



Philemon from Colossae has a slave named Onesimus: a typical name for a slave since Onesimus means “useful” (v. 11). Onesimus escapes and goes to Rome where he expects to disappear in the crowd. Accidentally, or luckily, he meets Paul whom he had known in his master’s house. At this point, Paul is imprisoned in Rome, but enjoys certain privileges enabling him to go out in the company of a policeman. Onesimus is converted and baptized; then Paul makes him go back to his former master with the letter of recommendation that we read here.

Paul asks that the slave be seen as a brother, and even suggests that the slave be freed (v. 21).

We have already seen the advice Paul gives to slaves in Col 3:22. In those first years of the Church, obtaining God’s life in Christ seemed such a tremendous privilege, providing such inner freedom, that being a slave or being free did not greatly matter (see 1 Cor 7:17).

At that time no one thought that a change of social structure was feasible: there were slaves and there would always be slaves. The Christians were few and without any influence. Thus, they were not concerned about reforming society, nor about laws to eliminate slavery. Even before the time it became necessary to think about changing the laws, faith was already against treating slaves as “objects” or inferiors: because they were Christians, an increasing number of masters – in the Church – spontaneously renounced their rights and granted freedom to their slaves.

Many people think that the Christian community has nothing to say concerning their responsibilities to society. Here, on the contrary, we see how Paul involves the whole community in Philemon’s problem.

<sup>Phil</sup> <sup>1:7</sup> <sup>Col</sup> <sup>4:10</sup> <sup>Rom</sup> <sup>16:5</sup> <sup>1Cor</sup> <sup>16:19</sup> <sup>1</sup>From Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and from our brother Timothy to Philemon, our friend and fellow worker, <sup>2</sup>to our dear sister Apphia, to Archippus faithful companion in our soldiering, and to all the Church gathered in your house.

<sup>3</sup>Grace and peace be with you from God the Father and Jesus Christ the Lord.

<sup>4</sup>I never cease to give thanks to my God when I remember you in my prayers, <sup>5</sup>for I hear of your love and faith towards the Lord and all the holy ones. <sup>6</sup>And I pray that the sharing of your faith may make known all the good that is ours in Christ. <sup>7</sup>I had great satisfaction and comfort on hearing of your charity, because the hearts of the saints have been cheered by you, brother.

<sup>8</sup>Because of this, although in Christ I have the freedom to command what you should do, <sup>9</sup>yet I prefer to request you in love. The one talking is Paul, the old man, now prisoner for Christ. <sup>10</sup>And my request is on behalf of Onesimus, whose father I have become while I was in prison.

<sup>11</sup>This Onesimus has not been helpful to you, but now he will be helpful both to you and to me. <sup>12</sup>In returning him to you, I am sending you my own heart. <sup>13</sup>I would have liked to keep him

at my side, to serve me on your behalf while I am in prison for the Gospel, <sup>14</sup>but I did not want to do anything without your agreement, nor impose a good deed upon you without your free consent.

<sup>15</sup>Perhaps Onesimus has been parted from you for a while so that you may have him back forever, <sup>16</sup>no longer as a slave, but better than a slave. For he is a very dear brother to me, and he will be even dearer to you. <sup>17</sup>And so, because of our friendship, receive him as if he were I myself. <sup>18</sup>And if he has caused any harm, or owes you anything, charge it to me. <sup>19</sup>I, Paul, write this and sign it with my own hand: I will pay it... without further mention of your debt to me, which is you yourself. <sup>20</sup>So, my brother, please do me this favor for the Lord's sake. Give me this comfort in Christ.

<sup>21</sup>Confident of your obedience I write to you, knowing you will do even more than I ask. <sup>22</sup>And one more thing, get a lodging ready for me because, thanks to all your prayers, I hope to return to you.

<sup>23</sup>Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings. <sup>24</sup>So do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my assistants.

<sup>25</sup>May the grace of the Lord Christ be with you. Amen!

<sup>1Cor</sup> <sup>7:22</sup>  
<sup>1Tim</sup> <sup>6:2</sup>

<sup>Col</sup> <sup>4:12</sup>

<sup>Col</sup> <sup>4:14</sup>

<sup>1Cor</sup> <sup>4:15</sup>  
<sup>Col</sup> <sup>4:9</sup>



In the year 50, Paul arrived in Thessalonica, a major city and the capital of the province of Macedonia (see Acts 17:1). Here, after being rejected by the Jews, he addressed his preaching to the pagans and succeeded in forming a community. After barely three months, a riot caused by the Jews forced him to leave.

What is going to happen to these recent converts to whom Paul taught the mere basics of Christian life?

Paul is quite concerned, so he sends Timothy to see them and to strengthen their church. Timothy comes back with an optimistic report and Paul, reassured, sends this letter at the beginning of 51.

This is the oldest writing of the New Testament.

**1** • <sup>1</sup>From Paul, Sylvanus and Timothy to the church of Thessalonica which is in God the Father and in Christ Jesus, the Lord.

May the peace and grace of God be with you.

<sup>2</sup>We give thanks to God at all times for you and remember you in our prayers. <sup>3</sup>We constantly recall before God our Father the work of your faith, the labors of your love and your endurance in waiting for Christ Jesus our Lord.

<sup>4</sup>We remember, brothers and sisters, the circumstances of your being called. <sup>5</sup>The gospel we brought you was such not only in words. Miracles, Holy Spirit and plenty of everything were given to you. You also know how we dealt with you for your sake.

<sup>6</sup>In return, you became followers of us and of the Lord when, on receiving the word, you experienced the joy of the Holy Spirit in the midst of great opposition. <sup>7</sup>And you became a model for the faithful of Macedonia and Achaia, <sup>8</sup>since from you the word of the Lord spread to Macedonia and Achaia, and still farther. The faith you

have in God has become news in so many places that we need say no more about it. <sup>9</sup>Others tell of how you welcome us and turned from idols to the Lord. For you serve the living and true God, <sup>10</sup>and you wait for his Son from heaven whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who frees us from impending trial.

### The beginning of the Church of Thessalonica

**2** • <sup>1</sup>You well know, brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not in vain. <sup>2</sup>We had been ill-treated and insulted in Philippi but, trusting in our God, we dared announce to you the message of God, and face fresh opposition. <sup>3</sup>Our warnings did not conceal any error or impure motive, nor did we deceive anyone. <sup>4</sup>But as God had entrusted his Gospel to us as to faithful ministers, we were anxious to please God who sees the heart, rather than human beings. <sup>5</sup>We never pleased you with flattery, as you know, nor did we try to earn money, as God knows. <sup>6</sup>We did not try to make a name for ourselves among people, either with you

• **1.1 Faith, endurance, love.** For us, sometimes hope (or: endurance) goes unnoticed between faith and love. For Paul it has two important meanings:

– Those who hope bear trials and persecutions with patience and perseverance. That is why Paul speaks of faith, perseverance and love. As we know from the Gospel, hope is not an easy optimism; it is the capacity to endure when faced with trials.

– The person with hope looks forward to the glorious coming of Christ who will judge this world and take us to the next one. *He frees us from impending punishment.* In those years, all believers were convinced that judgment was imminent and that they would witness Christ's coming.

*The Gospel we brought you was such not only in words (v. 5).* There were many signs, miracles and other manifestations in Thessalonica. Perhaps God increased the signs in view of the coming persecution; since very soon there would not be many with adequate formation to orient the community. In fact the Gospel cannot be proclaimed without God doing something to confirm it (Mk 16:17). Jesus criticized those who came to him to see miracles, but he performed

miracles throughout his ministry. Let us not say: "I do not need miracles to believe." Human beings as we are, we will have quite a different enthusiasm if we see that God is beside us, doing the incredible to confirm his word.

• **2.1 As a nursing mother who feeds and cuddles her baby (v. 7):** Paul's tenderness. Paul recalls the work and energy he spent to convince, to call each one personally. The conversion of a single person demands perseverance, weariness and struggles for the apostle.

All the Christians of Paul's time know that the mother Church in Jerusalem has been the first to suffer heavy persecution. For the Thessalonians, it was also an honor to have remained steadfast in the face of persecution.

Some people will find Paul's words concerning the Jews harsh and exaggerated: It is obvious that verses 15-16 do not refer to all the Jews or to the Jewish people of future time. Paul means those Jews and Judeo-Christians who persecute him from city to city. The divine sentence condemning them has already been pronounced yet they reflect his experience, verified in Acts 15-28.

Acts  
15:40  
16:1  
17:1

5:8  
1Cor  
13:13

1Cor  
2:4  
2Cor  
12:12

Phil  
3:17

Rom  
1:8

Jn  
17:3  
Acts  
14:15

Mt  
3:7  
1Cor  
1:7  
Tit  
2:13

Acts  
16:19-  
40

Gal  
1:10

Jn  
5:41

or anybody else, although we were messengers of Christ and could have made our weight felt.

<sup>Gal 4:19</sup> <sup>7</sup>On the contrary, we were gentle with you, as a nursing mother who feeds and cuddles her baby. <sup>8</sup>And so great is our concern that we are ready to give you, as well as the Gospel, even our very lives, for you have become very dear to us.

<sup>4:11</sup> <sup>2Thes 3:7</sup> <sup>9</sup>Remember our labor and toil; when we preached the Gospel, we worked day and night so as not to be a burden to you. <sup>10</sup>You are witnesses with God that we were holy, just and blameless toward all of you who now believe.

<sup>1Cor 4:15</sup> <sup>Acts 20:31</sup> <sup>11</sup>We warned each of you as a father warns his children; <sup>12</sup>we encouraged you and urged you to adopt a way of life worthy of God who calls you to share his own glory and kingdom.

<sup>Jn 14:10</sup> <sup>Heb 4:12</sup> <sup>13</sup>This is why we never cease giving thanks to God for, on receiving our message, you accepted it, not as human teaching, but as the word of God. That is what it really is, and as such it is at work in you who believe.

<sup>Acts 2:23</sup> <sup>Mt 23:32</sup> <sup>14</sup>Brothers and sisters, you followed the example of the churches of God in Judea, churches of Christ Jesus. For you suffered from your compatriots the same trials they suffered from the Jews, <sup>15</sup>who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and who persecute us. They displease God and harm all people <sup>16</sup>when they prevent us from speaking to the pagans and trying to save them. By doing so they are heaping up their sins, but now Judgment is coming upon them.

<sup>Gen 15:16</sup> <sup>Rom 1:18</sup> <sup>17</sup>We are for a time deprived of your presence, but not in our heart, and we eagerly long to see you. <sup>18</sup>For we have

wanted to visit you, and I, Paul, more than once; but Satan prevented us. <sup>19</sup>In fact, who but you are our hope and our joy? Who but you will be our glorious crown before Jesus, our Lord, when he returns? <sup>20</sup>Yes, indeed, you are our glory and our joy.

<sup>2Cor 1:14</sup>  
<sup>Phil 2:16</sup>

#### Paul's concern

**3** <sup>1</sup>As I could no longer bear it, I decided to go alone to Athens, <sup>2</sup>and send you Timothy, our brother and co-worker of God in the Gospel of Christ. I wanted him to encourage you in the faith and strengthen you <sup>3</sup>so that none of you might turn back because of the trials you are now enduring. You know that such is our destiny. <sup>4</sup>I warned you of this when I was there: "We shall have to face persecution"; and so it was, as you have seen. <sup>5</sup>Therefore I could not stand it any longer and sent Timothy to appraise your faith and see if the Tempter had tempted you and made our work useless.

<sup>Mt 16:24</sup>  
<sup>Heb 10:32</sup>

<sup>Acts 14:22</sup>  
<sup>15:36</sup>

<sup>6</sup>But now Timothy has just returned with good news of your faith and love. He told us that you remember us kindly and that you long to see us as much as we long to see you. <sup>7</sup>What a consolation for us, brothers and sisters, in the midst of our troubles and trials, this faith of yours! <sup>8</sup>It is a breath of life for us when you stand firm in the Lord. <sup>9</sup>How can we thank God enough for all the joy that we feel before God because of you? <sup>10</sup>Day and night we beg of him to let us see you again, that we may complete the instruction of the believers.

<sup>2Cor 7:13</sup>

<sup>11</sup>May God our Father and Jesus our Lord prepare the way for us to visit you. <sup>12</sup>May the Lord increase more and

<sup>5:15</sup>  
<sup>Gal 6:10</sup>

• **3.1** *May the Lord increase more and more your love for each other and for all people* (v. 12). Love manifests itself first within the community and then it must be expanded to all people.

Note also Paul's constant preoccupation: his apostolic mission does not allow him to remain

in any community. He is always moving, leaving his work unfinished, but he entrusts his converts to the grace of God that does not suppress the freedom of the recent converts nor the work of the Tempter in the world.

*You know that such is our destiny* (v. 3). There is no church, nor Christian life, without trials and persecutions.

more your love for each other and for all people, as he increases our love for you. <sup>13</sup>May he strengthen you internally to be holy and blameless before God, our Father, on the day that Jesus, our Lord, will come with all his saints.

5:23  
Zec  
14:5  
1Cor  
1:8

#### A call to a life of purity and work

**4** • <sup>1</sup>For the rest, brothers, we ask you in the name of Jesus, the Lord, and we urge you to live in a way that pleases God, just as you have learned from us. This you do, but try to do still more. <sup>2</sup>You know the instructions we gave you on behalf of the Lord Jesus: <sup>3</sup>the will of God for you is to become holy and not to have unlawful sex.

1Cor  
11:1

Mt  
6:10  
Eph  
1:4

1Cor  
6:13

Dt  
32:35

<sup>4</sup>Let each of you behave towards his wife as a holy and respectful husband, <sup>5</sup>rather than being led by lust, as are pagans who do not know God. <sup>6</sup>In this matter, let no one offend or wrong a brother. The Lord will do justice in all these things, as we have warned and

shown you. <sup>7</sup>God has called us to live, not in impurity but in holiness, <sup>8</sup>and those who do not heed this instruction disobey, not a human, but God himself who gives you his Holy Spirit.

Jn  
17:19

Is  
63:11  
Lk  
10:16  
1Cor  
6:10

<sup>9</sup>Regarding mutual love, you do not need anyone to write to you, because God himself taught you how to love one another. <sup>10</sup>You already practice it with all the brothers and sisters of Macedonia, but I invite you to do more. <sup>11</sup>Consider how important it is to live quietly without bothering others, to mind your own business, and work with your hands, as we have charged you. <sup>12</sup>In obeying these rules you will win the respect of outsiders and be dependent on no one.

Acts  
18:3  
2Thes  
3:6

#### Do not grieve as others do

• <sup>13</sup>Brothers and sisters, we want you not to be mistaken about those who are already asleep, lest you grieve as do those who have no hope. <sup>14</sup>We believe

Eph  
2:12  
Col  
1:27

• **4.1** If we have given ourselves to Christ, that should surely make our life different from what we lived before. The Jews who accepted baptism had a solid moral basis in the laws of the Old Testament. On the other hand, the pagans had only the moral laws observed in their society. Chastity, among others, was completely foreign to them. They considered occasional sexual relationships a necessity of nature, having nothing to do with moral values.

Paul reacts strongly: *The will of God for you is to become holy and not to have unlawful sex.* Facing what humans consider demands of nature, are other demands due simply to the fact that God has called us and put us on the path to divinization (Paul says: sanctification). Paul will take up the same argument in other words in 1 Cor 6:12-20. Here in verses 4-8, Paul is certainly thinking of adultery and relationships with prostitutes. If he were living in our social context, he would surely include sexual freedom among youth.

Paul never ceases telling us we are free. He passes over liturgical rules, customs proper to Jewish people – reminders of the past – all that kept believers in a religion of obedience to laws. He reaffirms fundamental moral rules that are valid at all times and in all places, especially when one has entered through the Gospel the age of spiritual maturity.

• **13.** *Lest you grieve as do those who have no hope.* The Thessalonian community is made up of Christians who are all recent converts with little experience. For years they had accepted

the fate of being born to die. Now, on the contrary, they awaken each day with the assurance of overcoming death: Christ will come soon and take them to the heavenly Kingdom. They are grieved nevertheless over their dead relatives whom Christ will not be able to save. This is what they thought because Greek culture had difficulties believing in a resurrection of the dead.

*Those who are already asleep.* Those who have died are not dead, but they are asleep, waiting for the time of the resurrection, the time of rising as new persons transformed by Christ: we will all be transformed. The word “cemetery” comes from a word meaning *sleeping place*.

*God will bring them together with Jesus.* Paul supposes that he and his readers will be alive when Christ returns and he describes the event according to the cultural expressions of the time. Let us not forget that up to the time of Galileo, everyone thought that heaven had its place in the universe, very high above and that God, although a spirit, was in some way present there.

*We will be with the Lord forever.* That is essential and always true even if it does not mean that Jesus will come on a beautiful cloud to the sound of heavenly trumpets. We already have some experience of the Lord’s presence in our earthly life, but then there will be nothing but this presence and this joy.

This brief message of hope leaves obscure essential questions concerning the resurrection of the dead. Paul will fully deal with this subject later on in 1 Cor 15. There he will show that resurrection is first a transformation of our whole

that Jesus died and rose; it will be the same for those who have died in Jesus. God will bring them together with Jesus and for his sake.

<sup>1Cor 15:51</sup> <sup>15</sup>By the same word of the Lord we assert this: those of us who are to be alive at the Lord's coming will not go ahead of those who are already asleep.

<sup>Mt 24:30</sup> <sup>Jn 5:28</sup> <sup>16</sup>When the command by the archangel's voice is given, the Lord himself will come down from heaven, while the divine trumpet call is sounding. Then those who have died in the Lord will rise first; <sup>Jn 17:24</sup> <sup>17</sup>as for us who are still alive, we will be brought along with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the celestial world. And we will be with the Lord forever.

<sup>18</sup>So, then comfort one another with these words.

#### You are citizens of the light

<sup>Acts 1:7</sup> **5** • <sup>1</sup>You do not need anyone to write to you about the delay and the appointed time for these events. <sup>Mt 24:36</sup> <sup>2P 2P</sup> <sup>3:10</sup> <sup>Rev 3:3</sup> <sup>2</sup>You know that the Day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. <sup>Jer 6:14</sup> <sup>3</sup>When people feel secure and at peace, the disaster will suddenly come upon them as the birth pangs of a woman in labor, and they will not escape. <sup>Lk 21:36</sup>

<sup>4</sup>But you, beloved, are not in darkness; so that day will not surprise you like a thief. <sup>Rom 13:12</sup> <sup>Eph 5:9</sup> <sup>5</sup>All of you are citizens of the light and the day; we do not belong to night and darkness. <sup>1P 1:13</sup> <sup>6</sup>Let us not, therefore, *sleep as others do*, but remain alert and sober. <sup>5:8</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Those who sleep, go to sleep at night, and those who drink, get drunk at night. <sup>Is 59:17</sup> <sup>8</sup>Since we belong to the day, let us be sober, let us put on the breastplate of faith and love, and let the hope of salvation be our helmet. <sup>1Cor 13:13</sup> <sup>9</sup>For God has not willed us to be condemned but to win salvation through Christ Jesus our Lord. <sup>10</sup>He died for us so that we might enter into life with him, whether we are still awake or already asleep. <sup>11</sup>Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, as you are doing now.

<sup>12</sup>Brothers and sisters, I want you to be thankful to those who labor among you, who lead you in the way of the Lord and also reprimand you. <sup>13</sup>Esteem them highly and love them for what they are doing. Live at peace among yourselves. <sup>1Tim 5:17</sup> <sup>Heb 13:17</sup>

<sup>14</sup>We urge you to warn the idle, encourage those who feel discouraged, sustain the weak, have patience with

<sup>Gal 6:6</sup>

being through the energies flowing from the resurrected Christ.

*Comfort one another.* The way of celebrating funerals in the Church must comfort the dead person's relatives and strengthen their faith in the resurrection. There is no room for expressions of despair which Jesus himself scorned (see Mk 5:40): these are peculiar to people who consider the separation to be final. A funeral mass without any spectacular display, when the fervent prayer of the community is experienced, produces a great impact on people who are indifferent.

Paul then gives a warning he will repeat at the end of this letter (5:14): *all should work*. The community is disturbed by certain believers more inclined to attract attention with an enthusiastic show of faith rather than work; they discredit the Church in the eyes of pagans. Paul, the good Jew and Pharisee he was, could earn his own living by manual labor. He would not have understood how a believer could be without some qualification and unable to find an outlet, be it well or poorly considered and paid.

• **5.1** Christ comes at night and believers are people of the light. These words are rich in meaning. Those who follow their evil desires are people of darkness, hiding to do evil. While children of the light are beyond reproach, transparent before God and with nothing to hide from him. The unbeliever sleeps and is off-guard while the believer keeps watch and stays awake: he likes to pray all night long until dawn as if waiting for the day to welcome Christ. As for those who have died, they are not dead: they are only "asleep," ready to rise when the Lord comes.

*Encourage one another and build up one another* (v. 11). In this the Church is seen as the true community needed by believers so they can grow in faith and overcome trials. In every difficulty, the help of the community will be the proof that we are surrounded by the love of God and of Christ, as was said in the first line of the letter.

According to verse 12, after only three months of evangelization this community already had leaders in charge.

Mt 5:44  
Rom 12:17  
everyone. <sup>15</sup> See that no one repays evil for evil, but try to do good, whether among yourselves or towards others.

<sup>16</sup> Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup> pray without ceasing <sup>18</sup> and give thanks to God at every moment. This is the will of God, your vocation as Christians.

• <sup>19</sup> Do not quench the Spirit, <sup>20</sup> do not despise the prophets' warnings. <sup>21</sup> Put everything to the test and hold fast to what is good. <sup>22</sup> Avoid evil, wherever it may be.

<sup>23</sup> May the God of Peace make you holy and bring you to perfection. May you be completely blameless, in spirit, soul and body, till the coming of Christ Jesus, our Lord; <sup>24</sup> he who called you is faithful and will do it. 1Cor 1:9

<sup>25</sup> Brothers and sisters, pray for us. <sup>26</sup> Greet all the brothers and sisters with a holy kiss. <sup>27</sup> I order you in the name of the Lord that this letter be read to all of them.

<sup>28</sup> May the grace of Christ Jesus our Lord be with you.

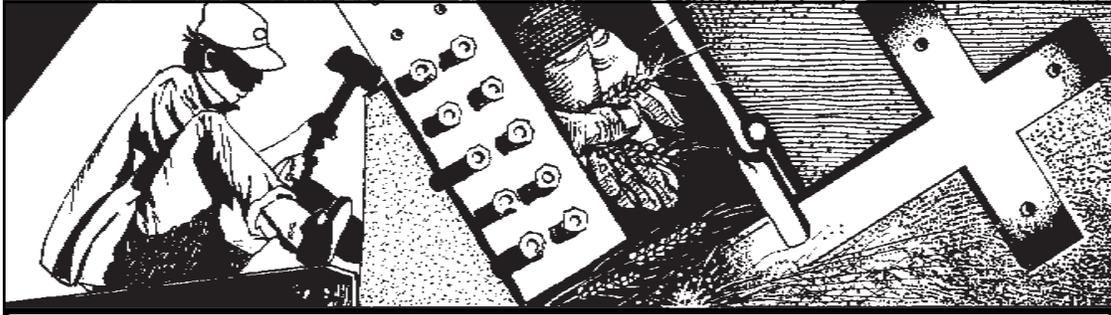
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• 19. *Do not quench the Spirit* (v. 19). A community such as this with few traditions and written instructions, depended on the intervention of the Spirit. Among these Christians there were some gifted with the charism of prophets: they would receive their communications during the Eucharistic assemblies. That is why Paul asks to profit by these spiritual messages, but not without first examining them as he will remind them in 1 Cor 14. This is a delicate situation: the community is subject to the Spirit who speaks through the prophet, but it must – and its leaders must – judge if it is truly the Spirit of God speaking.

*May you be completely blameless in spirit, soul and body* (v. 23). Neither the Jews nor the majority of Greeks would have agreed with our definition of the human: body and soul. They spoke at the same time of the *soul* that gives life to the body and deals with material activities, and of the *spirit* that is capable of truth and justice.

Paul's way of speaking, like the great spiritual Christians, shares this conception. When Paul speaks of the deep life of believers, he does not use the word *soul* but *spirit*. We do not face God as we do in facing an interlocutor and look at each other from the exterior: to understand better our relationship with God, through the Spirit we must think of what unites beings who love each other and in some way live in one another.

According to the Bible, God's Spirit can be omnipresent, insinuate itself, adapt itself, become our spirit without ceasing to be itself. Our spirit is not a part of ourselves, it is us, and it is at the same time our access to God. Our soul expresses itself in different ways, for example in dreams. We only discover our spirit in the measure of our experience of God. Only when we see God shall we truly know what and who we are.



## 2 LETTER TO THE THESSALONIANS

The First Letter to the Thessalonians taught us the importance of looking forward to the coming of Christ in Paul's preaching.

The hope for the Day of Christ was a powerful incentive for preserving the faith of the first Christians. Yet it could lead to an unhealthy nervousness. The Church of Thessalonica was the first example of those minorities and persecuted groups in whom the expectation of the end of the world distorts the normal development of Christian life.

In this letter, written a few months after the first one, Paul tries to reassure the community.

<sup>1</sup>Thes  
1:1

**1** • <sup>1</sup>From Paul, Sylvanus and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians which is in God our Father and in Christ Jesus, the Lord.

<sup>2</sup>May grace and peace be yours from God the Father and Christ Jesus, the Lord.

<sup>1</sup>Thes  
3:6

<sup>3</sup>Brothers and sisters, we should give thanks to God at all times for you. It is fitting to do so, for your faith is growing and your love for one another increasing. <sup>4</sup>We take pride in you among the churches of God because of your endurance and your faith in the midst of persecution and sufferings. <sup>5</sup>In this the just judgment of God may be seen; for you must show yourselves worthy of the kingdom of God for which you are now suffering.

<sup>1</sup>Thes  
2:12

### The judgment and the coming of Christ

• <sup>6</sup>Indeed, it is just that God repays with affliction those who persecute you, <sup>7</sup>but to you who suffer, he will grant rest with us when the Lord Jesus will be shown in his Glory, coming from

heaven and surrounded by his court of angels. <sup>8</sup>Then with flaming fire will be punished those who do not recognize God and do not obey the Gospel of Jesus, our Lord.

Is  
66:15  
Rom  
1:5

<sup>9</sup>They will be sent to eternal damnation far away from the face of the Lord and his mighty glory. <sup>10</sup>On that day the Lord will be glorified in the midst of his saints, and reveal his wonders through those who believe in him, that is through you who have received our testimony.

Is  
2:10

<sup>11</sup>This is why we constantly pray for you; may our God make you worthy of his calling. May he, by his power, fulfill your good purposes and your work prompted by faith. <sup>12</sup>In that way, the name of Jesus our Lord will be glorified through you, and you through him, according to the loving plan of God and of Christ Jesus the Lord.

Is  
66:5  
Jn  
17:22

**2** • <sup>1</sup>Brothers and sisters, let us speak about the coming of Christ Jesus, our Lord, and our gathering to

<sup>1</sup>Cor  
15:23  
<sup>1</sup>Thes  
4:15

Mt 24:31 meet him. <sup>2</sup>Do not be easily unsettled. Do not be alarmed by what a prophet says or by any report, or by some letter said to be ours, saying the day of the Lord is at hand.

Rev 13 Dn 11:36 <sup>3</sup>Do not let yourselves be deceived in any way. Apostasy must come first, when the man of Sin will appear, <sup>4</sup>that instrument of evil who opposes and defiles whatever is considered divine and holy, even to the point of sitting in the temple of God and claiming to be God.

<sup>5</sup>Do you not remember I spoke of it when I was still with you? <sup>6</sup>But you also know what prevents him from appearing until his due time. <sup>7</sup>The mystery of sin is already at work, but the one who restrains it at present has to be taken away. <sup>8</sup>Then the wicked one will appear, whom the Lord is to sweep away with the breath of his mouth and destroy in the splendor of his coming. <sup>9</sup>This lawless one will appear with the power of Satan, performing miracles and wonderful signs at the service of

Is  
11:4  
Ps  
33:6

Mt  
24:24

• **1.1** We again encounter the same ideas we have explained in 1 Thessalonians. A persecuted community. The basis of Christian life: faith, hope (or endurance), love. The day of Christ.

• **6.** When the apostles preached to the pagans, they insisted on the judgment of God (Rom 1:18; Acts 17:31). In fact, these pagans never thought they would be judged at the end of their lives. For almost a century there has been a tendency among us Christians not to mention judgment in reaction to several centuries when it was over emphasized and with it the fear of punishment. Actually, the evangelization of modern pagans, in whom conscience has not even been awakened in the family, demands that it be spoken of as in Paul's time.

To know that good and evil exist, that life prepares for definitive salvation (or the loss of it) and that God will judge us is an essential basis for Christian life. It is precisely from this truth that many turn away, saying for example that God is all-love, or imagining successive existences where we can catch up for our mistakes.

*Indeed it is just that God repays with affliction.* Let us not forget that the letters to the Thessalonians are the earliest of Paul's letters. Even if it was his duty to remind them of the judgment, as did the prophets, and Jesus himself – certainly he had not yet totally purified his thirst for justice of every trace of violence. This violence against the wicked has been (and still is in many religions) a support for faith, but Jesus has invited us to get rid of it (Mt 13:29).

*Coming from heaven... he will do justice.* In the early years of the apostles, it was believed that the Day of the Lord would soon come and judgment (the Last Judgment) would inaugurate the reign of God the Father (1 Cor 15:24). We now suppose – perhaps mistakenly – that it is not imminent, and we prefer to think of judgment as coming at the death of each one: individual judgment.

• **2.1** *Do not be alarmed.* What happens in Thessalonica is what frequently occurs in a persecuted community: people tend to withdraw from real life. There are rumors that the Lord's coming is imminent and hope verges on hysteria. This is why Paul reminds them of certain

truths, some of which are not new, for the Old Testament had more than once spoken of crises that would precede the Judgment. We cannot take as literally true all that the prophets have said on this subject, for they spoke with images proper to their time. They did agree in announcing difficult times for believers and almost a triumph, to begin with, for God's enemies. Jesus did not disagree.

*The apostasy must come first.* Before Christ's return, there must be a "general apostasy," or a worldwide religious crisis. An "antichrist" must come. It is true that there are antichrists in all times (see 1 Jn 2:18). Yet, at the end, there will be a more typical antichrist than all the previous ones. Christ will return in glory at the time the Church seems crushed.

*You know what prevents him* (v. 6). For us, this phrase is obscure. For Paul the *apostasy* is that of the nations already converted to the Gospel and the force of evil was already at work within them (v. 7). It is probable that Paul follows the thinking of the "apocalyptic" authors (some of their works are part of the Bible, among others Ezekiel 38–39 and Daniel 2–10). Everything happens at the time fixed by God and every person in history lasts the time needed to carry out the good and the evil that he has within himself.

Therefore, there cannot be apostasy or antichrist as long as two preceding events have not taken place: the Gospel has to be proclaimed to all the nations (Mk 13:10), and judgment passed on the Jewish nation. The fact that these events have not been realized, especially the second (1 Thes 2:16), is perhaps for Paul the reason why the coming of the antichrist is not imminent.

Paul had no idea that the *time of the nations* mentioned in Luke (21:24) would last for so many centuries; for him, it was a matter of years. Let us keep in mind his way of foreseeing the end of the world. All that is in human history must mature; history will end with a last adventure inspired by diabolical pride; faith or the rejection of the Gospel will be at the heart of the worldwide confrontation.

*God will send them the power of delusion.* Once again we have the Hebrew turn of phrase that should be translated: *God will allow the*

1K 22:22 deception. <sup>10</sup>All the deceits of evil will then be used for the ruin of those who refused to love truth and be saved. <sup>6:10 2Cor 2:16</sup> <sup>11</sup>This is why God will send them the power of delusion, that they may believe what is false. <sup>Jn 3:19 9:39</sup> <sup>12</sup>So all those who chose wickedness instead of believing the truth will be condemned.

### Persevere in faith

• <sup>13</sup>But we have to give thanks for you at all times, dear brothers and sisters in the Lord. For God chose you from the beginning to be saved through true faith and to be made holy by the Spirit. <sup>14</sup>To this end he called you through the gospel we preach, for he willed you to share the glory of Christ Jesus our Lord.

<sup>1Cor 11:2</sup> <sup>15</sup>Because of that, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold to the traditions that we taught you by word or by letter. <sup>16</sup>May Christ Jesus our Lord who has loved us, may God our Father, who in his mercy gives us everlasting comfort and true hope, strengthen you. <sup>17</sup>May he encourage your hearts and make you steadfast in every good work and word.

<sup>2Tim 4:7</sup> **3** <sup>1</sup>Finally, brothers and sisters, pray for us that the Word of God may spread rapidly and be glorified everywhere as it was with you. <sup>2</sup>May God guard us from wicked and evil people, since not everyone has faith. <sup>3</sup>The Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and keep you safe from the Evil One. <sup>4</sup>Besides, we have in the Lord this confidence that you are doing and will con-

tinue to do what we order you. <sup>5</sup>May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.

### Let everyone work

<sup>6</sup>We command you, beloved, to stay away from believers who are living in idleness contrary to the traditions we passed on to you. <sup>7</sup>You know how you ought to follow our example: we worked while we were with you. <sup>8</sup>Day and night we labored and toiled so as not to be a burden to any of you. <sup>9</sup>We had the right to act otherwise, but we wanted to give you an example.

<sup>1Thes 2:9 4:11</sup>  
<sup>Mt 10:10</sup>

<sup>10</sup>Besides, while we were with you, we said clearly: If anyone is not willing to work, neither should that one eat. <sup>11</sup>However we heard that some among you live in idleness – busybodies, doing no work. <sup>12</sup>In the name of Christ Jesus our Lord we command these people to work and earn their own living. <sup>13</sup>And you, brothers and sisters, do not weary in doing what is right.

<sup>14</sup>If someone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take note and do not have anything to do with him, so that he may be ashamed.

<sup>1Cor 5:9</sup>

<sup>15</sup>However, do not treat him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

<sup>Mt 18:15</sup>

<sup>16</sup>May the Lord of peace give you his peace at all times and in every way. May the Lord be with you all.

<sup>17</sup>I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is my signature in all my letters. This is how I write.

<sup>18</sup>May the grace of Christ Jesus our Lord be with you.

*forces of deceit to act.* The same people who do not take into account decisive arguments in favor of the faith, later follow doctrines and opinions without foundation.

Paul invites the Church, as he did in 1 Thessalonians, to follow his instructions and rules. He is more severe in insisting that they have an obligation to work: if everybody works, their faith will be more peaceful.

• 13. Note the word *traditions* used by Paul. The traditions are the customs, rites and teach-

ings that people pass down from one generation to another. They are also the usages and lifestyles which are adopted upon joining a community. Jesus condemned the exaggerated importance the Pharisees gave to their own traditions, to the point that they prevailed over God's commandments (see Mk 7:5). Yet Jesus himself, while he was with his apostles, taught them a certain way of praying, of doing, and of living in fellowship. It is in this sense that Paul here speaks of traditions: see *Traditions and Tradition* in the commentary on Mark 7:1.