

Notes on the Greek New Testament
Day 284 – October 11th – 1 Thessalonians 4:1-18

Works frequently referenced in these notes on Thessalonians

John Drane	<i>Paul</i> , Lion Publishing, Berkhamstead, 1976
John Eadie	<i>A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians</i> , MacMillan, London, 1877
Leon Morris	<i>The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians</i> , The New International Commentary on the New Testament, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1991

Verse 1

Λοιπὸν οὖν, ἀδελφοί, ἐρωτῶμεν ὑμᾶς καὶ παρακαλοῦμεν ἐν κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ, ἵνα καθὼς παρελάβετε παρ' ἡμῶν τὸ πῶς δεῖ ὑμᾶς περιπατεῖν καὶ ἀρέσκειν θεῷ, καθὼς καὶ περιπατεῖτε, ἵνα περισσεύητε μᾶλλον.

λοιπος, η, ον rest, remaining, other: (το)
λοιπον adv. finally, henceforth, from now on

λοιπον οὖν 'finally then'. An expression signifying "that the main section of the letter is concluded though the subsidiary section it introduces may be rather lengthy and very important." Morris

ἐρωτάω ask, request, beg, urge

The two verbs, 'ask' and 'urge' "reinforce one another, and the combination gives emphasis to the apostle's request." Morris

παραλάβετε Verb, aor act ind, 2pl
παραλαμβάνω take, receive, accept

This verb "had something of the technical sense of accepting the tradition handed on in Christian circles." Morris

παρα preposition with gen from, of, with πως how(?) in what way(?)
δει impersonal verb it is necessary, must, should, ought

περιπατέω walk, walk about, live
ἀρέσκω please, seek to please

Pleasing God is not an option for the Christian, it is the imperative of grace. "Christians do not 'walk' with a view to obtaining the maximum amount of satisfaction for themselves but in order to please their Lord." Morris

περισεύω increase, abound, excel
μᾶλλον adv more

Paul praises them for their current conduct but urges them to further endeavour – to 'abound more and more.'

Verse 2

οἴδατε γὰρ τίνας παραγγελίας ἐδώκαμεν ὑμῖν διὰ τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ.

οἶδα know, understand
παραγγελια, ας command, instruction

παραγγελια was used of military commands passed down the ranks. Paul passed on the commands of Christ.

Verse 3

τοῦτο γὰρ ἐστὶν θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, ὁ ἁγιασμὸς ὑμῶν, ἀπέχεσθαι ὑμᾶς ἀπὸ τῆς πορνείας,

θέλημα, ατος n will, wish, desire

The absence of a definite article indicates that this is *part* of God's will, not all of his will.

ἁγιασμος, ου m sanctification, holiness

The process of growing conformity to Christ. The behaviour of the Christian is to be moulded by what is pleasing to God and not by the fashions of contemporary society.

ἀπεχω midd. abstain from, avoid

This infinitive is also governed by the first part of the verse – this also is an expression of God's will for his people.

πορνεια, ας f sexual immorality

"The noun strictly means fornication, but it is used of all forms of illicit sexual intercourse." Morris

Verse 4

εἰδέναι ἕκαστον ὑμῶν τὸ ἑαυτοῦ σκεῦος κτᾶσθαι ἐν ἁγιασμῷ καὶ τιμῇ,

εἰδέναι here in the sense of to learn.

ἕκαστος, η, ον see 1:11

ἑαυτος, ἑαυτη, ἑαυτον see 1:11

σκευος, ους n object, vessel, one's body
κταομαι acquire, take a wife or exercise self-control

The phrase το ἑαυτου σκευος κτασθαι is ambiguous and could mean either 'take a wife for himself' or 'exercise control over his own body'. Eadie and Hendriksen favour the former, Eadie arguing that the phrase cannot mean anything other than acquiring a wife. Morris (following Bruce in drawing attention to 1 Sam 21:4-5 where David speaks in similar terms of his young men), inclines to the latter.

ἀγιασμος, ου m sanctification, holiness
τιμη, ης f honour, respect, price

Verse 5

μη ἐν πάθει ἐπιθυμίας καθάπερ και τὰ ἔθνη τὰ μη εἰδότα τὸν θεόν,

πάθει Noun, dat s παθος, ους n lust, passion
ἐπιθυμια, ας f desire, longing, lust, passion

The phrase παθει ἐπιθυμίας indicates a person's surrender to their passions – 'not in the grip of uncontrollable sexual drives.'

καθαπερ as, just as
ἔθνη Noun, nom & acc pl ἔθνος, ους n nation, people

τὰ ἔθνη which is normally used to mean Gentiles, is here used to mean those who are not Christians.

εἰδότα Verb, perf act ptc οἶδα (verb perf in form but with present meaning) know, understand

Cf. Rom 1:24,26,28. In the Roman society of Thessalonica, fornication was not viewed as a serious wrong but rather as part of the normal pattern of life.

Verse 6

τὸ μη ὑπερβαίνειν και πλεονεκτεῖν ἐν τῷ πράγματι τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ, διότι ἔκδικος κύριος περὶ πάντων τούτων, καθὼς και προεἶπαμεν ὑμῖν και διεμαρτυράμεθα.

ὑπερβαινω do wrong, sin against

Here in the sense of 'defraud.'

πλεονεκτεω take advantage of, cheat
πραγμα, τος n matter, thing, event, deed

The definite article τῷ πράγματι indicates that Paul is still speaking of the same subject of sexual immorality.

διότι because, for, therefore
ἐκδικος, ου m avenger, one who punishes
προεἶπαμεν Verb, aor act indic, 1 pl προλεγω say beforehand
διαμαρτυρομαι declare solemnly

"Paul is referring primarily to the sins of which he has just been speaking and says people who commit them will render account to God in due course... the full requital for wrong will not be exacted until the last day. It is likely that Paul is glancing at the great Assize." Morris

Verse 7

οὐ γὰρ ἐκάλεσεν ἡμᾶς ὁ θεὸς ἐπὶ ἀκαθαρσία ἀλλ' ἐν ἀγιασμῷ.

The call of God is the foundation of the Christian life.

ἀκαθαρσια, ας f impurity, immorality, uncleanness
ἀγιασμος, ου see v.3

Verse 8

τοιγαροῦν ὁ ἀθετῶν οὐκ ἄνθρωπον ἀθετεῖ ἀλλὰ τὸν θεὸν τὸν και διδόντα τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτοῦ τὸ ἅγιον εἰς ὑμᾶς.

τοιγαροουν inferential particle therefore, then, for that reason
ἀθετεω reject, set aside, refuse

To set on one side. To put out of the frame of one's decision and immediate concerns. To treat as of no account.

διδόντα Verb, pres act ptc, m nom s διδομι
ἅγιος, α, ον holy

The unusual construction το πνευμα το ἅγιον lays stress upon the Spirit as holy.

Note here the present participle (though some manuscripts, followed by the AV have the past participle). The Spirit is continually given; we need continually to be careful not to grieve him or quench his work. "Anyone who carries on an act of impurity is not simply breaking a human code, nor even sinning against God who at some time in the past gave him the gift of the Spirit. He is sinning against the God who is present at that moment, against the one who continually gives the Spirit. The impure act is an act of despite against God's good gift at the very moment it is being offered." Morris

Verse 9

Περὶ δὲ τῆς φιλαδελφίας οὐ χρεῖαν ἔχετε γράφειν ὑμῖν, αὐτοὶ γὰρ ὑμεῖς θεοδίδακτοὶ ἐστε εἰς τὸ ἀγαπᾶν ἀλλήλους·

φιλαδελφια, ας f brotherly love

Outside of the New Testament φιλαδελφια is used only of love between sons of one father. In the New Testament it is used exclusively of the love Christians are to show to each other. Love for fellow members of God's family is a hallmark of vital Christianity, cf. 1 John 3:14.

χρεια, ας f need, want

θεοδιδακτος, ον taught by God

This word occurs here only in the New Testament, though compare 1 Jn 2:26,27 for the same thought. Cf. also John 6:45; 1 Cor 2:13.

ἀλλήλων, ος, ους one another

Verse 10

καὶ γὰρ ποιεῖτε αὐτὸ εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς τοὺς ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ Μακεδονίᾳ. παρακαλοῦμεν δὲ ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, περισσεύειν μᾶλλον,

The present tense ποιεῖτε implies continuous action.

ὅλος, η, ον whole, all, complete, entire

We know of two other churches in Macedonia, those at Philippi and Berea. There may well have been others of which we are unaware.

παρακαλεω exhort, encourage, urge
περισεῖν μᾶλλον see v.1.

Paul will not allow them to rest on their laurels. Though commending them for their conduct, he urges them to abound even more.

Verses 11-12

"This is the first indication we have had in this epistle that some of the Thessalonians were so excited by all the wonderful things in the Christian faith that they were not bothering to earn their living. But there are a number of indications in the Thessalonian correspondence that this was so (cf. especially 2 Thess 3:11). A number of possible reasons for this have been suggested, but it is most likely that it arose out of second advent speculations. The Thessalonian believers had learned very well that the Lord would be returning in mighty power, and evidently some of them felt that it would be very soon. Accordingly there was no point in continuing in some steady job. It was much more realistic, they evidently reasoned, to be about the business of proclaiming the near end of the world. If they had need of this world's goods in the meantime, why, there were others, Christian brothers, who could be relied on to come to their rescue (it may be no accident that verses 11-12 follow a section in which Paul stresses brotherly love). This kind of thing can be done from a sense of serious purpose, but, human nature being what it is, it can easily degenerate into downright laziness and idleness. People can be so taken up with the spectacular, with excitement over the near approach of the Lord, that they pass over the important things of everyday life. So Paul gives attention to such matters, and counsels these brothers to mend their ways." Morris

Verse 11

καὶ φιλοτιμεῖσθαι ἡσυχάζειν καὶ πράσσειν τὰ ἴδια καὶ ἐργάζεσθαι ταῖς χερσὶν ὑμῶν, καθὼς ὑμῖν παρηγγείλαμεν,

φιλοτιμεομαι make it one's ambition,
endeavour, strive eagerly

The meaning here is 'fix one's aim on.' Cf. Rom 15:20; 2 Cor 5:9.

ἡσυχάζω be silent, cease, live a quiet life

Means tranquillity, not inactivity.

πρασσω practice, do

ἴδιος, α, ον one's own

πρασσειν τα ἴδια be occupied in one's own business

χειρ, χειρος f hand, power

Morris says, "This unashamed advocacy of manual labour in a letter to a community in a Greek city must be remarked. The typical Greek attitude was that slaves did this sort of work, but that freemen would not stoop to it. It was degrading. Here, as in so many other ways, the Christians refused to take their standards from the community in the midst of which they lived. Rather, they held that all things they did should be done as service to Christ (Col 3:17), and they specifically held that manual labour was good (Eph 4:28). Doubtless they remembered that Jesus himself had been a carpenter (Mark 6:3). How could the followers of the Carpenter do other than welcome manual work?" Though he then adds that it probably also indicates that the majority of the believers came from the lower social classes and were poor rather than rich.

παραγγελλω command, instruct

Neil quotes from Patterson Smyth a story from New England "of a day during one of those times of excited expectancy of the end of the world when a sudden darkness at noon interrupted the session of the Assembly. Some cried fearfully: 'It is the coming of Christ: It is the end of the world.' But the old President ordered lights to be produced: 'Bring in candles,' he said, 'and get on with your work. If the Lord is coming, how better can he find us than quietly doing our duty?'"

Verse 12

ἵνα περιπατῆτε εὐσχημόνως πρὸς τοὺς ἔξω καὶ μηδενὸς χρεῖαν ἔχητε.

περιπατεω walk, walk about, live
εὐσχημονως properly, respectably

"Believers must always bear in mind the impact of their conduct on those who are without faith." Morris

ἔξω adv. out, outside, away; ὁ ἔξω
outsider, unbeliever

μηδεις, μηδεμια, μηδεν no one, nothing

Here either, 'need of nothing' or 'need of no man'

χρεια, ας f need, want

"This whole section on earning one's living is closely connected with the previous one on brotherly love, and that not only in syntax. Those who imposed on the generosity of their fellows were not living in love. Or, to put the same thing the other way around, the exhortation to brotherly love carries with it the necessity for providing for one's own needs, so that undue strain may not be placed on the brother." Morris

Verses 13-18

"The Parousia ... is a difficult topic. Within the short space of the mission it would have been impossible for the apostolic band to have given anything like complete teaching about it. Clearly they had given it a good deal of attention, for the Thessalonian correspondence gives evidence of as lively interest in the whole subject... We get the impression that the Thessalonians had understood Paul to mean that the Parousia would take place within their lifetime. They had become perplexed when some (or even one) of their number died. Did this mean that they had lost their share in the events associated with that great day?" Morris

Verse 13

Οὐ θέλομεν δὲ ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν, ἀδελφοί, περὶ τῶν κοιμωμένων, ἵνα μὴ λυπησθε καθὼς καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ οἱ μὴ ἔχοντες ἐλπίδα.

θελω wish, will

ἀγνοεω not know, be ignorant, fail to understand

κοιμαομαι sleep, fall asleep, die

λυπεω pain, grieve, injure; pass be sad, sorrowful, grieve

λοιπος, η, ον rest, remaining, other

ἐλπις, ιδος f hope, what is hoped for

Hope is used in an objective sense. Cf Eph 2:12.

"When the apostle counsels the Thessalonians not to sorrow as the pagans do, he is not urging them to endure with a deep Stoic calm the buffetings of fortune that they cannot avoid. Nor is he counselling a callous indifference. Rather, he is rejoicing in the complete victory that Christ has won. Those who have died have simply fallen asleep in Christ, and they will wake with him. Clearly, in the face of this prospect there is no reason for despair." Morris

Verse 14

εἰ γὰρ πιστεύομεν ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἀπέθανεν καὶ ἀνέστη, οὕτως καὶ ὁ θεὸς τοὺς κοιμηθέντας διὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἄξει σὺν αὐτῷ.

ἀπέθανεν Verb, aor act indic, 3s ἀποθνησκω die

ἀνέστη Verb, 2 aor act indic, 3 s ἀνίστημι rise, come back to life

The διὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ could belong either with the preceding or following words – either 'those sleeping through Jesus' or 'he will bring through Jesus'. Moffatt argues the latter but Morris says that the parallelism of the verse and the awkwardness of 'through Jesus with him' favours the former. Paul is indicating that death has been transformed into sleep *through Jesus*. So also Bruce who writes, "Death 'through Jesus' is but the prelude to resurrection 'with Jesus'."

ἄξει Verb, fut act ind, 3 s ἄγω

"Jesus will bring the faithful departed with him when he comes back. Their death does not mean that they will miss their share in the Parousia." Morris

Verse 15

τοῦτο γὰρ ὑμῖν λέγομεν ἐν λόγῳ κυρίου, ὅτι ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες οἱ περιλειπόμενοι εἰς τὴν παρουσίαν τοῦ κυρίου οὐ μὴ φθάσωμεν τοὺς κοιμηθέντας·

The form ἐν λόγῳ κυρίου seems to imply that what follows is based on a saying of Jesus. The closest recorded saying is in Mat 24:31. The various suggestions regarding this verse are that:

- i) It represents an otherwise unrecorded saying of Jesus;
- ii) It represents a prophecy given in the name of Jesus in the early church;
- iii) It reports a direct revelation Paul had received from the Lord;
- iv) It represents the apostle's thinking under the guidance of the Spirit.

Morris thinks the first of these the best solution and cites J Jeremias' work *Unknown Sayings of Jesus*.

ζαω live, be alive

This expression may mean no more than 'those Christians who will be alive at that time.'

περιλειπομαι remain, be left behind

Note the emphatic use of οὐ μὴ

φθάσωμεν Verb, aor act subj, 1 pl φθάνω precede

κοιμαομαι sleep, fall asleep, die

Verse 16

ὅτι αὐτὸς ὁ κύριος ἐν κελεύσματι, ἐν φωνῇ ἀρχαγγέλου καὶ ἐν σάλπιγγι θεοῦ, καταβήσεται ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ, καὶ οἱ νεκροὶ ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναστήσονται πρῶτον,

"This verse makes us reflect on the very little that the New Testament has to say about the manner of the Parousia. Nowhere else do we have as full a description of what is to happen as here, but the details are few and do not paint a very full picture for us. The point of it all is that Scripture is intensely practical in this matter, as in others. There are many things that we would like to know, but the Bible was not written to gratify our curiosity. Rather, it is intended to help us in our Christian lives, and for that the important thing is that we should be ready when the Lord comes. Thus we are often warned to prepare, and told that the coming will be unexpected." Morris

κελευσμα, τος f shout of command, command

"The word is found often. It is the cry made by the ship's master to his rowers, or by a military officer to his soldiers, or by a hunter to his hounds, or by a charioteer to his horses. When used of military or naval personnel it was a battle cry. In most places, then, it denotes a loud, authoritative cry, often uttered in the thick of great excitement." Morris
O Cullmann thinks of the κελευσμα as pointing to God's sovereignty. He speaks of the time "when God, as in the first creation, will decide in his sovereign act (κελευσμα, 1 Thess 4:16) to constitute the *new creation* by means of the spirit of life."

σάλπιγγι Noun, dat s σαλπιγξ, ιγγος f trumpet, trumpet blast

Associated in OT with triumph or the call to festival.

καταβαινω come or go down, descend
νεκρος, α, ον dead

ἀναστήσονται Verb, fut midd indic, 3 pl
ἀνίστημι rise, come back to life

Verse 17

ἔπειτα ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες οἱ περιλειπόμενοι ἅμα σὺν αὐτοῖς ἀρπαγησόμεθα ἐν νεφέλαις εἰς ἀπάντησιν τοῦ κυρίου εἰς ἄερα· καὶ οὕτως πάντοτε σὺν κυρίῳ ἔσόμεθα.

ἔπειτα then, afterwards

περιλειπομαι remain, be left behind

ἅμα adv. at the same time, together

"There is a minor problem in that the faithful departed will be coming with Jesus (v.14), but the point made here is not so much the order of events as the truth that the Lord's people will be united at the Parousia." Morris

ἀρπαγησόμεθα Verb, fut pass indic, 1 pl

ἀρπαζω take by force, carry off

νεβηλη, ης f cloud

ἀπαντησις, εως f meeting

ἀηρ, ερος m air, space

παντοτε always

The description hardly fits a *secret* rapture.

Verse 18

ὥστε παρακαλεῖτε ἀλλήλους ἐν τοῖς λόγοις τούτοις.

ὥστε so that, with the result that

παρακαλεω exhort, encourage

ἀλλήλων, ος, ος one another

What God has revealed is for our encouragement.