

1 *Thessalonians*

According to the Acts of the Apostles, after Paul and Silas left Philippi, they eventually arrived in another city in the region of Macedonia, namely, Thessalonica, where they preached the gospel about Jesus as the Christ in a synagogue of the Jews (Acts 17:1–3). Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large group of God-fearing Greeks and several prominent women (17:4). But other Jews stirred up a crowd against Paul and Silas, so that they had to be sent to another Macedonian city, Beroea, where they made more converts (17:5–12). But when the Jews of Thessalonica heard that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul in Beroea, they came there as well, inciting and stirring up the crowds (17:13). As a result, Paul was sent to the seacoast, while Silas and Timothy remained behind (17:14). Those who accompanied Paul led him as far as Athens, and then returned with an order for Silas and Timothy to join Paul as soon as possible (17:15). After preaching in Athens with limited success (17:16–34), Paul went on to the Achaian city of Corinth (18:1), where he stayed for a year and six months, teaching the word of God (18:11). It is most probably during this time (49–50 CE) from Corinth that the first letter to the Thessalonians was sent, which is generally believed to be the earliest of Paul’s surviving letters.¹

The letter presents itself as being sent by Paul, Silvanus (=Silas), and Timothy to the *ekklēsia*, the “church” or “assembly,” of the Thessalonians (1 Thess 1:1). But the several references to Paul alone (2:18; 3:5; 5:27) indicate that he is the primary author who dictated the letter.² Noteworthy is the parental imagery that portrays the authors’

1. Ascough, “Thessalonians, First Letter,” 569; Fee, *Thessalonians*, 3–5.

2. Ascough, “Thessalonians, First Letter,” 571; Fee, *Thessalonians*, 4.

close relationship with their audience: “with affection for you like a nursing mother caring for her own children” (2:7–8);³ “we treated each one of you as a father treats his own children” (2:11); and “when we left you as orphans . . . we became all the more eager in our great desire to see you in person” (2:17).⁴

The fundamental Pauline triad of faith, love, and hope appears near the beginning (1:3) and near the end (5:8) of the letter. “Faith” (*pistis*) for Paul is the acceptance of divine grace by submitting oneself in obedience and trust to the eschatological saving activity of God initiated by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. “Love” (*agapē*) within the triad is inspired by and flows from faith. It refers to the sincere, mutual, and presently active care and concern for one’s fellow believer in response to God’s love for us as manifested in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Based upon faith in what God has accomplished in the Christ event, “hope” (*elpis*) for Paul is an absolutely assured, confident, and firm expectation of participating in the future and final salvation of God.

While Timothy has brought back to Paul good news of the faith and love of the Thessalonians (3:6), there is yet a need to correct some “deficiencies” in their faith (3:10). Since their faith and love but not their hope have been affirmed, this suggests that there is something not quite right with regard to their hope that is to be based upon their faith. In other words, their faith is apparently somewhat deficient with regard to the hope it should establish. The letter thus aims to encourage the Thessalonians with the proper and assured hope they should have for those who have already died before the final coming of Christ (4:13–18), as they await its unknown time of arrival by being “clothed with the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation” (5:8). The hope the letter gives them thus caps off their faith and love that the letter affirms.⁵

3. Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul*, 17–28.

4. Fee, *Thessalonians*, 105.

5. “In 1 Thessalonians the triad is used with different images; in the first instance with work-related images (work, labor, endurance) and in the second case with images taken from military armor (breastplate, helmet). Faith and love are mentioned together in 3:6 with reference to the Thessalonians (compare 3:10), and in 4:13 Paul seeks to address an issue that has the potential to cause them to lose hope: the death of loved ones. Elsewhere in the letter the words or their cognates are used frequently,

1 *Thessalonians as a Ritual of Worship**Introductory Worship*

With the opening greeting of “grace to you and peace,” the authors of the letter affirm the divine grace and peace that the Thessalonians have already received as a church or assembly of believers who now live within a divine realm or sphere characterized as their being “in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1:1).⁶ This initial greeting also functions as a prayer that the Thessalonians, gathered as a “church” or “assembly” (*ekklēsia*) for worship, have a renewed and ongoing experience of this divine grace and peace both during and after they have listened to the letter within their liturgical gathering.⁷

The authors then perform an act of epistolary worship that acknowledges the divine “grace” (*charis*) the Thessalonians have been given—“we thank (*eucharistoumen*) God always concerning all of you” (1:2a). They thank God not only now in the letter but always, as they make mention of the Thessalonians in their prayers, constantly (1:2b). More specifically, they call to mind in their prayers before our God and Father the manifestation of the fundamental triad of faith, love, and hope on the part of the Thessalonians—“your work of faith and labor of love and endurance of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:3).⁸

suggesting that the three elements of faith, hope, and love reflect the social and ethical standards to which the Thessalonian Jesus-believers aspire” (Ascough, “Thessalonians, First Letter,” 574).

6. “[I]t is likely that Paul combined ‘grace’ with the Jewish ‘peace’ to create a new form of epistolary address appropriate to his purpose and the setting in which he thought the letter would be read. The setting he had in mind was the congregation at worship, and . . . one function it would perform was liturgical” (Malherbe, *Thessalonians*, 100). “Far from being a mere formality, in Paul’s hands the common letter greeting becomes a blessing that embraces the totality of the divine benefits he and his associates desire for the Christians in Thessalonica” (Green, *Thessalonians*, 86).

7. The term “church” (*ekklēsia*) refers “not to a building but to the active gathering together of believers for worship and fellowship. One might translate it here ‘the gathered assembly of Thessalonians in God.’ This reminds us once more that this letter was to be read out when the gathered assembly met for worship. It is addressed to the body at corporate worship and was not meant primarily for private reading like a personal letter might be” (Witherington, *Thessalonians*, 49–50).

8. “Paul’s concentrated use of labials at the beginning of his first thanksgiving shows that he is writing with a view of how the letter would sound when read aloud. The letter would therefore function as a speech, and the liturgical features in these first

As the opening thanksgiving section continues, the authors further affirm the faith of the Thessalonians. They relate that other believers, those not only in Macedonia and Achaia but in every place that the faith of the Thessalonians has gone forth (1:8), are reporting how “you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1:9). That the Thessalonians have turned to God from idols means that they have abandoned their former idolatrous worship. The reference to their “service” thus implies a new worship that includes both their liturgical and ethical worship of the living and true God. Such worship is based on their faith in the living and true God who raised his Son from the dead, and it includes the hope of awaiting this Son from heaven, the Jesus who delivers us from the coming wrath (1:10).⁹

Worship in the Body of the Letter

That not only the Thessalonians but God himself is a witness to how “devoutly and justly and blamelessly” the authors became toward them as those who believe (2:10) describes an ethical worship approved by God. As part of their very close and personal relationship with the Thessalonians (2:8), the authors treated each of them “as a father treats his own children” (2:11). This fatherly instruction included exhorting and encouraging them “to walk,” that is, to conduct their lives, worthily of the God who is calling them into his kingdom and glory (2:12). For

verses contribute to the character of the speech as a sermon. Paul’s epistolary thanksgivings may indeed reflect his practice of beginning his sermons with such a prayer. The worshipful tone already established in the salutation is now continued. This report of the thanksgiving Paul constantly gives is the first of five prayers or prayer reports in the letter (1:2–3; 2:13; 3:10; 3:11–13; 5:23), which appear in important places in the structure of the letter and make the letter different from ordinary friendly letters” (Malherbe, *Thessalonians*, 122–23). “References to health wishes and even prayer and worship were also not uncommon in ancient letters. . . . It is striking, however, that Paul’s tone in 1 Thessalonians is equally worshipful and respectful even though Paul writes as a religious and social superior (or at least as equal) to his converts” (Witherington, *Thessalonians*, 56).

9. “Converts ‘serve’ the God who is living and true, implying the lordship of the living God. Implied here is the notion that Gentile conversion entailed a change of lordships, moving from bondage to pagan gods to a new life rendered in service to the living God. In Jewish tradition also, monotheism entails being a ‘servant’ to the living God and ‘service’ entailed both worship and adherence to the commandments” (Goodwin, *Apostle of the Living God*, 115).

the Thessalonians to conduct their lives “worthily” of God amounts to offering their own ethical worship as a worthy response to the grace of God, here described as God graciously calling them into his kingdom and glory.¹⁰

Furthermore, that the Thessalonians have received the word of God from the authors not as a word of human beings but, as it truly is, the word of God, inspires the authors to the worship of thanking God constantly (2:13a). That “we thank God constantly” recalls and reinforces the authors’ initial act of worship—“we thank God always concerning all of you, making mention of you in our prayers, constantly” (1:2). That the word of God that the Thessalonians received from the authors is at work in them as those who are believing (2:13b) empowers their ethical worship of “walking worthily” of God (2:12). By such ethical worship that is energized by the word of God, the Thessalonians may thus follow the lead of the authors and offer the worthy worship of likewise thanking God constantly.¹¹

Having been encouraged that the Thessalonians are still standing firm in their faith (3:7–8), the authors are prompted to an especially joyous worship of God in response. Indeed, “for all the joy” with which they are “rejoicing” before God because of the Thessalonians, they scarcely seem capable of rendering an adequate thanksgiving to God (3:9). The rhetorical question, “for what thanksgiving can we render to God concerning you?” (3:9a), recalls and reinforces the thanksgivings to God for the audience that the authors have already reported (1:2; 2:13). Not being able to offer adequate thanks to God has, nevertheless, not prevented the authors from the worship of thanking God and rejoicing with all joy before God because of the faith of the Thessalonians.¹²

Yet the deficiencies that remain in the faith of the Thessalonians have caused the authors to turn to a different kind of worship. Night and day they are praying exceedingly to see the Thessalonians in person

10. “The moral life of a person was frequently described as the way one ‘walked,’ both in the OT and in Hellenistic literature. This language is adopted in the NT, especially in the Pauline letters, to speak of the way one conducts oneself—either before God or in sin” (Green, *Thessalonians*, 137).

11. “The view that the moral life is to be congruent with God is characteristically Jewish and Christian” (Malherbe, *Thessalonians*, 152).

12. “The rhetorical question signifies that, while it is appropriate to render thanks to God, it could not be done adequately” (*ibid.*, 204).

in order to remedy these deficiencies in their faith (3:10). That these deficiencies are the cause of such an intense worship of petitionary prayer underlines their seriousness and prepares the audience for hearing them addressed within the letter itself as a substitute for the personal presence of Paul and his coauthors.¹³

An example of the authors' frequent praying to see the audience in order to correct their faith is then provided for their encouragement: "May God himself, our Father, and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you, and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we for you, so as to strengthen your hearts to be blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones" (3:11–13).¹⁴ This increase in love (cf. 1:3; 3:6) will enable the Thessalonians to offer the proper ethical worship of being "blameless in holiness" (3:13), like a worthy sacrificial offering, before our God and Father at the final coming of the Lord Jesus.¹⁵

As the deficiencies in the faith of the Thessalonians (3:10) begin to be addressed, the authors request that as their audience received from

13. According to Green (*Thessalonians*, 173), "their prayers were not simple requests since the verb (participle) translated *we pray* (*deomenoi*) means 'to pray with insistence' or 'implore.'"

14. On the presence of an "amen" at the conclusion of the prayer in some manuscripts, see Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 563. "It is hard to imagine the circumstances in which so many early and excellent witnesses would have omitted it had it been original" (Fee, *Thessalonians*, 128n4).

15. "The extended introductory thanksgiving of 1:2–3:13 is one of the most distinctive formal features of 1 Thessalonians. We propose that its presence in the letter is intended to reassure the community by establishing the soundness of the ground for his initial thanksgiving (1:2–3) in the face of the eschatological confusion and its ramifications and of Thessalonian concerns about the missionaries on account of their extended absence" (Nicholl, *From Hope to Despair*, 99n40). According to Witherington (*Thessalonians*, 104–5), "the prayer for growth in love is part and parcel with the prayer for holiness since increasing in love amounts to increasing in holiness and moves toward the goal of blamelessness. . . . The Thessalonians' coming to be 'established without blame in holiness' means that they will be conformed to the character of God himself." Fee (*Thessalonians*, 129) notes, "Paul records a prayer for them that seems to have two purposes. First, he hereby concludes the narrative of his and the Thessalonians' past and present relationships on a note similar to, and thus forming a kind of inclusio with, the prayer of thanksgiving with which the letter began (1:2–3). At the same time, second, he anticipates the matters addressed in the rest of the letter, where he deals with the 'deficiencies' mentioned at the end of the preceding sentence (v. 10)."

them how they must “walk and please God,” as indeed they are “walking,” so they should do so even more (4:1). This is a request that their “walking,” that is, the way they conduct their lives morally, be an ethical worship that “pleases God.” Their moral conduct, then, should stand in contrast to those Judean Jews who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and persecuted Paul and others (2:15a). By such conduct these Jews did not “please God” and were opposed to all human beings (2:15b). The Thessalonians are thus to follow the example of Paul and his coauthors, who speak the gospel with which they were entrusted not to please human beings, but as a sincere ethical worship that “pleases God,” who examines their hearts (2:4). The ethical worship of the Thessalonians includes the maintenance of their holiness—“for this is the will of God,” which they may do by avoiding sexual immorality (4:3). For God did not call us to impurity but to holiness (4:7; cf. 2:12), the holiness that is to embrace their entire way of living and thus render ethical worship that is pleasing to God.¹⁶

One of the deficiencies in the faith of the Thessalonians (3:10) involves a lack in the hope that is based on their faith. They do not seem to possess a hope that those who have already “fallen asleep,” that is, died, will participate in the final coming of the Lord Jesus. But they are reassured, and may encourage one another, that those who have already died will indeed be raised to meet the Lord when he comes again (4:13–18).

But having a proper hope also includes avoiding the complacency of those who are not aware of and ready for the sudden and unexpected coming of the Day of the Lord (5:1–3). The Thessalonians are thus exhorted to live in faith, love, and hope, as these basic Christian attitudes provide believers with the protective “armor” needed to meet the destructive dangers surrounding this unexpected coming (5:4–8). As a protective “helmet,” hope assures that whether believers are now “awake,” that is, “alive and alert” spiritually and morally, or “asleep,” that is, “dead” spiritually and morally, at the final coming of Christ they will

16. “‘Pleasing God’ does not mean anything so mundane as ‘being pleasant’ toward him but rather points to serving him in a way that makes his interests a person’s primary ambition” (Green, *Thessalonians*, 185). “God’s calling of the Thessalonians to himself was for the purpose of their living ‘in holiness,’ meaning that ‘holiness’ was to be the context that framed all of life both within and outside the community of faith” (Fee, *Thessalonians*, 152).

receive salvation and participate with him in eternal “life” (5:9–10). In the event that believers are morally “asleep,” they need to be “awakened” to a life of holiness by repenting with the encouragement and edification of their fellow Christians (5:11). Such moral alertness amounts to the ethical worship that pleases God (4:1).¹⁷

Worship in the Letter’s Closing

As the letter begins to come to a close, the Thessalonians are exhorted to “rejoice always” (5:16). They are thus invited to join in the joyous worship of the authors inspired by the faith of the Thessalonians—“for all the joy with which we are rejoicing because of you before our God” (3:9). The Thessalonians are exhorted to “constantly pray” (5:17) and “in everything to give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus” (5:18).¹⁸ They are thus called to imitate the manner of worship performed by the authors, who are thanking God constantly (2:13), thanking God always for all of the Thessalonians, remembering them in their prayers, constantly (1:2). When the Thessalonians are gathered for worship, they are not to quench the Spirit (5:19), which may be speaking to them in prophecies they are not to despise from fellow participants (5:20). They should examine all such prophetic utterances and retain what is beneficial to the community (5:21). And as part of their ethical worship, they are to refrain from every form of evil (5:22).

At the beginning of the letter the authors prayed that the “peace” of God be granted to the Thessalonians (1:1). Now the authors pray to the “God of peace” to bring the ethical worship of the Thessalonians to its completion at the final coming of the Lord: “May the God of peace himself make you completely holy, and may your entire spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is the one calling you, who indeed will accomplish it” (5:23–24). The God who did not “call” the Thessalonians to moral impurity

17. Heil, “1 Thess 5.9–10,” 464–71.

18. “Practicing this kind of prayer in the midst of extreme social pressure is only possible on the basis of, and would exemplify, an utter dependence on God and the hope of God’s coming public vindication of the faithful (as Paul describes in 4:13–5:11). It would both flow from, and continue to engender, a transformation of this audience’s imagination” (Johnson, “Sanctification,” 288).

but to “holiness” (4:7), the “holiness” that is the will of God as their ethical worship (4:3), is the God who is “calling” them into his own kingdom and glory, as those conducting themselves in the ethical worship that is worthy of God (2:12). This is the faithful God “calling” the Thessalonians (5:24), the God of peace who will make them completely “holy” in their ethical worship, with their entire persons kept “blameless” (5:23), like a sacrificial offering worthy of and pleasing to God. This prayer thus resonates with and reinforces the previous prayer that the Thessalonians be “blameless in holiness” before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his holy ones (3:13).¹⁹

The Thessalonians, who were exhorted to constantly pray (5:17), are now exhorted to pray also for the authors (5:25). They are thus to reciprocate the prayers offered for their benefit by the authors. Paul and his coauthors are making mention of all of the Thessalonians in their prayers, constantly (1:2), as exemplified in the letter itself (3:10–13; 5:23–24). The Thessalonians are to greet all the brothers, as they are gathered together to listen to the reading of the letter (5:27), with the liturgical ritual of the “holy kiss” (5:26).²⁰ The verbless final greeting, “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ with you” (5:28), reaffirms that the Thessalonians, as believers, have already been recipients of this divine grace. It also functions as a prayer that they will continue to experience this grace as a result of having listened to the letter. This climactic prayer

19. “Paul’s wish-prayer in 5:23–24 must be understood in light of his former wish-prayer in 3:11–13 as well as in light of his concrete exhortations in 4:1–5:22. As we have seen, adherence to these concrete exhortations would result in practices that both presuppose and continue the transformation of his audience’s imagination. . . . Because this God is faithful (v. 24), the result will be a people of God, kept blameless *both now and at the eschaton* because their communal life is constituted by self-giving actions” (Johnson, “Sanctification,” 289–90). “With this twofold benedictory prayer Paul concludes his letter by emphasizing his two major concerns in writing: that the Thessalonian believers continue on a course of holy living; and that they do so until the Parousia itself” (Fee, *Thessalonians*, 225–26).

20. “The kiss is not an ordinary one but is to be holy, Paul again picking up on a major theme of the letter. Such a greeting may have been given at different points in the church’s worship” (Malherbe, *Thessalonians*, 341). “This kiss is described as *holy*, not necessarily to distinguish it from the erotic kiss but rather to identify it with the common life of those who were ‘holy ones’ or ‘saints.’ As such, the adjective *holy* reinforces the bond between them that the kiss itself symbolizes and separates this symbol of their unity from the kisses they would exchange with others in their world” (Green, *Thessalonians*, 271). See also Penn, “Performing Family,” 151–74; idem, *Kissing Christians*.

for the divine “grace” of the Lord Jesus Christ forms a literary inclusion with the opening greeting and prayer that “grace” and peace (cf. 5:23) be given to the assembly of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (1:1). These opening and closing prayers for divine grace thus frame the entire letter within a context of worship.²¹

Conclusion: Worship in 1 Thessalonians

After the initial greeting of “grace to you and peace” (1:1), Paul and his coauthors perform an act of epistolary worship that acknowledges the divine “grace” the Thessalonians have been given—“we thank God always concerning all of you” (1:2a). They thank God not only now in the letter but always, as they make mention of the Thessalonians in their prayers, constantly (1:2b). That the Thessalonians have turned to God from idols means that they have abandoned their former idolatrous worship for a new “service” that includes both their liturgical and ethical worship of the living and true God (1:9).

For the Thessalonians to conduct their lives “worthily” of God amounts to them offering their own ethical worship as a worthy response to the grace of God, the God who is graciously calling them into his kingdom and glory (2:12). That the word of God which the Thessalonians received from the authors is at work in them as those who are believing (2:13b) empowers their ethical worship of “walking worthily” of God (2:12). By such ethical worship that is energized by the word of God, the Thessalonians may thus follow the lead of the authors and offer the worthy worship of likewise thanking God constantly (2:13a).

The authors’ rhetorical question, “for what thanksgiving can we render to God concerning you?” (3:9a), recalls and reinforces the

21. “‘Peace’ and ‘grace’ from 1:1 are repeated in 5:23, 28, which enclose the final greeting” (Malherbe, *Thessalonians*, 342). “Since this document was read in worship, we may assume that the end of the letter is liturgically shaped to suit the end of the worship service” (Witherington, *Thessalonians*, 177). “It was ‘grace,’ God’s own favor that is theirs through ‘the Lord, Jesus Christ,’ with which he greeted them at the beginning; and now that same ‘grace’ is what he wishes for them in conclusion. It is the one word in Paul’s vocabulary that embraces all that God has done, and that he desires that God will do, for his Thessalonian friends through Christ Jesus” (Fee, *Thessalonians*, 233).

thanksgivings to God for the audience that the authors have already reported (1:2; 2:13). Not being able to offer adequate thanks to God has, nevertheless, not prevented the authors from the worship of thanking God and “rejoicing with all joy before God” because of the faith of the Thessalonians (3:9b). On the other hand, that the deficiencies in their faith are the cause of such an intense worship of petitionary prayer (3:10) underlines their seriousness and prepares the Thessalonians for hearing them addressed within the letter itself as a substitute for the personal presence of Paul and his coauthors. An example of the authors’ frequent praying to see the Thessalonians in order to correct their faith is then provided for their encouragement: “May God himself, our Father, and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you, and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we for you, so as to strengthen your hearts to be blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones” (3:11–13).

As the deficiencies in the faith of the Thessalonians (3:10) begin to be addressed, the authors request that their “walking,” that is, the way they conduct their lives morally, be an ethical worship that “pleases God” (4:1). The ethical worship of the Thessalonians includes the maintenance of their holiness—“for this is the will of God,” which they may do by avoiding sexual immorality (4:3). For God called them to holiness (4:7; cf. 2:12), the holiness that is to embrace their entire way of living and thus render ethical worship that is pleasing to God.

One of the deficiencies in the faith of the Thessalonians (3:10) involves a lack of hope that those who have already died will participate in the final coming of the Lord Jesus. But they are reassured, and may encourage one another, that those who have already died will indeed be raised to meet the Lord when he comes again (4:13–18). But having a proper hope also includes avoiding the complacency of those who are not aware of and ready for the sudden and unexpected coming of the Day of the Lord (5:1–3). Their hope assures that whether the Thessalonians are now “awake,” that is, “alive and alert” spiritually and morally, or “asleep,” that is, “dead” spiritually and morally, at the final coming of Christ they will receive salvation and participate with him in eternal life (5:9–10). In the event that some of them are morally “asleep,” then they need to be “awakened” to a life of holiness by repenting with

the encouragement and edification of their fellow Thessalonian believers (5:11). Such moral alertness amounts to the ethical worship that pleases God (4:1).

At the closing of the letter the Thessalonians are exhorted to “rejoice always” (5:16), to “constantly pray” (5:17), and “in everything to give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus” (5:18). Then the authors pray to the “God of peace,” the “peace” they prayed for the Thessalonians at the beginning of the letter (1:1), to bring the ethical worship of the Thessalonians to its completion at the final coming of the Lord: “May the God of peace himself make you completely holy, and may your entire spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is the one calling you, who indeed will accomplish it” (5:23–24). God is the faithful one calling the Thessalonians, the God of peace who will make them completely “holy” in their ethical worship, with their entire persons kept “blameless” (5:23), like a sacrificial offering worthy of and pleasing to God (cf. 3:13).

The Thessalonians are to reciprocate the prayers (5:25) offered for their benefit by the authors (5:17). They are to greet all the brothers, as they are gathered together to listen to the reading of the letter (5:27), with the liturgical ritual of the “holy kiss” (5:26). The verbless final greeting, “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ with you” (5:28), reaffirms that the Thessalonians, as believers, have already been recipients of this divine grace. It also functions as a prayer that they will continue to experience this grace as a result of having listened to the letter. The opening and closing prayers for divine grace (1:1; 5:28) thus frame the entire letter within a context of worship.