINST APOSTASY (1 THESS 5:14; CF. 2 THESS 3:6–15)

Paul urges the Thessalonian church to warn the ataktoi congregants, cheer up the faint-hearted, and help the weak members (1 Thess 5:14). The need to instruct, nurture, and warn these congregation members is necessary, no doubt, because such
individuals may be susceptible to disturbing the welfare of the entire congregation, and they could abandon their faith.

The faint-hearted members (ἄλγοψυχος) need encouragement and consolation perhaps due to their worry and fear of being persecuted (e.g., 2:12–14) and anxiety about dying before Christ returns (e.g., 4:13–18; cf. 2 Thess 2:1–2). They likely harbor doubts about their salvation, which is one reason why Paul emphasizes the Thessalonians’ election and safekeeping as God’s people (1 Thess 1:4–5; 2:13; 5:9; 5:23–24; cf. 2 Thess 2:13–14). Malherbe rightly suggests the problem with these congregants is psychological. Without proper consolation and instruction, it is not difficult to draw the inference that these believers might end up denying their faith and becoming apostates.

Support for the weak members (ἀδοκιμός) may be assuming those with a weak conscience and high scruples against certain foods; elsewhere Paul claims that this type of parish member is prone to fall away by eating idol meats or foods that are not kosher (1 Cor 8–10; Rom 14). But there is no indication of conflicts over table fellowship in 1 Thessalonians, and since this letter was written before Romans and 1 Corinthians, a less specific identity for the weak may be in view. The “weak” in this letter perhaps identifies those who are physically and economically challenged, or the term’s ambiguity in this context may be inclusive of both the spiritually and physically frail congregation members. The former, at least, are susceptible to apostasy—these weak members might be growing weary of being watchful for the time of the end and tempted to give up hope.

The Thessalonians also are to warn the ἀτακτοὶ among their members (1 Thess 5:14). The term refers to either idlers/loafers or unruly/disorderly. Examples from early Jewish and Greco-Roman literature suggest the latter, but both senses may be implied in the Thessalonian correspondence. The unruly members may be disrupting congregational fellowship as a result of their behavior, which is exemplified by their refusal to earn their pay by working. They “walk” in an insubordinate way,

49. Malherbe, Thessalonians, 318.
50. On this identity for the weak see Friedrich, Thessalonicher, 248; Best, Thessalonians, 230–31.
53. For the former view see, e.g., Ellingworth and Nida, Thessalonians, 118–19; Best, Thessalonians, 229–30; the latter view includes, e.g., Yeo, “Rhetoric of Election,” 535, 537; Richard, Thessalonians, 269–70.
54. 3 Macc 1:19; Josephus, Ant. 15.152; J.W. 2:517; Philo, Creation 20; T. Naph. 2:9; Herodotus, Histories 6.93; Thucydides, Hist. 8.10. See further Delling, “ἀτακτικός” 8.48, who writes that, apart from Christian use, when the verb form is “applied to work, [it] does not in the first instance lay emphasis on sloth but rather on an irresponsible attitude to the obligation to work.”
meddling in other people's affairs (2 Thess 3:6–12; cf. 1 Thess 4:11).55 This behavior may be seen in contrast to Paul's exhortation for the believers to walk worthy of God's calling (1 Thess 2:12; cf. Phil 1:27; Col 1:10; Eph 4:1).

One possible scenario suggests that a group within this church espoused to a type of realized eschatology that embraced rebelliousness or idleness (cf. ἄτακτοι: 1 Thess 5:14), libertinism in sexual ethics (4:1–8), dualism of spirit and body (contrast 5:23), and a view that the resurrection had already taken place; hence, persecution took them by surprise because they thought such a thing could not happen in the new age (4:13–18). Paul instructs them about death in relation to Christ's second coming as an imminent event (4:13–5:10), but this teaching was interpreted to support the ἄτακτοι in their radical millennialism. This is one of the reasons Paul had to write 2 Thessalonians—to respond to their realized view of the eschaton and sternly warn against the ἄτακτοι members (2 Thess 2:1–12; 3:6–13).56 It is questionable, however, to what extent the Thessalonians held to a realized eschatology in the first letter. Paul teaches them about the coming Day of the Lord by way of reminder (1 Thess 5:1–2), and their eager expectation of Christ's future return may have led them to wrongly believe that no one from their congregation would die before he returned.

Their view of eschatology nevertheless appears to move from imminent in the first letter (1 Thess 4–5) to realized in the second (2 Thess 2:2). Connections between the ἄτακτοι (1 Thess 5:14; 2 Thess 3:6, 7, 11), those who are not working (1 Thess 4:11; 2 Thess 3:6–13), and those who are having sexual affairs (1 Thess 4:1–8) may be related if this group had a lot of extra time on their hands by wrongly thinking the end was so near.57 Perhaps one of their favorite pastimes involved pursuing sexual relationships with other congregation members. Regardless of our knowing details about the situation, the ἄτακτοι are disturbing the cohesion within the community and not pleasing God by their conduct. Moreover, if the ἄτακτοι disobey Paul's instructions and do not yield to the congregation's warnings, the other members should disassociate with such individuals (2 Thess 3:14–15).58 The exact nature of this separation is not specified, but it does not appear to be a complete expulsion from the

55. Barclay, "Conflict in Thessalonica," 525n46, suggests that Paul may have the unruly of 5:14 in mind in 4:11–12, and the two passages were connected in 2 Thess 3:6–13.

56. Holding to the ἄτακτοι as radical millenarians is Jewett, Thessalonian Correspondence, esp. 176–78. See also similar views in Friedrich, Thessalonicher, 205, 225; Lüütgert, Volkommenen.

57. The term ἄτακτος in 1 Thess 5:14 is closely related to the adverbial ἄτακτος in 2 Thess 3:6, 11 and the verb ἄτακτευμαι in 3:2 (cf. Delling, "ἄτακτος," 8,47). The thought of manual labor (cf. 1 Thess 4:11–12) is not part of Paul's stock paraenesis, pace Hock, Social Context of Paul's Ministry, 43–47, but entirely relevant to the Thessalonian situation, as argued by De Vos, Church and Community Conflicts, 160–70.

58. Witherington, Thessalonians, 254, rightly notices the offender is isolated here, that is, individualized from the corporate community.
church on the level of the man committing fornication with his stepmother in 1 Cor 5:1–5.\(^{59}\) The Thessalonians are not to consider the unruly person as an enemy but warn him as a “brother” (2 Thess 3:15), a term often used by Paul for identifying fellow believers.\(^{60}\) As recent converts to the gospel, the Thessalonians are no longer idolaters but take on a new identity as a familial community “in Christ” (1 Thess 1:1; 2:14; 4:16) with God as their heavenly Father (1:1, 3; 3:11, 13; cf. 2:11) and they all as brothers and sisters (1:4; 4:1, 6, 9–13; 5:14, 26). This designation of ἀδελφός may suggest that the idler is not completely banished from the church; he is not banished from Christ’s community, and hence, he is not cut off from Christ. Moreover, unlike the fornicator in 1 Cor 5, there is no mention that the disobedient person in Thessalonica is delivered over to Satan or that a destruction of his “flesh” must take place for the remedial purpose of saving him.

The punishment in 2 Thess 3:14, then, seems to be a further elaboration of Paul’s imperative to keep away from such individuals (3:6).\(^{61}\) The nature of this disassociation, even so, probably involves more than merely ignoring the person or looking the other way when that person is at church; it probably involves some sort of disciplinary action. The unruly idler who refuses correction may be excluded from table fellowship and partaking of the Lord’s Supper.\(^{62}\) The concept of not mingling or associating (συναγωνίζομαι) is found elsewhere in Paul only in 1 Cor 5:9–11, which involves table fellowship, and this view dovetails nicely with an earlier admonition against the rebellious idler: “if anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat” (2 Thess 3:10). Fellow believers could still admonish this idler whenever they talk with the person apart from church gatherings or presumably even at the gathering so long as food is not being served. This sort of discipline against the erring believer is remedial: “that he may be ashamed” (2 Thess 3:14) and hopefully repent of unruly and idle behavior. There is hope, then, for his complete restoration. His period of discipline, however, would seem to be a delicate time in which he could be hardened further and so decide to leave the community in Christ. If that were the case, then Paul and his followers would undoubtedly consider him an apostate and no longer a “brother” (2 Thess 3:15; cf. Phil 3:18).

59. Contrast Wanamaker, Thessalonians, 289, who thinks the disassociation involves excommunication.

60. See ἀδελφός in 1 Thess 1:4; 2:1, 9, 17; 3:2, 7; 4:1; 5:4; 2 Thess 1:3; 2:13, 15; 3:1 cf. Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 1:1, 26.

61. Frame, Thessalonians, 310, perceptively connects the dots between 3:6 and 3:14.

62. See 1 Cor 5:9, 11; 1QS 6.24–7.25; 8.16–18; and Best, Thessalonians, 343. Marshall, Thessalonians, 228, adds the interesting nuance that the discipline includes a discouraging of hospitality towards such individuals in the various homes of the believers; this would “prevent the idlers from sponging on the other members of the church.”
WALKING IN HOLINESS AND THE WORK OF FAITH
(1 THESS 4:1-2; CF. 1:3; 2:12; 3:11-13; 2 THESS 1:11)

The central paraenesis in the letter comes by way of reminder for the Thessalonians—they are to walk in holiness and in a manner that pleases God (1 Thess 4:1-2; cf. 2:12).63 The exhortation material in 4:1-12 is grounded for the most part in earlier Jewish thoughts. The ideas of receiving instruction (1 Thess 4:1-2), of walking in moral conduct (4:1, 12), of pleasing God (4:1), of following God’s will (4:3), of holiness (4:3-4, 7), of “brother” as originally Jewish terminology (4:6, 9), of concern about outsider perceptions (4:11-12),64 and of possible echoes from Israel’s scriptures65 all point to Jewish influence.66

Paul exhorts the Thessalonians to “walk” (περιπατέω) in sanctification (4:1, 3, 12). This manner of advancement is similar to ancient halakah; it involves following a moral pattern for conducting one’s life. Faithful Israelites “walked” before God by living in a way compatible with the Torah and godly wisdom (Deut 8:6; 10:12; 11:22; 13:5; 30:6; 1 Kgs 3:3, 6, 14; 8:23, 25; 2 Kgs 20:3; Ps 85[86]:11; Prov 6:20-22; 8:20; 28:6; Isa 33:15; 59:9; 1QS 3.21; 4.11, 24; CD 19.4). Paul in a similar manner instructs his churches to “walk” in a way that pleases God, requiring spiritual sensitivity and righteous conduct (cf. Gal 5:16; 1 Cor 7:17; Rom 6:4; Phil 1:27; 3:17-18; Col 1:10; 2:6; Eph. 4:1).67 The apostle seems to be influenced here by his earlier training as a Pharisee, which required him to conduct himself on a daily basis in accordance with the Law in order to be righteous before God. Sometime after becoming a Christfolower he reconfigured the moral principle of walking according to the commands of the Law and began to teach that believers exhibit personal righteousness by walking according to the example of Christ.

He stresses in his letters the importance of walking in the Spirit (Gal 5:16, 25; Rom 8:4, 14), which becomes a source of guidance in place of the works of the Law and produces virtuous conduct such as love and self-control among believers (Gal 5:22-23). This type of walking may be contrasted with unrighteous strides associated with the “flesh” (Gal 5:16-17; Rom 8:4-5), unbelievers (Col 3:7-8; Eph 4:12;

65. 1 Thess 4:6/Ps 94:1; 1 Thess 4:8/1 Sam 8:7; 1 Thess 4:9/Isa 54:13.
66. For Jewish elements, see further Carras, “Jewish Ethics and Gentile Converts,” 306–15.
67. Stressing the influence of Proverbs on this metaphor is Steinmann and Eschelbach, "Walk This Way,” 43–62, who rightly criticize NT translations (e.g., NIV) that render “walk” (περιπατέω) as “live” (ζωέω) and thus overlook the significant nuance of the former term. The former centers on “activity and movement, which suggests purpose and destination” (52).
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5:8), carnal believers (1 Thess 3:6, 11; 1 Cor 3:3), and apostates (Phil 3:18). The contrast between these oppositional ways of walking may be influenced in part by Jesus’ teaching on two paths, one leading to life and the other to destruction (Matt 7:13-14; cf. Luke 13:24). As well, Paul may be influenced by the prominent two-ways motif stressed by the Law and Proverbs (e.g., Deut 30:6, 15-16; Prov. 15:9; 16:25). If so, he shifts an earlier emphasis on language about the “way” (διήκον) to the more active περιπατεῖο and other verbs related to advancement in a forward motion.

The Thessalonians’ walk includes their receiving and actualizing godly instructions that originate from the Lord Jesus and have been passed on from his immediate apostles to Paul and his colleagues (1 Thess 4:1-2). Christ’s command to love one another no doubt would be at the forefront of these instructions (4:9 cf. Mark 12:28-34; Matt 22:36-40; Luke 10:25-28; John 13:34-35). In a very deep sense, to follow Christ is to walk in love, which includes sacrificing for the sake of others (cf. Rom 14:15; Eph 5:2) and behaving properly towards outsiders (1 Thess 4:12; cf. Rom 13:13; Col 4:5; Eph. 5:15) even though the Christ community is to be distinct from the society (1 Thess 4:3, 5). This love reflects God’s love for Christ’s followers, and they are to reciprocate by conducting their life in a holy manner that pleases God, obeys the Lord’s teachings, and perseveres in faithfulness and God’s word (1 Thess 2:12-14; 4:1-3; cf. 2 Thess 3:5; 2 Cor 5:7; Col 1:10).

In the Thessalonian correspondence, “work” is not set in contrast to “faith,” but involves obedience and service to God exemplified by a new lifestyle that embraces the virtues of faithfulness, love, and hope (1 Thess 1:3 cf. Gal 5:6; 1 Cor 13:13). Paul uses the singular “work” in 1:3, not “works” as in “works of the Law’ which in Galatians and Romans is set in contrast to faith.70 The singular is unattached to the Law here and indeed can have positive connotations elsewhere in Paul (cf. Rom 2:7; 13:3; 14:20; 1 Cor 3:14). The congregation’s “work of faith” (1 Thess 1:3; cf. 2 Thess 1:11)71 is virtually synonymous with the “obedience of faith” that Paul mentions in Rom 1:5 and 16:16. For Paul sanctification is essential for the Thessalonians if they are to be considered blameless at the second coming of Christ (1 Thess 3:11-13; 5:23; cf. 1:3; 2:19; 4:6).72 Paul hopes they will indeed live up to this expectation (2:19). As

68. Harink, Paul among the Postliberals, 32-38, rightly argues against an oppositional view between faith and works in 1 Thessalonians.

69. See Best, Thessalonians, 67-68.

70. On 2 Thess 1:11, Menken, 2 Thessalonians, 93, identifies the verse as a prayer wish for salvation in which “one might speak of double causality: both the Christians themselves and God’s Spirit are working” (cf. Phil 2:12-13; Rom 8:4).

71. On 1 Thess 3:11-13, Mitchell, “1 and 2 Thessalonians,” 56, writes, “Here, as elsewhere, he reminds the Thessalonians rather pointedly that what is at stake now, as always, is their eschatological salvation at the parousia.” Schnelle, Einleitung, 52, may be correct when suggesting through 1 Thess. 48
Pieter De Villiers affirms, "They must live up to the salvation that has been granted to them in Christ. If they do not do so, they are lost and fall under the judgment of God." Until the end takes place, then, the congregation must continue in holiness and both encourage and warn its members (5:14).

**ABSTAINING FROM PORNÉIA (1 THESS 4:3–9)**

Paul claims that the will of God for the Thessalonians is to abstain from πόρνεία (1 Thess 4:3; cf. 5:22). In this case God's will (θέλημα) refers to God's desire, which is something they must obey; to do God's will is to please God (2:4, 12; 4:1, 3). In a broad sense the word πόρνεία, sometimes translated as "fornication," may be defined as "illegitimate sexual activities." Paul uses the word or its derivatives to identify a form of incest (1 Cor 5:1–5), cultic prostitution (1 Thess 4:3–5), adulterous relationships (1 Cor 7:1–2), and frequently sexual vice that could prevent its practitioners from inheriting God's kingdom (1 Thess 4:9–11; 10:8; Gal 5:19–21; Col 3:5). Paul is responding to sexual misconduct as most Jews would who read the Septuagint; he condemns πόρνεία in its various forms (e.g., Gen 38:24; Num 25:1; Prov 7; Sir 23:16; 41:17–22; Wis 3:16–19; 14:26).

The term, moreover, reflects sexual deviance as found in the sex codes of Deuteronomic and Levitical traditions (Deut 22; Lev 18–21). He considers this kind of prohibition against Gentile believers to be binding, even though in Jewish thinking these codes originate from Mosaic Law. Obviously such rules do not constitute the "works of the Law" that he condemns in Galatians; there πόρνεία is considered one of the "works of the flesh" contrary to walking in the Spirit (Gal 5:19–25). Such works reflect the unregenerate behavior of outsiders who live in the old, fallen era. These works are also committed socially and thus violate the solidarity of the community in Christ and the command to love others (Gal 1:4; 5:14). Perhaps this is the and 5:9 that the future judgment will be according to a person's works.

74. On this definition and activities identified by the term, see Oropeza, "What Is Sex?" 27–63. Malina, "Does *Porneia* mean Fornication?", 17, identifies πόρνεία as "unlawful sexual conduct." For Jensen, "Does *Porneia* Mean Fornication?", 165–66, this would include premarital sexual activities (e.g., Lev 19:29 LXX; 21:7–14 LXX; Deut 22:13–21; Sir 42:9–11). For Gaca, *Making of Fornication,* 19–20, 124, 151, the LXX emphasizes πόρνεία as sexual activities that digress from the norm of worshiping the one true God. Religious endogamy is also stressed by its usage. Glancy, "Obstacles to Slaves' Participation," 493, 497, 501, more specifically defines Paul's use of the term narrowly as prostitution (1 Cor 6) and more widely as "sexual irregularity." Henceforth, the term will be transliterated *porneia* in this chapter.
75. See further 1 Cor 5:9–11; 2 Cor 12:21; Rom 1:24–32; Eph. 5:3, 5; 1 Tim 1:10.
basis for Paul's thinking in 1 Thess 4 even though he does not mention the works of the flesh in this letter. Then again, even though the Law does not bring about righteousness in Paul's view (Gal 3:19–25), he could still maintain the Levitical codes against πορνεία in agreement with the decision of the Jerusalem meeting that prohibited such activities among the Gentile converts (Acts 15:19–20, 28–29). We will see in 1 Corinthians and Romans, however, that even though Paul agrees with the prohibition against fornication he is not entirely in agreement with the Jerusalem church on its dietary prohibitions, including the ban on idol foods. Paul, in any case, mentions nothing about the Jerusalem verdict in his correspondence to the Thessalonians. A better explanation of his prohibition in this letter rests on internal evidence.

The Thessalonians are to refrain from πορνεία, and each one of them is to possess or guard his "vessel" (σκεύος) in honor and holiness (1 Thess 4:3–5). In all probability the "vessel" is not referring to a wife despite its being used this way in 1 Pet 3:7. If the Thessalonians are to take a wife without having lustful passion (1 Thess 4:4–5), this would tend to contradict what Paul writes in 1 Cor 7:9: the Corinthians are allowed to take a wife for the very purpose of relieving their lustful passion! We do not need to argue that Paul changed his view from passionless marital sex in 1 Thessalonians to passionate sex in 1 Corinthians. The vessel in the former correspondence (1 Thess 4:4), as certain scholars rightly argue, is a euphemism for the penis in which σκεύος can be translated back into אָרָץ, a Semitic euphemism for the genitalia (cf. 4Q416[4QInstruction] 2:2.21; 1 Sam. 21:4–6). Paul exhorts the Thessalonian men to control their sexual organ. Alternatively, Paul may understand the penis as a kind of synecdoche for the whole body (cf. 2 Cor 4:7). The driving issue for Paul in either case rests not on his meaning behind the word "vessel," but on his urging the Thessalonians to abstain from πορνεία. Beverly Gaventa is instructive.

76. Supporting the vessel="wife" view are, e.g., Kondradt, "Eidenai ekaston hymón," 128–35; Yarbrough, Not Like the Gentiles, 68–76; Witherington, Thessalonians, 113–14.

77. See further Oropeza, "What Is Sex?," 31–32. Ellis, Paul and Ancient Views of Sexual Desire, rightly affirms that Paul argues for self-control over sexual desire rather than the elimination of such desire, and sex within marriage seems intended for pleasure (cf. 1 Cor 7)—it is not passionless. His view contends against Martin, "Paul without Passion," 201–15; and Fredrickson, "Passionless Sex," 23–30. Assuming that the "vessel" means a wife, Ellis suggests that Paul may be advocating for self-control of sex within marriage (161). As we argue, however, 1 Thess 4:4 does not support the vessel=wife view.


here: "Whatever Paul means in this particular text, it is certain both that Paul was opposed to adultery and that Paul was opposed to all sexual expression outside of monogamous marriage (see 1 Cor 6:15-20; 7:1-2)."

The Thessalonians should not mimic non-believing Gentiles in their sexual practices (1 Thess 4:5), since they were often thought by Jews and emergent Christians to be promiscuous. Paul warns that they must not trespass and take advantage (πλοεοντευτεω) of a "brother" in this matter; in other words, they should not cheat fellow believers in reference to sexual matters (4:6-7). It is quite possible that some of the unruly idlers in the congregation occupied a good portion of their time pursuing sexual affairs. They tried to woo the wives, daughters, sons, or servants that belonged to the households of other male believers. This view would be in keeping with the ancient patriarchal assumption that illegitimate sexual relations with the members of another man's household violates that man's rightful "property" (cf. Exod 20:14-15). As such, porneia may have been understood by Paul as infringement on the reciprocal ethic to love one another (cf. 1 Thess 4:9): it involved cheating the rightful "owner" of his possession by taking or using what was his without proper consent, whether that "owner" was the father, master, male kinsman, spouse, or future spouse. In this sense, Paul's assumption is that those who engage in porneia are violating bodies that belong to another male believer, and so they are not walking in a manner that loves their male neighbor as themselves.

Ultimately, then, Paul's ground for prohibiting porneia in 1 Thessalonians centers not on its being a work of the flesh, nor on the Jerusalem church's decision against it; he forbids it because it violates the law of love by which all Christ-followers must conduct themselves (cf. Gal 5:14; 6:2; Rom 13:8-10). The potential for congregation members to commit apostasy is evident in 1 Thess 4:8—the one who rejects Paul's exhortation concerning sexual conduct rejects..."
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God who gives them the Holy Spirit to work sanctification in their lives and help them resist vices such as porneia (1 Thess 4:8; cf. Gal 5:19–23; 1 Cor 6:15–20; Eph 4:30; Luke 10:16; Acts 7:51; CD 5.11; 7.2). The Thessalonians are being spiritually cleansed as God's eschatological people via the work of God's Spirit (1 Thess 1:9; cf. Ezek 11:18–20; 36:25–29; 37:14, 23). Hence, to resist this work and not turn away from porneia is to reject the Holy Spirit and, in the words of Frank Thielman, "opt out of the eschatological era." Paul affirms the Lord as the avenger of those who are cheated, implying divine punishment on the believers who defraud others and commit porneia (1 Thess 4:6). This probably assumes the typical consequence of divine judgment on sexual offenders as was prevalent in Israel's scriptures. Yet for Paul God's judgment will be fully manifest at the eschaton. When Paul was still in their city he apparently taught the Thessalonians about the future judgment and gave them a solemn warning (διαφωτισμένοι) not to practice immorality if they wished to escape that judgment (4:6c–8). Now he adds that if they continue practicing sexual vice and reject his words they are rejecting God and his Spirit. Their immorality, if unchecked, will thus lead to apostasy, which in turn will bring on them divine wrath at the parousia. The recalcitrant sexual offenders in the church would seem to suffer a final punishment similar to those who do not know God (1 Thess 1:10; 5:3, 9; 2 Thess 1:8–9; 2:10–12).

THE COMING APOSTASY AND PAROUSIA
(1 THESS 5:1–11; 2 THESS 2:1–12)

The Thessalonians seem to have expected Christ to return before death could claim any members of their church, but when some of their faithful had died, they became disturbed about end-time events and the fate of the dead in Christ (1 Thess 4:13–5:10; cf. 3:13). In order to instruct them about the eschaton, Paul reconfigures apocalyptic traditions, especially those originating from the "Little Apocalypse" in the Synoptic Gospels (Mark 13; Matt 24). Paul's words about the Day of the Lord coming as a "thief in the night" (5:1–2) are reminiscent of Jesus' warnings to his disciples to be watchful and morally prepared, lest they face divine punishment at the parousia (Mark 13:33–37; Matt 24:45–51; Luke 12:41–48). Although 1 Thessalonians was written earlier than the canonical gospels, the Thief in the Night sayings were

84. Cf. Wanamaker, Thessalonians, 158.
85. Thielman, Paul & the Law, 77.
probably well-known orally by the time Paul wrote to this congregation.87 His spin on these sayings is that, rather than stressing them as warnings to the Christ-followers as do the Synoptic texts, he is more interested in encouraging his audience and highlighting distinctions between their behavior and that of their unbelieving neighbors (1 Thess 5:4–11). The believers belong to the “day”; the outsiders belong to the “night.” And whereas the Thessalonians are “sons of light,” the outsiders are in “darkness,” not being alert and morally self-controlled. They are not prepared for the parousia (1 Thess 5:4–8).88

Paul’s mention of the specious peace and safety claimed by the outsiders echoes a slogan of imperial Rome (5:3),89 and it may be an indirect slam against the false sense of security provided by the Pax Romana. Paul’s words also sound similar to Dan 8:24–25 and 11:6–7, in which destruction comes upon those who are “at ease.” Regardless of whether the false peace betrays a political or prophetic voice or both, the outsiders are led astray by false security, and this itself is reminiscent of the proclamations of false prophets who wrongly speak of peace when impending doom lurks around the corner (cf. Jer 6:14; Ezek 13:16).90 The oppressors of the Thessalonian church will suffer eschatological destruction on the Day of the Lord (1 Thess 5:3; cf. 1:10; 2 Thess 1:6–9; 2:10–12). Differently, the faithful congregation will be rewarded when the Lord returns, and its members are to comfort one another with the assurance of this salvation (1 Thess 5:9–11; cf. 1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:16–18; 5:23; 2 Thess 1:7).

The contrast between the people of light and darkness resembles Qumran literature (e.g., 1QS 1.9–11; 2.16; 1QM 1.1), but perhaps ultimately the contrast recalls Israel as God’s elect people protected against the plagues that God sent on Egypt. In the Thessalonian correspondence Paul identifies Gentile believers as the holy people of God set apart from other Gentiles (e.g., 1 Thess 4:3, 7; 5:23; 2 Thess 2:13–14), which is similar to Israel being called out of Egypt. In this sense the community in Thessalonica may be patterned after Israel.91 Even so, it would be inaccurate for us to say that Paul merely consoles the Thessalonians when referring to the parousia. More in keeping with the gospel traditions, Paul exhorts his audience to remain vigi-

87. On the possibility of Paul echoing Jesus sayings or Q, see Plevnik, “1 Thess 5:1–11,” 81–82; Witherington, Jesus, Paul and the End, 160f.
88. The metaphor of sleep in 5:6–7 is negative and connotes the outsiders’ lack of watchfulness. In 5:10, however, being asleep refers to believers who have already died (5:10; cf. 4:13–16), and so the negative connotation is removed in the latter verse.
89. So Green, Thessalonians, 233–34. Gaventa, Thessalonians, 70, cites an example from Velleius Paterculus, Compendium of Roman History, 2.103.5.
90. See examples in Löverstam, Spiritual Wakefulness, 104–5.
91. See further Thielman, Paul & the Law, 75.
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lant and morally self-controlled until the Lord returns (1 Thess 5:6, 8; cf. 1 Cor 16:13). If he is informed by the Thief in the Night traditions, he probably knows about the eternal consequences against the spiritually lethargic followers of Jesus (e.g., Matt 24:48-51); albeit, he does not warn the Thessalonians against committing apostasy in this regard.

Spiritual apostasy related to the end times surfaces instead in 2 Thess 2:1-12 when Paul is forced to clarify his view of the eschaton. Here he must affirm to the congregation that prior to Christ’s second coming a great apostasy (ἀποστασία) will take place, and the “man of lawlessness” will be revealed (2:3-4). This massive falling away does not seem to be merely political or social, but it involves moral and spiritual dimensions that were in some sense already manifest as the “mystery of lawlessness” (2:7). Predictions of apostasy and deception that would occur towards the close of the eschaton seem to be prevalent in early Jewish traditions, and the early Christians tend to adopt this theme in their own predictions (e.g., 1 Tim 4:1-3; 2 Tim 3:1-5; Rev 12:3-4; Did. 16:1-5). Paul’s view is thus held in common with Jews and Christians of antiquity.

More specifically, Paul is still being informed by sayings attributed to Jesus and found in the “Little Apocalypse” of the Synoptic Gospels; this time he echoes words that warn of a coming apostasy among the Christ-followers (e.g., Mark 13:5-22; Matt 24:5-13; Luke 17:30-33; 18:8; 21:34-36). If these sayings originate with Jesus or the Twelve, they would seem to have been known, at least orally, prior to Paul writing to the Thessalonians. Paul is certainly not unfamiliar with teachings attributed to Jesus that were later included in the gospels. He also seems familiar with the tradition of Daniel in terms of a coming apostasy in the eschaton and a leader who exalts himself above every god (cf. Dan 8:10, 24-25; 11:23, 30-31, 34-36; 12:11). Perhaps his view blends ideas attributed to Daniel and Jesus, especially in relation to predictions about an “abomination” standing in the temple in Jerusalem (cf. Matt 24:15-24; Dan 9:27; 11:31, 36; 12:11; cf. Luke 21:16-20). If so, Paul may have

92. On ἀποστασία as defection see further sources in Giblin, Threat to Faith, 245; cf. 81-88; Schlier, “ἀποστασία, ἀποστασία, διχοστασία,” 1-513.
94. E.g., 4 Ezra 5:1-13; Jub. 23:14-21; 1 En. 91:5-7; 1QHab 2:1-10.
95. On comparisons between apocalyptic/prophet material in the gospels and Thessalonians, see further Hartman, Prophecy Interpreted, 178-205; Beasley-Murray, Jesus and the Future, 226-30.
96. E.g., 1 Cor 7:10/Mark 10:1-12; 1 Cor 11:23-25/Luke 22:14-20; Rom 12:14, 19-21/Matt 5:10-11, 39-44.
97. In Matt 24:15 the “holy place” almost certainly refers to the temple in Jerusalem; cf. Matt 23:38; Luz, Matthew, 3.195-96. If this is Paul’s backdrop, then he did not intend the temple in 2 Thess 2:4 to be a reference to the seat of the body or "temple of the Holy Spirit" (cf. 1 Cor 3:16-17; Giblin, Threat
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taken seriously an exhortation to study Daniel (cf. Matt 24:15) and interpreted the man of lawlessness as the “abomination” mentioned in the gospels. For Paul, this person will sit in the temple in Jerusalem and proclaim or display (ἀποδείκνυμι) himself as God. The followers of this Lawless One will be deceived and worship him as God—namely, they will turn from God by committing this ultimate act of idolatry (2 Thess 2:3–4). For Paul, this person’s designation as “the man of lawlessness” (2:3: ὁ ἀνθρωπος τής ἁπωμας) and “the lawless one” (2:8: ὁ ἁνωμος) does not center on his violation of the works of the Law but on his opposition to the will of God (cf. 1 John 3:4; John 17:12).88 He sets himself up as God and leads others into apostasy.89

Whereas Antiochus IV (Epiphanes) setting up an image of Zeus in the temple of Jerusalem100 seems to be closer to the meaning of Daniel’s abomination (cf. 164–67 BCE), the Thessalonians may have been more familiar with the attempt of Emperor Caligula (c. 40 CE) to set up an image of himself in the guise of Zeus in Jerusalem’s temple. Paul, however, is referring to a future event from his vantage point. While it is possible that the apostates in 2 Thess 2 will fall away through persecutions, he does not mention this as the reason.101 Paul has idolatry and deceptive miracles as the points of leading the masses away from God, not persecution.

He does not reveal the identity of those who will commit the future apostasy, perhaps because his audience already knew these details from previous instructions (cf. 2 Thess 2:5). To this we may add an observation by Menken that the definite articles appearing before “apostasy” ( fullfiled apostasy) and “man of lawlessness” (ὁ ἀνθρωπός τῆς ἁπωμας) assume the original readers were already familiar with these subjects.102 The followers of the Lawless One who are destroyed in 2:10–12 would seem to include those who commit apostasy in 2:3. Unless Paul changes his thinking by the time he writes Rom 9–11, these followers of the Lawless One do not appear

to Faith, 76–80). This also suggests a pre-70 CE date for 2 Thessalonians, when the temple was still standing.

88. In 2:3 the older reading is ἁνωμας (e.g., B, 81) and is preferred over ἁπωμας (e.g., A, D, G): cf. 2:8 and Metzger, Textual Commentary, 567; Wananaker, Thessalonians, 251. In essence, however, that this man is lawlessness is not much different than claiming him an ultimate sinner or evildoer: see Trilling, Zweite Brief, 83. For ἁνωμα and ἁνωμος in early Jewish and Christian sources see Gutbrod, “ἁνωμα,” 4.1085–87.

89. Similarly in emergent Judaism, Malherbe, Thessalonians, 419, writes that “lawlessness came to describe the influence of paganism on Jews (Pss Sol 1:8; 2:3; 3:13), especially as it was embodied in a person like Pompey (Pss Sol 17:13 cf. 20).”

100. 1 Macc 1:54–59; 6:7; 2 Macc 8:17.

101. Nevertheless, if he has Daniel in mind, then persecution and idolatry may be related, for, similar to Antiochus Epiphanes, the Lawless One may persecute or discriminate against those who refuse to submit to worshipping him.

102. Menken, 2 Thessalonians, 102.
to be non-Christian Jews who have never accepted Paul's gospel. The fate of those who follow the Lawless One is eternal destruction at the second coming of Christ (2 Thess 2:8–12); differently, the unbelieving Israelites who reject the gospel will still be saved in the future (cf. Rom 11:26). The apostates who worship the Lawless One are probably former Christ-followers. If this phenomenon is to take place at the temple in Jerusalem (2:4), then apostate Jewish Christians seem to be primarily in view. Nevertheless, if Paul is borrowing ideas found in the canonical gospels and Daniel, the latter dealing with all humanity and kingdoms, then it is quite possible that the apostasy not only points to Jewish but also Gentile Christians, and even a more general rebellion against God involving the entire world (cf. Mark 13:8, 10; Matt 24:7, 14, 21; Luke 21:34–35). In terms of worldwide chaos, Malherbe's words are instructive: "If Paul had taught the Thessalonians the apocalyptic view of apostasy, they would not have thought that only a part of humanity would be deceived but that the whole world would be in jeopardy (cf. Rev 13:3)."

The fate of the apostates and followers of the Lawless One would seem to be the same as that of the Lawless One. He is called the "son of perdition" (2 Thess 2:3; cf. John 17:12), pointing to his ultimate destruction and condemnation, and those who follow him will suffer God's wrath on the day of the Lord (2 Thess 2:8–13; cf. 1 Thess 1:10; 5:3; 2 Thess 1:6–10). Paul claims that God sends them delusion so that they believe a lie because they did not receive the "love of the truth" and so be saved (2 Thess 2:10-11). They are excluded from salvation and God confirms them in their spiritual obduracy after they reject the truth (2:10-11).

Excursus: Evil Spirits and God's Strong Delusion (2 Thess 2:10–11)

The thought in 2:10–11 shows that God is sometimes directly or indirectly involved in deluding or otherwise hardening his enemies. In Israel's scriptures, the means by which God hardens hearts or stirs up calamity is sometimes attributed to evil spirits. While the Pentateuch affirms divine hardening (e.g., Exod 4:21; 7:3; Num 21:23; Deut 2:30; Josh 11:20; cf. Isa 29:10; Sir 16:15), it mentions nothing about evil spirits that work

103. Some suggest the apostates may be related to the disorderly/idle members among the Thessalonians (1 Thess 5:14); e.g., Holland, Tradition that You Received. There is no clear connection, however, between the apostates in 2 Thess 2 and the disorderly members.

104. Malherbe, Thessalonians, 431.

105. The unusual phrase τὴν ἀληθείαν τῆς ἀληθείας perhaps refers to the gospel message that has love as its object (Wanamaker, Thessalonians, 261). Either this or it refers to the gospel message about the true God who is the source of genuine love, as opposed to the Lawless One, who is a false deity they worship (2 Thess 2:4; cf. 1 Thess 1:9).

106. See Beale, Thessalonians, 222; Witherington, Thessalonians, 224.
for God to accomplish this end. The Book of Judges, however, mentions God sending an evil spirit between Abimelech and the people of Shechem in order to avenge the murder of Gideon's seventy sons (Judg 9:23). God also sends an evil spirit to deceive King Ahab (1 Kgs 22:1-40). God incites David to take the census in 2 Sam 24:1, but 1 Chr 21:1 has Satan inciting David. Whereas God may be viewed as a destroyer of the wicked (Deut 32:39; 1 Sam 2:6; Isa 45:6-7), the "Destroyer" sometimes appears to be an angelic being sent by God (Exod 12:23; cf. 1 Cor 10:10; Heb 11:28; Rev 9:11).107

Sometimes the spirits are not necessarily benevolent even though God carries out God's plan either through or despite these beings. King Saul in his disobedience to God is plagued by an evil spirit (1 Sam 16:14; cf. 15:22-26). Then while under the influence of this spirit sent by God, Saul attempts to kill David (1 Sam 19:9 cf. 26:17-19). In Job's story the accusing messenger or "Satan" works in permission with God's purposes even though Job is innocent of wrong-doing (Job 1-2).

In later traditions Mastema, the leader of evil spirits, aids Pharaoh's magicians and hardens the hearts of the Egyptians to pursue the Israelites after they had left Egypt, and yet God concedes of the idea to overthrow the Egyptians in the midst of the sea (Jub. 48:9, 15-17; 49:2). Unclean spirits also lead astray the sons of Noah, causing them to become spiritually blind (10:1-3). In the Testament of Solomon the king interrogates a malevolent spirit coming out of the Red Sea who claims to have hardened Pharaoh and opposed Moses by aiding the magicians Jannes and Jambres (T. Sol. 25:1-7). Pseudo-Philo claims that the calamities that befell apostate Israel in the wilderness are the work of destroying angels (e.g., L.A.B. 15.5-7; cf. Num 10-16).

Qumran literature possesses accounts of angels who bring calamity on deceitful and obdurate humans (1QS 4.9-14; cf. CD 2.6).109 According to this community's version of Abraham's sojourn in Egypt, Pharaoh Zoan takes Sarai as his bride and intends to kill Abraham, but Sarai claims to be Abraham's sister. Pharaoh Zoan cannot have sexual


108. For Targums and other sources along these lines see Perrot, "Les examples du desert," 440; Str.B. 3.413-16.

109. For the Qumran group, stubborness and hardness of heart are associated with blind eyes and dull ears, and these are often attributed to outsiders, apostates, and those expelled from the community (1QS 2.3, 14, 25-26; 4.9-14; 5.4-5; 7.18-25; CD 8.3-8; cf. 1QS 1:2-3; 1QH 7[15].3; 11.25-29; 1Q26 5). Early Jewish literature often attribute obduracy to human sin or demonic activity and tend to stress forgiveness (Philo, Spec. 1.54-55; L.A.B. 10.2; Jub. 10:1-3; b. Megillah 17b; b. Rosh Hashanah 17b; b. Abodah Zarah 58a; S. Eli. Rab. 16; Lev. Rab. 27.8; Lam. Rab. 1.22 §57; Pesiq. Rab. 8.3; 33.13). Israel, however, is not always the exclusive target of spiritual obduracy. Some early Christian sources use this motif to warn against Christian apostasy (1 Clem. 3.1; 51.3; Herm. Vis. 3.7.6). See further Evans, To See and Not Perceive, 138-62.
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relations with Sarai because God sent an evil spirit to plague his household in response to Abraham's prayer. After Pharaoh returns the patriarch's wife, Abraham lays hands on him and the spirit departs, enabling the monarch to recover from illness (1QapGen ar 20:8-29).110

In 2 Thess 2:9-12 Satan is at work performing lying wonders before the apostates who follow the Lawless One. God sends them a "working of delusion" (2:11: ἐνέργειαν πλάνης), implying perhaps that God uses some sort of malevolent activity or spirit as the instrumental means of punishment to bring judgment against those who rebel against God. This act may be similar to God delivering rebels over to anti-God powers (cf. Rom 1:24, 26, 28), but in 2 Thessalonians the divine role is more active: God "sends" (πέμπει) them this working of delusion.

Paul does not elaborate on how God goes about doing this. Since the followers of the Lawless One refuse to accept the gospel (2 Thess 2:10b), Paul believes it is God's prerogative to have them completely deceived and consequently destroyed (2:8-10). They already rejected God's message of salvation prior to God sending the delusion; hence their punishment is a consequence of their prior rejection.111 Perhaps God reciprocates lex talonis their acceptance of delusion with more delusion. God recompenses their refusal to follow the truth with more spiritual blindness.112

THE ELECTION AND FINAL SALVATION OF THE COMMUNITY
(2 THESS 2:13-14; CF. 1 THESS 1:4-5; 2:13; 5:9; 5:23-24)

One of the primary aims of 1 Thessalonians is to commend and encourage the congregation for its steadfast faith and love despite persecution. Among other things, and especially in the opening chapters, the letter reaffirms, reinforces, reminds, amplifies, and consoles the audience, which is typical epideictic rhetoric (cf. Aristotle, Rhetoric 2.18.1391b[17]; Quintilian, Inst. 3.7.6).113

With this aim in mind Paul reassures the Thessalonians that their election (ἐκλογή) is from God and they are "beloved by God," a phrase used of elect Israel (1 Thess 1:4; cf. Deut 32:15; 33:12; Isa 44:2).114 The apostle and his missionary col-

110. Here the evil spirit brings pestilence and is also called a "pestilent spirit": see Fitzmyer, Genesis Apocryphon, 116-17, 121. Also see Knibb, Qumran Community, 193, and similar examples in Jub. 10:9-13; 13:13; Josephus, Ant. 1.8.1(164); Philo, Abr. 96; Tg. Ong. on Deut 28:60.
111. Malherbe, Thessalonians, 426, says it well: "God's action is thus in consequence of theirs."
112. See a similar example in Mark 4:10-12 (vol. 1 of this work).
113. See further Witherington, Thessalonians, 21-29, 63-64.
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These leagues confirm the congregation's status by recollecting their original preaching to the Thessalonians, which was presented with confidence, deep conviction, and substantiated with powerful signs and wonders in the Spirit (1 Thess 1:5). God's choice of the Thessalonians was prior to any decision of theirs, and the actualizing of that choice resulted in their calling. The gospel message became the instrument God used to reach the Thessalonians—they received the divine word that was spoken by Paul and works effectively in them (2:13). Paul's prayer wish is that God will watch over the Thessalonians, and on account of God's faithfulness he will see to it that their sanctification is made complete (5:23-24).

In relation to final salvation the Thessalonians are delivered from the coming wrath directed against the unbelieving outsiders who afflict them (1 Thess 1:10; 2:14-16; 3:13; 5:9; 2 Thess 1:6-12; 2:8-12). They are not appointed for wrath but will obtain (περιστοίχος) salvation on the Day of the Lord through the believers' watchfulness (1 Thess 5:9; cf. vv. 4-8). God is the one who destines (θέτει) them to salvation. By implication the unbelievers also seem destined, but they for God's wrath. Both destinies will be finally realized at the culmination of the eschaton. Even so, whether to salvation or wrath, these destinies are general categories that do not appear to be fixed when speaking of particulars. Paul does not guarantee that every Thessalonian who is presently a believer will remain so until Day of the Lord regardless of his or her lack of watchfulness and sanctification. Nor does Paul affirm...
that every person who is presently an unbeliever must remain in this state until the
time of the end. Repentance is always possible for the unbelieving neighbors of the
Thessalonian faithful, and salvation can be forfeited if a believing Thessalonian is not
watchful and lives immorally.

In 2 Thess 2:13–14 the believers are chosen by God for salvation through
sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth. Their election is either “from the
beginning” (ἀρχή: e.g., \( \text{D} \)), or as “firstfruit” (ἀρχήν: e.g., \( \text{P}^{10} \), \( \text{B} \)). If we assume “firstfruit” as the correct term, then Paul may be understanding ἀρχήν in
terms of the new creation, the reception of the Spirit, or the general harvest of
Gentiles in the eschatological scheme of events (Rom 8:23; cf. Rev 14:4; Jas 1:18).
The Thessalonians may be just one of many communities Paul would consider to
be the “firstfruit.” If we assume the original text is “from the beginning,” the mean-
ing of this verse is still not clear. The “beginning” may refer to: 1) the beginning of
Paul’s mission to that region (cf. Phil 4:15), 2) the beginning of the new era of the
good news predicted through the prophets and related to Gentiles’ salvation (cf. Acts
13:47–48), 3) the beginning of Israel’s tradition history starting with Abraham or
the creation story in Genesis (cf. Luke 11:50; Mek. Exod. 14.15), or 4) pretemporal
history, as from the beginning of time (cf. John 17:24). The last of these is perhaps
the most often held position of the four. When combined with God’s calling, election, and “eternal comfort” (2 Thess 2:13–16), the fourth option would stress salvific
encouragement and the Thessalonians’ predestination. If we assume the beginning
of time as the correct nuance, then this passage may be compared with Rom 8:29–31
and Eph 1:3–14, in which God’s prior choice of his people involves their corporate
election via God’s choice of Christ, through whom the entire plan of salvation would
eventually unfold to the Gentiles, including the Thessalonians. For Paul, God’s de-
sire has always been to bless Israelites and Gentiles who have faith (Gen 12; cf. Gal
3:6–14; Rom 4), and God will see to it that his collective people will be finally saved
(Rom 11).

121. Metzger, Textual Commentary, 568, favors this reading because: 1) nowhere in Paul’s letters do
we find the phrase ἀρχή, unless here (but see 1 Cor 2:7; Col 1:26); 2) ἀρχή is normally interpreted
as “power” in Paul’s letters (except Phil 4:15); 3) Paul uses ἀρχή six other times in his letters (but five
times with a genitive); and 4) there is early evidence that ἀρχήν was changed to ἀρχής in other
texts (e.g., Rev 14:4 [M]; Rom 16:5 [D]).

122. E.g., Marshall, Thessalonians, 207; Gundry Volf, Paul and Perseverance, 16; Trilling, Zweite
Brief 121; Rigaux, Thessaloniciens, 570; Davidson, Pauline Predestination, 10–11.

123. Eternal comfort or encouragement (παράκλησις) in 2 Thess 2:16 perhaps means that this comfort
will last from the present age through to eternity. Malherbe, Thessalonians, 442, writes that “the
expression has the ring of prayer to it.”

124. If we assume this alternative to be the correct one for 2 Thess 2:13–14, then the words of
Menken, 2 Thessalonians, 121, are in order: though the passage is “redolent of predestination . . . it
In either case this passage is no denial of the Thessalonians' own responsibility to continue walking in a worthy and holy manner before God (1 Thess 2:12; 4:1–2; 2 Thess 1:11). Despite passages on encouragement in the correspondence, the Thessalonians still must take action in the process of their sanctification (cf. 1 Thess 4:3), and they are to stand firm and hold the traditions they have been taught (2 Thess 2:15). Persecution, rebellion, and immoral sexual acts are still struggles that threaten the spiritual well-being of the Thessalonians. If their faith is in some sense passive involving God at work in them (1 Thess 2:13; 5:24; 2 Thess 2:13), it is also active—they exercise faithfulness toward God (1 Thess 1:8), and this is demonstrated by their activities manifested through love (1 Thess 1:3; 3:6; 4:9; 5:8) and their decision to turn away from idols to serve God (1 Thess 1:9). Faith that leads to salvation is two-sided, involving both God's work in humans and human responsibility to be obedient. The Thessalonians' faith is to be understood as continual loyalty to God, similar to the Hebrew scriptural terms related to "faithfulness" (Deut 32:20; 1 Sam 26:23; Psa 32[33]:4; cf. Rom 1:5, 17). Karl Donfried correctly distills this aspect of faith: "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."

From Paul's perspective, if the future apostasy among the Christ-followers seemed inevitable because it was predicted by Paul and the Jesus tradition (2 Thess 2:3–4; cf. Matt 24:6–14; Mark 13:7–13), then Paul could at least affirm also that the same tradition promised that the elect community would be preserved by God during the eschatological crisis (e.g., Matt 24:21–24; Mark 13:20–23). In his Thessalonian correspondence, Paul believes the elect community will persevere to final salvation even if all its members do not (1 Thess 5:9, 23–24 contrast 3:5; 4:8; 5:14). This view is entirely consistent with what he teaches in other letters also (e.g., 1 Cor 1:5–9 vs. 10:1–13; Rom 11:20–22 vs. 11:26–32; Phil 1:6 vs. 2:12–14; 3:18–19).

serves the goal of convincing the addressees that it is indeed the eternal God who is active in the preaching and the accepting of the gospel, and it does not exclude human responsibility and human effort."

126. Krentz, "Theology and Fidelity in 2 Thessalonians," 61–62, rightly views their holding on to tradition as indication of their fidelity, which the Pauline writer attempts to rouse with "steadfast waiting as the apocalyptic calendar unfolds."

127. Contrast Nicholl, From Hope to Despair, 64–66; and Gundry Volf, Paul and Perseverance, 20–27, who both want to emphasize God's salvific work in the Thessalonians independent of human effort but then run into difficulties with Paul's other statements involving human obedience (e.g., Nicholl, 98n37; Gundry Volf, 271n20). The working together of both divine initiative and human obedience involves a form of compatibilism. See further Barclay, "By the Grace of God," 156–57.
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Namely, there is no indication that Paul is nullifying any real potential for members to commit apostasy by using salvific assurances and elective language to encourage the congregation. His comforting words to them serve a rhetorical strategy to suppress any temptations they might have of returning to their former lifestyle as idolaters. They are constantly reminded of their new identity as God’s people to help them differentiate themselves from outsiders and remain a separate community unassimilated with the immoral practices of the host society. His words likewise intend to bolster the confidence of members who may still be disturbed or confused about end-time events (2 Thess 2:1-2; cf. 1 Thess 4:13-14; 5:9-11). In particular Paul hopes to comfort those members with weak consciences and still prone to fear of death and final judgment despite their conversion (2 Thess 2:13-16). He is doing no less than what he charges the congregation to do: he is consoling the faint-hearted members and supporting the weak (1 Thess 5:14). Thus, Paul both affirms the election of frail members and warns of the potential apostasy of unruly ones (1 Thess 4:8; cf. 2 Thess 3:6-15), all of whom he calls “brothers and sisters,” that is, fellow believers in Christ.

CONCLUSION

We have posited that 1 and 2 Thessalonians were written by Paul. His letters to the Thessalonians aim at encouraging and instructing a congregation that has been experiencing persecution from Gentile compatriots. As former Gentile polytheists, they recently turned away from idols to serve God, and have continued to operate in faith, love, and hope despite afflictions. Paul commends their faithfulness and encourages the congregation to continue walking in a manner that pleases God. His words of praise and comfort, however, are mixed with exhortations showing that he believed congregation members faced the danger of committing apostasy. First, he fears that during his absence they had turned away from God as a result of persecution (1 Thess 3:5). Second, he must exhort them to “walk” or conduct their lives in holiness and not commit sexual immorality with other members of the congregation. To do so is to violate a fellow believer’s possession and reject the command to love one another (4:1-9). Those who refuse to receive his instruction on this matter are said to reject God’s Spirit who works sanctification among them. Third, even though God has not destined them for eschatological wrath, they must still be vigilant and self-controlled until Christ returns (5:1-9). This watchfulness is in keeping with prophesy from Daniel and oral sayings attributed to Jesus that are found in the Synoptic Gospels—prior to the parousia there will be a great apostasy that will claim the spiritual lives of many saints (2 Thess 2:3-4). Those who fol-

This page discusses the Thessalonians, focusing on their role in the church and their challenges. The text analyzes the unfolding of the Lawless One instead of God will be destroyed when the Lord Jesus returns (2:8–12). Another conflict in the congregation centers on the chastisement of unruly idlers among them. If they refuse instruction, they should be excluded from table fellowship (1 Thess 5:14; cf. 2 Thess 3:6–15). This form of discipline aims to get these idlers to be ashamed of their conduct and repent.

The future apostasy among Christ-followers and also their safekeeping until the end are both affirmed by Paul in unison with the Jesus traditions he echoes (1 Thess 5:9, 23–24; 2 Thess 2:3; cf. 1 Cor 1:4–9; 10:1–12; Matt 24:6–14, 21–24; Mark 13:7–13). He gives us no indication that he sees a tension between the apostasy and preservation of believers. His assumption is that God will keep the elect people safe, and the Gentile believers in Thessalonica belong to the elect people. This assumption, however, breaks down on the level of particulars. Namely, when individuals from among the elect community refuse to walk in a manner worthy of God, they might forfeit the salvific assurance and benefits promised to the elect community as a whole. If they continue to commit porneia, fail to be vigilant, or turn away from God to serve the Lawless One, then such individuals cannot presume upon receiving the final salvation promised to the elect community. In all this there is also a rhetorical strategy for Paul that aims at keeping all members persevering in faith: for the weak and faint-hearted members he stresses the comfort of salvific hope, but for the unruly idlers he warns of potential judgment. He comforts and warns with the same objective in mind—that all the believers in Thessalonica would continue to walk in holiness and please God (1 Thess 4:1–3).

Unlike his letter to the Galatians, Paul is not concerned about the Thessalonians falling away on account of the works of the Law. External pressures for the latter do not come by way of Jewish Christian opponents who are attempting to lead astray Gentiles converts to get circumcised. Rather, the Thessalonians face opposition in the form of harassment from Gentile neighbors who do not believe the gospel message at all. Paul will maintain throughout his letters a generally positive attitude towards such persecution as beneficial for the believer's status in Christ (e.g., Rom 8:18–39). His anxiety over the Thessalonians committing apostasy as a result of external mistreatment (1 Thess 3:5) is more the exception than the rule. His optimism contrasts sharply with Matthew and Mark, who emphasize the danger of apostasy through persecution. Spiritual dangers for the Thessalonians come more by way of vice in 1 Thessalonians, and in 2 Thessalonians it will come through idolatrous deception brought about by a person who, unlike Paul's typical opponents, violates the Torah's first commandment to have no other gods beside the one true God.