

Notes on the Greek New Testament
Day 285 – October 12th – 1 Thessalonians 5:1-28

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

Περὶ δὲ τῶν χρόνων καὶ τῶν καιρῶν, ἀδελφοί, οὐ χρείαν ἔχετε ὑμῖν γράφεσθαι,

καιρος, ου m time, appointed/proper time

"With regard to the second advent ... the χρονων are the chronological epochs that must elapse, time considered simply with regard to its duration, while the καιρων focus our attention rather on the nature of the time, on the critical events which will take place heralding the coming of the Lord." Morris

χρεια, ας f need, want

γράφεσθαι Verb, pres pass infin γραφω

"There is abundant evidence from the two letters that he had spoken a good deal about the Parousia during his initial preaching... It is widely accepted in modern theology that early Christian teaching was thoroughly eschatological." Morris

Verse 2

αὐτοὶ γὰρ ἀκριβῶς οἶδατε ὅτι ἡμέρα κυρίου ὡς κλέπτῃς ἐν νυκτὶ οὕτως ἔρχεται.

ἀκριβως accurately, completely (in the sense of needing no further instruction)

οἶδα know, understand

ἡμερα κυριου – a very ancient expression. Cf. Amos 5:18-20.

κλεπτης, ου m thief

νυξ, νυκτος f night

The event is certain but the timing unfathomable. In this sense it will be totally unheralded.

Verse 3

ὅταν λέγωσιν· Εἰρήνη καὶ ἀσφάλεια, τότε αἰφνίδιος αὐτοῖς ἐφίσταται ὄλεθρος ὡσπερ ἡ ὦδιν τῇ ἐν γαστρὶ ἐχούσῃ, καὶ οὐ μὴ ἐκφύωσιν.

ὅταν when, whenever, as often as

εἰρηνη, ης f peace

ἀσφαλεια, ας f security, safety

They imagine their situation unshakable.

τοτε then, at that time

αἰφνιδιος, ου sudden, unexpected

ἐφιστημι come up to, approach, appear

ὄλεθρος, ου m destruction, ruin

ὡσπερ as, even as

ὦδιν, ινος f birth-pains, suffering

γαστρι Noun, dat s γαστηρ, τρος f womb;

ἐν γαστρι ἔχω conceive or be pregnant

The comparison of a woman in labour focusses not merely on the pain but also on suddenness and inevitability.

ἐκθευγω escape

Verses 4-11

The themes of night and day continue but are now supplemented by those of darkness and light. "It is not a difficult step from the idea of the day of the Lord to that of walking in the light, from that of the coming of Christ to that of the character of Christian people as 'sons of the light.' The coming of that Day must inspire God's people to live lives appropriate to their calling." Morris

Verse 4

ὑμεῖς δέ, ἀδελφοί, οὐκ ἐστὲ ἐν σκότει, ἵνα ἡ ἡμέρα ὑμᾶς ὡς κλέπτῃς καταλάβῃ,

σκότει Noun, dat s σκοτος, ους n darkness, evil

κλεπτης see v.2

καταλάβῃ Verb, aor act subj, 3 s

καταλαμβανω obtain, seize

Not that it will be heralded for them but that they will be prepared.

Verse 5

πάντες γὰρ ὑμεῖς υἱοὶ φωτός ἐστε καὶ υἱοὶ ἡμέρας. οὐκ ἐσμὲν νυκτὸς οὐδὲ σκότους·

πάντες Adjective, m nom pl πας

φως, φωτος n light

υἱοὶ φωτός is a Semitic idiom: to be a 'son' of something is for that thing or quality to be characteristic of the person. The added 'sons of the Day' must refer to the Day of the Lord. "Believers find in the Day of the Lord a situation in which they are perfectly at home." Morris – A Day in which they live now.

νύξ, νυκτός f night
οὐδὲ neither, nor
σκοτός, οὐς n darkness, evil

Verse 6

ἄρα οὖν μὴ καθεύδωμεν ὡς οἱ λοιποὶ, ἀλλὰ γρηγορῶμεν καὶ νήφωμεν.

ἄρα οὖν expresses a "logical inference and introduces an inescapable conclusion." Morris

καθεύδω sleep, be dead
λοιπος, η, ον rest, remaining, other

"Unbelievers may well 'sleep'; they are spiritually insensitive. But the believer should not take his standards from them... 'Sleep' is natural enough for the sons of the night, but is entirely out of place in the sons of light." Morris

γρηγορεῶ be or keep awake, be alert

Cf. Mk 14:38.

νήφω be sober, be self-controlled

The senses not clouded or drowsy through drink.

Verse 7

οἱ γὰρ καθεύδοντες νυκτὸς καθεύδουσιν, καὶ οἱ μεθυσκόμενοι νυκτὸς μεθύουσιν·

μεθυσκομαι get drunk
μεθῶ be drunk, drink freely

Sleep and drunkenness are characteristic of the night.

Verse 8

ἡμεῖς δὲ ἡμέρας ὄντες νήφωμεν, ἐνδυσάμενοι θώρακα πίστεως καὶ ἀγάπης καὶ περικεφαλαίαν ἐλπίδα σωτηρίας·

νήφω see v.6

The stress is not merely on not getting drunk but on the self-control and alertness that should mark a soldier on duty.

ἐνδύω dress, clothe; midd put on, wear

The aorist may suggest the idea of a definitive act. On Christian armour, see Rom 13:12f; 2 Cor 6:7; 10:4; Eph 6:13f.

θώραξ, ακος m breastplate, chest

περικεφαλαία, ας f helmet

ἐλπίς, ἰδος f hope, what is hoped for
σωτηρία, ας f salvation

Note here the three 'graces' of faith hope and love occupy a central place in the Christian life as is expressed also in 1:3. Here they are the defensive armour of the Christian.

Verse 9

ὅτι οὐκ ἔθετο ἡμᾶς ὁ θεὸς εἰς ὀργὴν ἀλλὰ εἰς περιποίησιν σωτηρίας διὰ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ,

ἔθετο Verb, 2 aor midd indic, 3 s τιθημι
midd put place, set, appoint

Cf. Jn 15:16; 1 Tim 2:7; 2 Tim 1:11; 1 Peter 2:8.

ὀργη, ης f wrath, anger

Cf. 1:10. To appreciate the greatness of our salvation we need to appreciate what we have been saved *from* as well as what we are saved *to*.

περιποιησις, εως f obtaining, gaining
σωτηρία, ας f salvation

Verse 10

τοῦ ἀποθανόντος περὶ ἡμῶν ἵνα εἴτε γρηγορῶμεν εἴτε καθεύδωμεν ἅμα σὺν αὐτῷ ζήσωμεν.

ἀποθανόντος Verb, aor act ptc, m gen s
ἀποθνησκω die

εἴτε if, whether

γρηγορεῶ see v.6

καθεύδω see v.6

The sense here is 'whether we are living or have died'

ἅμα adv. at the same time, together
ζῶ live, be alive

"Paul is maintaining that the death of Jesus has brought about a new relationship between God and sinners. Those who are Christ's live with him. There is the thought of that close union which elsewhere is expressed in the pregnant phrase 'in Christ.' This relationship is not disturbed by even such a final and decisive happening as death." Morris

Verse 11

διὸ παρακαλεῖτε ἀλλήλους καὶ οἰκοδομεῖτε εἷς τὸν ἕνα, καθὼς καὶ ποιεῖτε.

διὸ therefore, for this reason

παρακαλεῶ exhort, encourage, urge

The present tense implies continuous action.

ἀλλήλων, οἰς, οὐς one another

οἰκοδομεῶ build, build up, encourage

Implies growth.

εἰς τον ένα 'one (to) one' is equivalent to ἀλλήλους but emphasises the distributive nature of the task – each one is to do it – and also that it is to be a one-to-one activity as well as communal.

καθως και ποιειτε "He knows the way in which the Thessalonians were assisting one another, and he commends them for it. But he urges them to go forward on this way. Christians may never relax on the grounds that they have made sufficient progress." Morris

Verses 12-13

Morris suggests that the first groups of Christians would have been organised on the model of the synagogue (cf. Jas 2:2) and would have included a group of elders exercising oversight. Such elders at Thessalonica may have been unused to responsibilities of leadership – most of the believers seem to have been from the lower strata of society. Yet they were being required to deal with members who, in the heat of apocalyptic fervour, had given up work and were expecting to live off others. In such a situation there may well have been tension between the leaders and some of the congregation.

Verse 12

Ἐρωτῶμεν δὲ ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, εἰδέναι τοὺς κοπιῶντας ἐν ὑμῖν καὶ προϊσταμένους ὑμῶν ἐν κυρίῳ καὶ νοουθετοῦντας ὑμᾶς,

ἐρωταω ask, request, beg, urge
εἰδεναι infin οἶδα (verb perf in form but with present meaning) know

Here 'know the worth of', respect

κοπιαω work, work hard, labour

The single definite article indicates a single group – the elders in the church who may not yet have formally borne that title. The following participles may expand and explain the first.

προϊστημι be a leader, have authority over

The NT is not shy of speaking of *leadership* within the church, though it does offer a distinctive Christ-centred model.

νουθετεω instruct, teach, warn

A distinctively Pauline word, cf. Acts 20:31; 1 Cor 4:14. J Behm says that strictly the verb means "to impart understanding (a mind for something)" and further, "It denotes the word of admonition which is designed to correct while not provoking or embittering."

Verse 13

καὶ ἡγεῖσθαι αὐτοὺς ὑπερεκπερισσοῦ ἐν ἀγάπῃ διὰ τὸ ἔργον αὐτῶν. εἰρηνεύετε ἐν ἑαυτοῖς.

ἡγεομαι think, regard, consider, esteem
ὑπερεκπερισσου adv. exceedingly

"Hold them in special esteem and affection" Moffatt

εἰρηνευω live or be at peace
ἑαυτος, ἑαυτη, ἑαυτον reflexive pronoun,
himself, herself, itself

Both leaders and followers are to be peacemakers (cf. Mk 9:50; Rom 12:18; 2 Cor 13:11).

Verse 14

παρακαλοῦμεν δὲ ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, νοουθετεῖτε τοὺς ἀτάκτους, παραμυθεῖσθε τοὺς ὀλγοψύχους, ἀντέχεσθε τῶν ἀσθενῶν, μακροθυμεῖτε πρὸς πάντα.

"The address 'brothers' shows that these words are addressed to the whole of the membership and not simply to the leaders... The content of this charge is to look to the needs of certain people in the church. While this would be in a special measure the responsibility of those holding office, it was also something that lay on the shoulders of all (perhaps it was something the leaders should lead others to do). It was (and is) characteristic of the Christian understanding of life that the entire brotherhood is charged with responsibility for all. For Christians care for others is not to be left to any special class of believers." Morris

παρακαλεω see v.11

νουθετεω see v.12

ἀτακτος, ον idle, unruly

The word is a military term meaning a soldier who is out of step. It came then to mean one who is idle – a slacker.

παραμυθεομαι comfort, console
ὀλγοψυχος, ον fainthearted, discouraged

"The word is well adapted to expressing a tender concern, quite in the spirit of 'a bruised reed he will not break' (Is 42:3)." Morris

ἀντεχομαι be loyal to, support
ἀσθενης, ες sick, weak, helpless

On the responsibility of the strong towards the weak, see esp Rom 14 and 1 Cor 8.

μακροθυμεω be patient, wait patiently

Verse 15

ὁρᾶτε μὴ τις κακὸν ἀντὶ κακοῦ τινὶ ἀποδῶ, ἀλλὰ πάντοτε τὸ ἀγαθὸν διώκετε εἰς ἀλλήλους καὶ εἰς πάντα.

ὁραω trans see, observe; intrans make sure, see to

κακος, η, ον evil, bad, wrong, harm
 ἀντι prep with gen for, in place of
 ἀποδοῖ Verb, 2 aor act subj, 3 s ἀποδίδωμι
 give back, repay

Cf. Matt 5:44-45; Rom 12:17. "Revenge is the most natural and instinctive of vices." Denny

παντοτε always
 διωκω seek after, pursue, follow
 ἀλλήλων, ος, ους one another

"Our Master, for our salvation, endured patiently the insults and injuries of wicked men. He, the Just, died for the unjust. In both these ways his example is important for his people. As the servant is not greater than his Lord, we must expect the same kind of treatment, and therefore we must expect to be called on to show the same kind of patience under provocation. And since he came to die for sinful people, we must expect that our meekness is to be by way of ministering to the needs of the sinful also." Morris

Verse 16

πάντοτε χαίρετε,

"The New Testament does not give us a picture of believers as people who are always screwing themselves up to the point of doing unpleasant things in the service of their God but rather those who are glad to live out the implications of their faith... He is not writing about a joy that Christians produce by their own efforts. It is natural for people to be happy when things go well for them. But it is not this natural joy, dependent on circumstances, that is the special characteristic of Christians. It is the joy that comes from being 'in Christ.' Thus it is that the New Testament contains so many exhortations to joyful living – startlingly many, if we fix our attention on the outward circumstances of the early Christian communities. Persecution was always threatening and often actual. Believers were usually in straitened circumstances and compelled to work hard for their living. Their lot can rarely have been other than hard. But if we fasten our attention on these things, we put our emphasis in the wrong place. They thought more of their Lord than of their difficulties, more of their spiritual riches in Christ than of their poverty on earth, more of their glorious future when their Lord should come again than of their unhappy past. So the note of joy rings through the New Testament, and so Paul, who himself knew what it was to rejoice in difficult circumstances (Acts 16:25; Rom 5:3; Col 1:24), can say 'Be joyful always' (cf. Phil 4:4), and speak of Christians as 'sorrowful, yet always rejoicing' (2 Cor 6:10)." Morris

Verse 17

ἀδιαλείπτως προσεύχεσθε,
 ἀδιαλειπτως ceaselessly, without ceasing
 προσευχομαι pray

"Continuing prayer is the continuing expression ... of dependence... Again and again in Paul's letters (and especially in these two letters to the Thessalonians) the apostle interjects little prayers into his argument. Prayer was as natural to Paul as breathing. At any time he was likely to break off his argument or to sum it up by a prayer. In the same way he looks for the Thessalonians to live lives with such an attitude of dependence on God that they will easily and naturally move into the words of prayer on all sorts of occasions, great and small, grave and festive" Morris

Verse 18

ἐν παντί εὐχαριστεῖτε· τοῦτο γὰρ θέλημα θεοῦ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ εἰς ὑμᾶς.

εὐχαριστεω thank, give thanks

"When we come to realise that God's hand is in all things, we learn to give thanks for all things." Morris

θέλημα, ατος n will, wish, desire

Cf. 4:3. "For this is the will of God ...' almost certainly refers to the three injunctions" [of vv 16-18] Morris

Verse 19

τὸ πνεῦμα μὴ σβέννυτε,
 σβεννυμι extinguish, put out

"The use of the Greek negative μη with the present imperative here denotes a command to cease from doing something already in process and not simply a warning to avoid this kind of thing in the future." Morris
 Morris suggests that the reference is to the behaviour Paul has written to them about, which quenches the Spirit and results in loss of spiritual power and joy.

Verse 20

προφητείας μὴ ἐξουθενεῖτε·
 προφητεια, ας f prophecy, preaching, the
 gift of prophecy
 ἐξουθενεω despise, treat with contempt

Verse 21

πάντα δὲ δοκιμάζετε, τὸ καλὸν κατέχετε,
 δοκιμαζω test, examine, prove
 κατεχω hold fast, keep, restrain

"The point of this injunction, then, is that the Thessalonians are asked to apply tests. There are things that appear on the surface to be good. There are manifestations that claim to come from God. Such are not simply to be accepted at their face value, for it is not part of Christian simplicity to be credulous. All things must be tested. And not simply tested, but accepted wholeheartedly or rejected decisively as a result of the test. 'Hold on to' denotes the firm acceptance of the good. There must be no half measures." Morris

Verse 22

ἀπό παντός εἶδους πονηροῦ ἀπέχεσθε.

εἶδος, ους n visible form, appearance
πονηρος, α, ον evil, bad, wicked

πονηρου here can be either a noun or an adjective, the phrase meaning either 'every appearance of evil' or 'every evil appearance'. In either case the meaning is the same.

ἀπεχω midd. abstain from, avoid

Verse 23

Αὐτὸς δὲ ὁ θεὸς τῆς εἰρήνης ἀγιάσαι ὑμᾶς ὀλοτελεῖς, καὶ ὀλόκληρον ὑμῶν τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ τὸ σῶμα ἀμέμπτως ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τηρηθεῖη.

εἰρηνι, ης f peace
ἀγιάσαι Verb, aor act opt, 3 s ἀγιαζω
sanctify, make holy
ὀλοτελης, ες wholly, in every part

The work carries the sense of completeness, 'to perfection'.

ὀλοκληρος, ον sound, whole, complete
ψυχη, ης f self, inmost being, life, 'soul'
σωμα, τος n body

Sanctification involves the whole person.

ἀμέμπτως Adv (from ἀμεμπτος)
blamelessly

παρουσια, ας see 2:19
τηρηθείη Verb, aor pass opt, 3 s τηρω
keep, observe, maintain

Verse 24

πιστὸς ὁ καλῶν ὑμᾶς, ὃς καὶ ποιήσει.

πιστος, η, ον faithful, reliable

Paul is confident that his prayer will be answered. "Because he is the faithful One, and because he is the One who has called them, the Thessalonians may know that he will do perfectly all that is involved in their call. It is profoundly satisfying to the believer that in the last resort what matters is not his feeble hold on God, but God's strong grip on him (cf. John 10:28-29)." Morris

Verse 25

Ἀδελφοί, προσεύχεσθε περὶ ἡμῶν.

προσευχομαι pray

Paul needed their prayer as much as they needed his.

Verse 26

ἀσπάσασθε τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς πάντας ἐν φιλήματι ἁγίῳ.

ἀσπαζομαι greet, welcome
φιλημα, τος n kiss
ἅγιος, α, ον holy

The meaning is 'give everyone a kiss from me.'

Verse 27

ἐνορκίζω ὑμᾶς τὸν κύριον ἀναγνωσθῆναι τὴν ἐπιστολὴν πᾶσιν τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς.

ἐνορκίζω place (someone) under a solemn charge (in the name of)

Morris links this strong term to such passages as 2:17-18. "Apparently some of the Thessalonians had said that he had no real love for them, and if he had wished to do so, he would have been able to return. That he had not done so showed him to have his affections elsewhere. In this situation the ideal thing would have been for Paul to have returned. But his circumstances made this impossible; he had to use this letter as a substitute. Accordingly it was important not only that it should come before the notice of all, but also that it be seen plainly to be intended to come before the notice of all. In this way his care for them all would be manifest." Morris

The first person singular may suggest that this is the point where Paul himself took up the pen.

ἀναγνωσθῆναι Verb, aor pass infin
ἀναγινωσκω read, read in public
worship

ἐπιστολη, ης f letter

Verse 28

ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ μεθ' ὑμῶν.

χαρις, ιτος f grace, unmerited favour