

# 1 Thessalonians

## IGNATIUS CATHOLIC STUDY BIBLE QUESTIONS

### Welcome

“You are approaching the ‘word of God’. But for thousands of years, . . . the Word of God has been approaching you.”

The following guide is provided to enhance your reading of the First Letter of Saint Paul to the Thessalonians using the *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible*. If you are new to this resource or to reading the Bible, we recommend you read the general Introduction before you begin. It explains what it means that Scripture is the Word of God as well as how we understand and interpret it as Catholics. It also introduces the special features of the Study Bible and tells how they can enrich your reading and study. Additionally, the *Introduction to Paul and His Letters* will provide valuable context for your reading.

A simple rhythm of prayer followed by reading and reflection is offered below to guide you through the book one chapter at a time. Questions draw attention to key footnotes and word studies to lead you into a deeper understanding of what you read and then prompt you to consider how to apply what you have learned. For a deeper dive, take advantage of additional features as you go: not just the other footnotes but also cross-references to Scripture and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* that are provided above the footnotes as well as any maps, charts, or essays that are not touched on in the questions.

Don’t miss these helpful icons as you read! They highlight footnotes that pertain to the Church’s criteria for interpreting Scripture (see CCC 112–14):



### Be attentive to the content and unity of Scripture

Notes marked with a Bible icon connect Old Testament passages and New Testament mysteries, fostering appreciation for God’s unified plan.



### Read Scripture in light of the Church’s living tradition

This icon marks notes drawn from the Holy Spirit’s guidance of Church teaching and the spiritual senses of scripture. Here you’ll find official teaching as well as interpretations from Fathers, Doctors, and saints of the Church.



### Be attentive to the “analogy of faith”

Explore notes marked with an icon of keys to learn how the mysteries of faith, revealed in Scripture and defined by the Church, clarify and connect with one another in a unified, coherent way.

May God bless you as you read his word!

of God,\* did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,<sup>7</sup>but emptied himself,<sup>†</sup> taking the form of a servant,<sup>‡</sup> being born in the likeness of men.<sup>§</sup> And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.<sup>¶</sup> Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name,<sup>||</sup>that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,<sup>|||</sup>and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

**Shinin**  
12 Therefore, obeyed, so now much more in salvation with f work in you, bo pleasure.  
14 Do all thi tioning,<sup>15</sup>that y children of God crooked and per

2:9–11: Rom 10:9; 14:9; Eph 1:20–21. 2:13: 1 Cor 15:10. 2

**2:7 emptied himself:** The Greek verb *kenōō* means “empty out” or “render void”. The idea is, not that Christ divested himself of divinity when he united himself with humanity, but that he restricted his rightful exercise of certain divine abilities during his earthly life and accepted certain limitations of the human condition. In effect, the Son of God made himself poor in order to make us rich with his grace (2 Cor 8:9) (CCC 472). • Christ emptied himself by compressing the glory of his Godhead within our smallness. What he always was remained perfect and incomprehensible, but what he assumed was in proportion to the measure of our nature (St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Apollinarius*).

**2:8 death on a cross:** The ultimate indignity. Death by crucifixion was the most awful and degrading form of criminal execution in the ancient world. The Romans reserved it for slaves and insurrectionists. See note on Mk 15:24.

**2:9 exalted him:** By raising him from the dead, enthroning him in heaven, and clothing his humanity with divine glory. A similar destiny awaits all who humble themselves as Jesus did (3:21; Lk 14:11).

**2:10 every knee should bow:** An allusion to the divine oath in Is 45:23. • Yahweh swore that all peoples, to the very end of the earth, would acknowledge his Lordship and bow before him in homage. Paul moves Christ into the center of this prophecy as the divine Lord destined to be revered by all. **heaven . . . earth . . . under the earth:** The three principal realms in the world view of ancient Israel (Ex 20:4). Homage will come from all creatures great and small—the angels and saints above, the family of man and beasts spread over the earth, and the dead and the demons of the underworld.

**2:11 confess:** I.e., acknowledge. Included in this open dec

serious that we pur sense of awe at ser the prospect of sinn Encouragement con readers that God’s g desire (intention) at 21; CCC 308) (CC “work”, he address and trembling”, he good deeds were th not boast of your g within you (St. Augu **2:15 pervers** • Deuterono poetic lawsuit that and ingratitude du

*A Thing to Harpagmos* (G in the Greek O Occurrences of “robbery”. Its considerable d the leading vi (1) Some, like “something sel

## Prepare

Read the Introduction to 1 Thessalonians, paying particular attention to the *Purpose* and *Themes* of the book. What one thing stands out to you, that you would like to remember?

Read the Outline of 1 Thessalonians to get an overview of the book. What are its major divisions?

## Pray

Use the following questions to guide your reading of 1 Thessalonians, going at a pace that is comfortable to you. Before you begin each new section, pray simply for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit:

*Come, Holy Spirit, open my heart to hear and receive these words as what they truly are, the Word of God. Enlighten my understanding and give me grace to put what I read into practice in my life. Amen.*

## Read and Reflect

Read and reflect on 1 Thessalonians as follows:

- Pray before you read
- Read a section of biblical text by itself
- Read the text again, referring to the notes that accompany the text
- For deeper understanding and to aid in applying what you read, answer the questions that follow. The references at the top of each numbered question correspond to particular notes.

At the end of each chapter, review what you have written and linger where you feel drawn, asking the Lord to speak to your heart and into your life. What do you hear? Respond in prayer and ask his help to live what you hear in your attitudes and actions this week.

# STUDY QUESTIONS

## Chapter 1

### *For understanding*

1. **1:1.** Who are the Silvanus and Timothy mentioned in this verse? How is the Church family in Thessalonica united?
2. **1:3.** What is Paul remembering? How does each of the theological virtues apply to the Thessalonian situation?
3. **1:7.** What are Macedonia and Achaia, and where are they in relation to each other?
4. **1:9.** What does Paul's phrasing suggest about the Thessalonians' religious background? What is the traditional Jewish critique of idolatry contained in the Scriptures? In what respect is the Jewish faith the faith of the Church?

### *For application*

1. **1:2.** When you pray, for whom do you pray? For whom should you be praying? How often do you give thanks for that person's faith in, hope for, and love of Jesus Christ and his Church?
2. **1:5.** To what extent do you experience the gospel as more than a matter of words and dogmas—as, rather, a matter of power in the Holy Spirit and utter conviction? If, as Paul suggests, the gospel should come in power, what might you do to receive it that way?
3. **1:6.** Which Catholics (living or not) do you most admire for their practice of the faith? How have you imitated those you admire? What has been the fruit of your imitation? To extend this question a little farther, how do you imitate the Lord?
4. **1:9.** To what do you devote more time and attention in everyday life than you should? Might these pursuits qualify as idols, in the sense that you spend too much energy and affection in their service? How can you turn from them to the service of a God who is a living reality in your life?

## Chapter 2

### *For understanding*

1. **2:9.** Why did Paul and his companions avoid claiming their rights to material and financial support during their brief stay with the Thessalonians? How did they support themselves?
2. **2:13.** To what does "the word of God" refer here? How was it delivered? What OT personages do the apostles and their associates parallel, and how?
3. **2:14–16.** For whom does Paul have some unusually harsh words? Why does he trace this madness to Jerusalem? Who is persecuting the Thessalonians?
4. **Word Study: At Last (2:16).** What are some of the ways this expression is used in the New Testament? If Paul's use of the expression in 1 Thessalonians is a matter of interpretation, what three possible interpretations can be given it? Why is a decision about the meaning difficult here?

### *For application*

1. **2:1–4.** Think of someone you admire for his refusal to give up in the face of opposition. What is it about that person's attitude that you most admire? How might that attitude encourage you in the face of opposition—especially of a religious or spiritual nature?
2. **2:11–12.** If you are a parent or are responsible for children or adolescents, how do you exhort, encourage, and charge them "to lead a life worthy of God"? If you are direct and explicit, how do you respond when your charges seem to ignore or reject your encouragement? If you are indirect or "hands off", how do you know that they perceive your approach as encouragement to lead such a life?
3. **2:13.** How do you receive the Church's teaching on moral issues? Do you accept it as the word of God for you—that is, as the truth—or as someone's opinion? If you accept it as the word of God, how can you tell when it "is at work in you"? That is, what effect is it having on you?

## Chapter 3

### *For understanding*

1. **3:2.** Why did Paul send Timothy to visit the Thessalonians? When did Timothy return? What happened as a result of the visit?

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2. **3:10.** What did Paul fear was lacking in the Thessalonians' faith?
3. **3:12.** When Paul talks about love in this verse, about what kind of love is he speaking? How does this kind of love function? Why can only God make this love increase and overflow?
4. **3:13.** To whom can the expression "all his saints" in this verse refer? What is Paul most likely saying? What other Scripture passages support this interpretation?

### *For application*

1. **3:1–5.** How do you deal with uncertainty over the faith of people you love, especially if their faith is new or is under-going trial? What steps do you take to encourage them to persevere?
2. **3:10.** Have you ever tried to instruct anyone in the faith? How did you go about it? For example, how did you determine what those you were instructing needed to know? How could you tell when they were "getting" what you were teaching and were growing in faith?
3. **3:12.** Reflect on the note for this verse. How has the Lord caused love to increase in your own life? in the lives of those you catechize?

## Chapter 4

### *For understanding*

1. **4:3.** Describe the processes of sanctification. Of what is it a condition? To what does the injunction "abstain from immorality" refer? Where did the Greek expression used here originate?
2. **4:13.** For what is "asleep" a metaphor? What does Scripture imply by using it? Though it is human to mourn for the death of a loved one, how should the Christian handle grief?
3. **4:15.** What do some scholars infer from Paul's use of "we" in this passage? What other comments in Paul's letters seem to weigh against this common interpretation?
4. **4:16–17.** What kind of imagery does Paul use to depict the Second Coming of Jesus? What three OT examples does the note cite, and for which specific images?

### *For application*

1. **4:3–7.** Look up and read Tob 8:4–7. What is the connection between Paul's admonition and Tobias' attitude toward taking a wife? What connection is there between chastity, sexual expression within marriage, and the sanctification of the spouses?
2. **4:9–12.** At first, Paul's injunctions, on the one hand, to love the brethren and, on the other, "to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands" may appear to be contradictory. How can tending to one's own work be an expression of love for the community?
3. **4:13–14.** If you have ever grieved for the loss of a loved one, how did your grief challenge your hope? How did hope reassert itself? What is the basis for Christian hope?
4. **4:15–18.** If you have ever comforted anyone who has lost a loved one, what kinds of comfort did you offer? How was it received? How would you want to be comforted in a similar situation?

## Chapter 5

### *For understanding*

1. **5:2.** What is the "day of the Lord", and what does Paul know about it? How does the liturgy anticipate this final and fateful day? How is it prefigured in history?
2. **5:5.** What is the Semitic expression "sons of light" a way of saying? To what does the struggle between light and darkness refer, and where do you find it discussed in Jewish tradition?
3. **5:12.** What does the expression "over you in the Lord" indicate about the Thessalonian Church? Why is this situation not surprising? To what does the spiritual oversight of these pastors entitle them from the laity?
4. **5:23.** In using the formula "spirit and soul and body", what is Paul emphasizing? What is he *not* intending to emphasize? What distinctions *can* be made among these components?

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### *For application*

1. **5:1–4.** How predictable is your life? How far into the future do you tend to make plans? What do these verses suggest for the ways you should be planning?
2. **5:5–8a.** What kind of sobriety do you think Paul is talking about here? What does drunkenness represent (beyond an excess of alcohol)? How do these verses compare with what Paul said in 4:3 about sanctification?
3. **5:12–13a.** Why are bishops and pastors always entitled to your respect? In what ways have you personally shown respect to them, especially around others? How often do you pray for them?
4. **5:16–18.** Since Paul advises rejoicing, prayer, and thanksgiving “in all circumstances” as God’s will for you, how do you act on his advice? What does it mean to rejoice or give thanks when times are tough? How do you pray constantly?
5. **5:19–24.** Read these verses slowly, with an emphasis on v. 24. How secure is your confidence that God is faithful to you and will (note the definite future) sanctify you if you cooperate with him?