

THE AUTHORSHIP OF 2 THESSALONIANS Is Pseudonymity a Better Alternative?

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I. Introduction

In studying a letter written by Paul, for example, 1 Thessalonians, the usual starting point for a person who takes historical exegesis seriously is to allow the content of the letter to inform us what might have happened in the Thessalonian church. Then we attempt to describe the "historical situation" of the Thessalonian church which might have caused Paul to write this letter.¹ This always necessitates some historical reasoning and not unusually, also involves some imaginative reasoning to the satisfaction of the exegete. However,

¹ Although the legitimacy of such a step in the studies of the Gospels has been questioned by scholars such as Bauckham, it has not been seriously challenged in the studies of New Testament epistles. Richard Bauckham, ed., *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

this is only half of the hermeneutical loop. As the reconstructed "situation" takes shape, we begin to interpret the text of the letter based on this reconstruction, which in turn based on that text. This, then, forms the second part of the loop. Although it sounds like a circular argument, a careful exegete will keep refining the historical reconstruction as well as the interpretation of the text, and at the same time pay close attention to the hermeneutical community's responses.

On the other hand, when there are two letters written to the same community, the reconstructed situation must be able to account for both letters. The importance of this criterion is even more obvious in the case of the Thessalonian correspondence, because (1) the two letters concern similar subjects, and (2) it is commonly believed that the interval between these two letters was very short. In this case, some scholars challenge the reconstructed situations as unsatisfying, and consequently question the authorship of 2 Thessalonians.

Admittedly, the early church thought that 2 Thessalonians was written by Paul. In mid-second century AD, Marcion accepted Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians without question (though he did edit the letter to reflect his theological bias).² It was also listed in the so-called Muratorian Canon, dated to late second century AD.³ Nonetheless, the tide has now turned. The authorship status of 2 Thessalonians can no longer be assumed as "given."

² Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem* 5.16.

³ "...Paul himself.... Although he wrote to the Corinthians and to the Thessalonians once more for their reproof..." E. Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. 1, rev. ed., ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, trans. R. McL Wilson (Louisville: Westminster/Knox, 1991), 35.

The debate on the subject can be divided into two main categories: those who hold to Pauline authorship and thus propose various solutions to resolve the issues surrounding 2 Thessalonians; and those who think Paul had not written the second letter and thus propose various theories to explain why it was composed. The present state of scholarship on the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians leans more on the side of pseudonymity, as reflected in Brown's assessment: "Looking at the arguments for and against Paul's writing II Thess, personally I cannot decide with certitude, even if surety is claimed by some adherents of post-Pauline writing."⁴ Brown's comment highlights at least one issue: some scholars have essentially declared that it has been proven beyond reasonable doubt that Paul had not written 2 Thessalonians. As such, this writer wishes to explore the arguments of pseudo-Pauline authorship and critically evaluate their plausibility, and also restate other scholars' objections which this writer finds significant.

II. Pseudo-Pauline Authorship

The objections raised against Pauline authorship can be grouped into four categories: (1) the alleged un-Pauline characteristics found in 2 Thessalonians; (2) literary dependency of 2 Thessalonians on 1 Thessalonians; (3) the theological discrepancy between 1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians in the area of eschatology; and (4) stylistic differences of 2 Thessalonians from other Pauline letters. It should be noted at the outset that although the authenticity of 2

⁴ Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, Anchor Bible Reference Library, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 596.

Thessalonians has been seriously challenged, at least two scholars admit that no argument against the Pauline authorship can stand alone without the mutual support of the other arguments.⁵

A. Un-Pauline Characteristics

In 2 Thessalonians 2:2, Paul was concerned about forgery, δι' ἐπιστολῆς ὡς δι' ἡμῶν. The assumption is that after Paul had sent the first letter to Thessalonica, he should have heard a rumor that a forged letter under his name was in circulation in the Thessalonian church. Menken's explanation seems best to illuminate the difficulty:

Such a reading of 2.2 raises several problems. Its adherents have to presuppose that rumours about a forged letter (whether true or not) came into being and reached Paul in the short time that elapsed between his two letters to the Thessalonians (in 1 Thessalonians, there is no trace whatsoever of the forged letter). It is astonishing that Paul does not react more passionately against the real or presumed forgery. There are no signs in Paul's letters that there was any question of forged letters already during his lifetime.⁶

Hence we have two objections here: (1) if there was really a forgery, Paul's response seemed to be too gentle; and (2) there was no record of anyone having forged Paul's name during his lifetime. In 2 Thessalonians 2:2, Paul exhorted the believers not to be shaken in their mind nor be stirred up "either by spirit or by word or by letter purporting to be from us," which claimed that the Day of the

⁵ Wolfgang Trilling, *Untersuchungen zum zweiten Thessalonicherbrief*, Erfurter Theologische Studien 27, ed. Erich Kleineidam, Heinz Schürmann, and Wilhelm Ernst (Leipzig: St. Benno, 1972), 45. Similarly, Menken except for the argument of literary dependency. Maarten J. J. Menken, *2 Thessalonians*, New Testament Readings, ed. John Court (New York: Routledge, 1994), 30-31, 36, 40.

⁶ Menken, *2 Thessalonians*, 33.

Lord were now present. This is the false teaching. The source of this teaching, as summarized by Paul, was either through "spirit" (διὰ πνεύματος), or "word" (διὰ λόγου), or "forged letter" (δι' ἐπιστολῆς). The first possible source was "by a spirit," by which Paul probably meant prophetic words. The second possible source was "by word," that is, someone else's teaching. The third source was "by a letter" in Paul's name. We can say that Paul was not sure if a forged letter was the source, therefore he listed three possibilities. It is therefore unfair for scholars to focus solely on the letter. What Paul did in this verse was to issue a blanket statement to cover all possible forms of false teaching. Without solid evidence before Paul's eyes, he cannot be expected to be passionate about it.

A related issue is found in 2 Thessalonians 3:17, where Paul mentioned, Ὁ ἀσπασμὸς τῆ ἐμῆ χειρὶ Παύλου, ὃ ἐστὶν σημεῖον ἐν πάσῃ ἐπιστολῇ· οὕτως γράφω. As pointed out by those who deny Pauline authorship, such a remark can also be found in four other letters: 1 Corinthians 16:21; Galatians 6:11; Colossians 4:18; and Philemon 19. Yet curiously, both Richard and Menken find it too much for the real Paul to have put an extra emphasis on his own handwriting, especially when he had already suspected that there was a possible attempt to forge a letter in his name.⁷ Menken, however, does concede that this is a weak argument.⁸

Bailey notes that in the entire letter of 2 Thessalonians, except 1:7 and 3:1, there is a lack of personal warmth, which is a distinctive element found throughout 1 Thessalonians.⁹ The tone of 2

⁷ Menken, *2 Thessalonians*, 35; Earl J. Richard, *First and Second Thessalonians*, Sacra Pagina Series 11, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1995), 394.

⁸ Menken, *2 Thessalonians*, 36.

⁹ John A. Bailey, "Who Wrote II Thessalonians," *NTS* 25 (1978-1979): 137.

Thessalonians is thought to be official and formal. The tone of 1 Thessalonians 1:2 is one of warmth and welcoming while the tone of 2 Thessalonians 1:3 is one of passive obligation. However, this is a very subjective argument. Even if for the sake of argument one agrees that the tone has shifted, it can be easily explained away by a change of situation from one of joy to one of danger. Guthrie notes that such charges cannot be taken seriously since Paul could have been writing in a very different mood.¹⁰ It is not difficult to imagine a plausible scenario for Paul's situation. He had just sent out 1 Thessalonians a short while ago with a sense of relief that the church there was on the right track and was still zealous for the Lord. He hoped that this letter, now known to us as 1 Thessalonians, would put to rest certain issues which were of some concern to him. However, not long afterward, probably within a period of two months, he received news that the situation of the Thessalonian church had become more serious. After hearing news about the unexpected turn of the situation in the Thessalonian church, he would have most naturally become more anxious and serious in his tone, just as when he wrote Galatians (either later or earlier). Menken himself also concedes that it is possible for any author to change his tone in a second letter to the same addressee if the addressee has in the meantime displayed undesirable ideas or conduct.¹¹ The question as to what had caused such a change in the addressee, of course, can only be answered after we have examined the alleged theological differences, and this is outside of the scope of this paper.¹²

¹⁰ Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 4th ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1990), 596.

¹¹ Menken, *2 Thessalonians*, 31.

¹² One possibility as proposed by Robert Jewett (see footnote 29 for reference) is that there was a misunderstanding of 1 Thessalonians by a millenarian group in the church. This writer agrees

Bailey also discussed the text of 2 Thessalonians 1:12 where Christ was called God, which according to Bailey, reflects a later understanding of Christology. He writes, "In i. 12 Christ is called God: 'according to the grace of our God and Lord Jesus Christ.' The Greek, due to the lack of the article before 'Lord,' is ambiguous....It is not impossible that Paul himself once – in II Thess. i. 12 – called Christ God, but again it is more likely that another, writing some decades later, did so."¹³ This objection is based on the Greek grammatical argument of Granville Sharp's rule. However, although the terms in this verse qualify for a Granville Sharp construction of article – noun – καί – noun, the Granville Sharp's rule does not cover proper nouns. Since the noun κυρίου has the proper nouns Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ in apposition to it, the rule does not apply in this case.¹⁴

B. Literary Dependency

The apparent similarities between the two letters cause Wrede to comment that it is "difficult to believe that Paul would have written the same letter which he only shortly previously had sent to the church."¹⁵ In his commentary, Marxsen makes a comparison between 1 and 2 Thessalonians and demonstrates that these two letters have

with Jewett that there was a millenarian group but thinks that the addressee's change of attitude was due to a combination of factors: millenarian prophetic prediction (date setting), failure of prophecy, and subsequent group behaviors characterized by cognitive dissonance. This writer hopes to present a full development of the arguments in future. However, this paper's position, namely, pseudonymity is not a better alternative, does not depend on these arguments.

¹³ Bailey, "Who Wrote II Thessalonians," 139.

¹⁴ It is true that Bailey does not explicitly say that this is the application of the Granville Sharp rule, but the way he equates κυρίου with τοῦ θεοῦ implies Granville Sharp construction. See also Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 276.

¹⁵ William Wrede, *The Origin of the New Testament*, trans. James S. Hill (London: Harper & Brothers, 1909), 40.

completely parallel structure which cannot be found in any other Pauline letters.¹⁶ Menken also concurs that "the author of one letter wrote it making use of the other letter."¹⁷ Thus Marxsen concludes that it is inconceivable that the same author could have written 2 Thessalonians, which literarily depends so much on 1 Thessalonians while presenting a totally opposite point of view concerning the eschatology in these letters.¹⁸ Menken elaborates even further:

It should be clear, first of all, that the fact that Paul wrote the second letter shortly after the first one, with the latter still in his memory, is not a sufficient explanation; it may explain a similarity of subject-matter, but not this degree of similarity of expressions and phrases. One has to presuppose at least that Paul kept a copy of 1 Thessalonians (which is not impossible), but it is rather uncommon for an author to write a second letter to the same addressee which is so remarkably alike the first one, even when he did so using a secretary. Besides, there is the striking point that precisely the more 'personal' parts of 1 Thessalonians (in 2:1-3:10) have not been used in the composition of 2 Thessalonians. In fact, the parts of 1 Thessalonians that are most clearly paralleled in 2 Thessalonians are the more general or formulaic sections of the letter (prescript, thanksgivings, prayers, general admonitions, letter-closing).¹⁹

To Menken, the literary dependency of 2 Thessalonians is the decisive argument against Pauline authorship.

¹⁶ Willi Marxsen, *Der zweite Thessalonicherbrief*, 2d ed., Zürcher Bibelkommentare: Neues Testament 11.2, ed. Georg Fohrer, Hans Heinrich Schmid, and Siegfried Schulz (Zürich: Theologischer, 1982), 22. Malherbe, Menken and Rigaux have each produced a similar list in their books. Abraham J. Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, Anchor Bible 32B, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 356-57; Menken, *2 Thessalonians*, 36-38; Béda Rigaux, *Saint Paul: Les Épîtres aux Thessaloniens*, Études Bibliques (Paris: Gabalda, 1956), 133-34.

¹⁷ Menken, *2 Thessalonians*, 39.

¹⁸ Marxsen, *Der zweite Thessalonicherbrief*, 27.

¹⁹ Menken, *2 Thessalonians*, 39-40.

However, Malherbe thinks that the similarities between the two letters are exaggerated.²⁰ The subject-matter is similar but the second letter is more focused on two specific issues, namely eschatology and work. It is reasonable to assume that the content of the first letter was still fresh in Paul's memory if the interval between the two letters was short. Instead of belaboring the point, this writer chooses only two examples to show how Menken and others make such a comparison. The first example is 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 and 2 Thessalonians 1:3; the second is 1 Thessalonians 2:9 and 2 Thessalonians 3:8. When we examine closer the so-called literary dependency between the two letters, we find that the comparison is made on similarity in vocabulary as the following examples:

Examples of the literary similarity between 1 and 2 Thessalonians

<p>1 Thess 1:2-3 <u>Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ πάντοτε</u> <u>περὶ πάντων ὑμῶν μείαν ποιούμενοι</u> <u>ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν ἡμῶν, ἀδιαλείπτως</u> <u>μνημονεύοντες ὑμῶν τοῦ ἔργου</u> <u>τῆς πίστεως καὶ τοῦ κόπου τῆς ἀγάπης</u></p> <p>καὶ τῆς ὑπομονῆς τῆς ἐλπίδος τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν,</p>	<p>2 Thess 1:3 <u>Εὐχαριστεῖν ὀφείλομεν τῷ θεῷ πάντοτε</u> <u>περὶ ὑμῶν, ἀδελφοί, καθὼς ἄξιόν ἐστιν,</u> <u>ὅτι ὑπερσῶζει</u></p> <p><u>ἡ πίστις ὑμῶν καὶ πλεονάζει ἢ ἀγάπη</u> <u>ἐνὸς ἐκάστου πάντων ὑμῶν εἰς ἀλλήλους,</u></p> <p>2 Thess 1:4 ὥστε αὐτοὺς ἡμᾶς ἐν ὑμῖν ἐγκαυχᾶσθαι ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τοῦ θεοῦ ὑπὲρ <u>τῆς ὑπομονῆς ὑμῶν καὶ πίστεως ἐν πᾶσιν</u> τοῖς διωγμοῖς ὑμῶν καὶ ταῖς θλίψεσιν αἷς ἀνέχεσθε,</p>
<p>1 Thess 2:9 μνημονεύετε γάρ, ἀδελφοί, τὸν κόπον ἡμῶν <u>καὶ τὸν μόχθον· νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας ἐργαζόμενοι πρὸς τὸ μὴ ἐπιβαρῆσαί τινα ὑμῶν ἐκηρύξαμεν εἰς ὑμᾶς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ.</u></p>	<p>2 Thess 3:8 οὐδὲ δωρεὰν ἄρτον ἐφάγομεν παρά τινος, ἀλλ' ἐν <u>κόπῳ καὶ μόχθῳ νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας ἐργαζόμενοι πρὸς τὸ μὴ ἐπιβαρῆσαί τινα ὑμῶν</u></p>

²⁰ Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, 357.

A general observation is that these passages are considered similar because they display similar wordings, as shown by underlining. As Menken himself points out, there is a general agreement that "from the point of view of vocabulary, 2 Thessalonians is no less Pauline than the recognized Pauline letters."²¹ However, when considered as a whole, Menken opts for pseudonymity. One must ask, then, is it possible that Paul could have written similar phrases in both letters. The answer is positive. One comparison would suffice to validate this position. If we look at 1 Corinthians 1:4, εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ μου πάντοτε περὶ ὑμῶν ἐπὶ τῇ χάριτι τοῦ θεοῦ τῇ δοθείσῃ ὑμῖν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ. The underlined words show similarity with both letters to the Thessalonians, except that they are singular in number.²² In the second example of 1 Thessalonians 2:9 and 2 Thessalonians 3:8, Menken notes that the long sequence of words is identical.²³ Again, one must ask if the phrase is considered to be unusual and therefore not repeatable verbatim. The answer is negative. Since Paul was referring to the same subject matter, it was very probable that the same phrase came to mind. The phrase νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας appears also in 1 Thessalonians 3:10 and also in 1 Timothy 5:5 and 2 Timothy 1:3. Even if one denies Pauline authorship for 1 and 2 Timothy, one has to agree that the phrase was a common one to denote the length of time. Furthermore, judging from Paul's reaction to certain members of local churches (e.g. 1 Cor. 9:1-15; 2 Cor. 6:3-10), it is in fact possible that it became customary for Paul to speak rhetorically about the hardship he endured in ministry.

²¹ Menken, *2 Thessalonians*, 32.

²² Related to this Menken notes the similarity between the prescripts of 1 Thessalonians 1:1 and 2 Thessalonians 1:1-2. A very simple explanation is that in both of these letters Paul was writing in the names of three persons: Paul himself, Timothy, and Silas. When Paul was writing in his own name, say, in 1 Corinthians 1:4, he used the singular first person pronoun and did not mention other "co-authors."

²³ Menken, *2 Thessalonians*, 38.

The second part of the sentence is also not something so unusual that it became impossible for Paul to repeat it verbatim, ἐργαζόμενοι πρὸς τὸ μὴ ἐπιβαρῆσαι τινα ὑμῶν. If, as Menken claims, the writer of 2 Thessalonians most likely had a copy of the first before him, it would be curious as to why he did not complete the thought of the sentence with ἐκηρύξαμεν εἰς ὑμᾶς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ, since he had already copied the first part. Furthermore, Schmidt, although also arguing from the view point of pseudonymity, has demonstrated that there are considerable stylistic differences between the two letters.²⁴ Schmidt's argument, in this writer's opinion, creates more difficulty for the argument of literary dependency, for how can a person, with a copy of 1 Thessalonians before him as his literary base, compose a letter with so much literary dependency on the first yet show many differences in the level of embedding.

Pseudonymity, therefore, cannot be proved simply based on the literary similarities between the two letters. This is not to say that the two letters do not share similarities. In fact, it is precisely their similarity that shows that both of them may have been written within a short time gap. This in turn goes back to the discussion of the theological differences between the two letters.

²⁴ Daryl Schmidt, "The Syntactical Style of 2 Thessalonians: How Pauline is it?" in *The Thessalonian Correspondence*, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 87, ed. Raymond F. Collins (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1990), 383-93.

C. Theological Discrepancy

In late eighteenth century, Schmidt argued that the warning of forgery and the teaching about the Antichrist were very un-Pauline.²⁵ Specifically, Schmidt contended that 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 could not have been written by the same Paul who wrote the first letter.²⁶ Schmidt suggested that 2 Thessalonians 1:11 connects seamlessly with 2 Thessalonians 2:13, and he proposed that the section about the Antichrist was a second-century addition.²⁷ Although his solution was not adopted, the principle of his argument, that there are detectable theological differences between the two letters, is still widely held today.

This theological difference hinges in part on the statement of 2 Thessalonians 2:2. As it can be readily shown in 1 Thessalonians, Paul's emphasis was on the unpredictability of the Parousia. It is clear that by the time of the writing of 2 Thessalonians 2:2, for some yet to be discovered reason, an announcement had been made: ἐνέστηκεν ἡ ἡμέρα τοῦ κυρίου, "the Day of the Lord is here." Trilling argues that one of the sources of this false teaching, δι' ἐπιστολῆς ὡς δι' ἡμῶν, should be understood as 1 Thessalonians, "Daher dürfte es methodisch ratsam sein, von der Angabe auszugehen, die grammatisch sicher ist, nämlich von »Brief«. Daß damit wahrscheinlich an 1Thess gedacht ist, wurde gesagt."²⁸ This is not to say that the teaching of 1 Thessalonians was faulty, but that it was used to make a faulty

²⁵ J. E. C. Schmidt, "Vermutungen über den beiden Briefe an die Thessalonicher," in *Bibliothek für Kritik und Exegese des Neuen Testaments und ältesten Christengeschichte* 2.3 (Hadamr: Gelehrtenbuchhandlung, 1801), 380-86; Schmidt's article can be found in the appendix of Trilling, *Untersuchungen zum zweiten Thessalonicherbrief*, 159-61.

²⁶ Werner Georg Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 14th ed., trans. A. J. Mattill, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966), 264.

²⁷ Trilling, *Untersuchungen zum zweiten Thessalonicherbrief*, 161.

²⁸ Wolfgang Trilling, *Der zweite Brief an die Thessalonicher*, Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 14, ed. Josef Blank et al. (Zurich: Benzinger, 1980), 77.

declaration. Trilling's argument is similar to Jewett's misinterpretation theory but differs in that Trilling sees the misinterpretation as having happened in a much later time after Paul had died.²⁹

However, Koester prefers to see the source of error coming from "the apocalyptic fervor of the second half of the first century."³⁰ He thinks that the situation of 2 Thessalonians was "fundamentally different from the situation of the first letter." First of all, Koester thinks that Paul did not preach an imminent view of Parousia, "his [Paul's] message proclaims the death and resurrection of Jesus as the turning point of the ages and the presence of the new age in the building of the new community in which the eschatological future is realized in faith, love, and hope, regardless of the nearness of the parousia."³¹ The opponents addressed in 2 Thessalonians, on the other hand, wished to effect a change in the behavior of the church through the "enthusiastic expectation of a change that is to come soon." Koester thinks that Paul's opponents were not teaching a "realization of the eschatological future in the work of the community" but rather, that they were proclaiming "the nearness of the 'day of the Lord' in order to effect a change in the behavior of the established church...it is characterized by the turning away from the pursuits of the world to the enthusiastic expectation of a change that is to come soon; only after that change will there be a new eschatological community."³²

²⁹ Robert Jewett, *The Thessalonian Correspondence: Pauline Rhetoric and Millenarian Piety*, Foundations & Facets: New Testament, ed. Robert W. Funk and Burton L. Mack (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 186-91.

³⁰ Helmut Koester, "From Paul's Eschatology to the Apocalyptic Schemata of 2 Thessalonians," in *The Thessalonian Correspondence*, 455.

³¹ Koester, "From Paul's Eschatology to the Apocalyptic Schemata of 2 Thessalonians," 455.

³² Koester, "From Paul's Eschatology to the Apocalyptic Schemata of 2 Thessalonians," 455.

Thus, the believers were located "within a radicalized apocalyptic time table just before the decisive turning point."³³ Koester's peculiar interpretation, of course, is based on his truncating of the future element even in 1 Thessalonians, when he asserts that in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 the "day" and "night" were concurrent events.³⁴ Few scholars would agree with Koester's view of Paul's eschatology in 1 Thessalonians.

Menken states the issue in a different manner: "It is clear, however, that the author of 2 Thessalonians is convinced that the final decision is at hand, because in his view the things that have to happen before the parousia, are already working – albeit in a hidden way – in the present time: 'For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work' (2:7). The eschatologies of 1 and 2 Thessalonians differ in that in the first letter Christ is expected to come soon and suddenly, whereas in the second letter it is added that his coming will be preceded by other events."³⁵ Giblin, who originally supported the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians, has changed his position.³⁶ He now holds that 2 Thessalonians is pseudonymous. He believes that the writer of 2 Thessalonians did not hold to an imminent view of the Parousia. The post-1988 Giblin suggests that while Paul in 1 Thessalonians encouraged the believers to look forward to the Parousia, the writer of 2 Thessalonians "almost officiously disapprove[d] of enthusiasm concerning the clock-and-calendar presence or nearness

³³ Koester, "From Paul's Eschatology to the Apocalyptic Schemata of 2 Thessalonians," 456.

³⁴ Koester, "From Paul's Eschatology to the Apocalyptic Schemata of 2 Thessalonians," 445-54.

³⁵ Menken, *2 Thessalonians*, 29.

³⁶ Giblin originally held that 2 Thessalonians is authentic. See Charles H. Giblin, *The Threat to Faith: An Exegetical and Theological Re-Examination of 2 Thessalonians 2*, *Analecta Biblica* 31 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1967).

of the Lord's parousia."³⁷ Both of these writers hold that the difference in eschatology of these two letters therefore necessitates different authorship.

In this writer's opinion, the root of the arguments of the theological differences lies in the difficulty to reconstruct a satisfactory "situation" for the Thessalonian church so that Paul would have needed to respond by de-emphasizing the imminence of the Parousia. However, the difference between the two letters in terms of eschatology is not that they contradict each other, as Menken and Giblin imply. Kümmel refutes this so-called theological difference by declaring that "there is nothing surprising about the alleged tension" because "it must be recalled that both conceptions — the End is coming suddenly, and it has historical antecedents — occur together in the apocalyptic details (cf. 1 Thess. 4:15-17; 1 Cor. 15:23-28, 51f)."³⁸ This is apparent even in Jesus' teaching. In Mark 13:21-31 Jesus talked about the apocalyptic events and yet at the same time cautioned that the date and time had not been disclosed to anyone (Mk. 13:32-37).

In addition, the argument for pseudonymity based on theological differences depends heavily on whether scholars can provide a satisfactory situation for the need of 2 Thessalonians to be composed by a pseudonymous writer. As this writer will show in this paper, such a reconstruction creates more difficulties than it solves. On the other hand, if Kümmel's statement is valid, then it is entirely possible that Paul would have held a similar view.³⁹

³⁷ Charles H. Giblin, "The Second Letter to the Thessalonians," in *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1990), 872.

³⁸ Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 266.

³⁹ The orderly fashion of the eschatological events listed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:20-28 is one such possible indication.

D. Stylistic Differences

The evaluation of stylistic evidence other than vocabulary focuses on phrases and syntactical structure. It is thought that Paul used less pictorial language in 2 Thessalonians than in 1 Thessalonians, but that he repeated his words more often in the second letter,⁴⁰ in which he also utilized Hebraic parallelism more often than in the other undisputed Pauline letters.⁴¹ In a recent study, Schmidt analyzes the syntactical structure of Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians by means of computer-assisted analysis.⁴² He finds that 2 Thessalonians exhibits a high degree of syntactical complexity in the opening thanksgiving section, and that only Ephesians and Colossians have similar level of complexity (both of which are usually considered pseudepigraphic).⁴³

Best, who thinks that the linguistic and stylistic evidence "favors a common authorship" of both letters, explains the differences in style by saying that "it may be due to Paul's creative freedom as a writer or possibly to his employment of Silvanus or Timothy as an 'executive' secretary for both letters but for none of his others."⁴⁴ On the other hand, Malherbe dismisses the linguistic analysis because he thinks it reduces the letter into "a conglomeration of words, phrases, and sentences to be manipulated to prove a hypothesis."⁴⁵ Furthermore, there is another issue Schmidt has not addressed to. If

⁴⁰ Trilling, *Untersuchungen zum zweiten Thessalonicherbrief*, 56, 62-63. Cited also in Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, 366-67.

⁴¹ Trilling, *Untersuchungen zum zweiten Thessalonicherbrief*, 53.

⁴² Schmidt, "The Syntactical Style of 2 Thessalonians" 383-93.

⁴³ Schmidt, "The Syntactical Style of 2 Thessalonians" 385.

⁴⁴ Ernest Best, *A Commentary on the First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, Harper's New Testament Commentaries, ed. Henry Chadwick (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 52-53.

⁴⁵ Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, 368.

a writer really had a copy of 1 Thessalonians in front of him as he attempted to imitate Paul's writing, why would he end up writing twice the number of embedding sentences (according to Schmidt, ten in 1 Thessalonians; twenty-two in 2 Thessalonians), resulting in 2 Thessalonians having three times more in the number of level of embedding (five in 1 Thessalonians and fifteen in 2 Thessalonians)?⁴⁶ This would defeat the purpose of forgery. If the writer consciously wanted to have his letter look like Paul's, he would have wanted to make his style as close to Paul's as possible, especially if he had a copy of 1 Thessalonians before him (to account for the so-called literary dependency). On the other hand, if he was not consciously thinking that he was composing a forgery, it would have been more natural to have reduced the sentence complexity. Therefore, in this writer's opinion, Schmidt's arguments about the stylistic differences and Menken's arguments of literary dependency cannot be true at the same time.⁴⁷

The similarity in the vocabulary, and even in some phrases, and the stylistic differences can all be accounted for if we allow Paul to have the liberty to use an amanuensis (cf. Rom. 16:22). There is no difficulty in seeing that 2 Thessalonians was penned by a person different from that of 1 Thessalonians. If Paul himself had written 1 Thessalonians, he would not have the need to sign as he had in 2 Thessalonians. Most probably, 2 Thessalonians was written by someone else who was writing under Paul's instruction.

⁴⁶ Statistics found in Schmidt, "Apocalyptic Schemata of 2 Thes," 385.

⁴⁷ This argument is similar to the canon of textual criticism which states that the reading that better explains the rise of the other is preferred. It is more plausible for a forger to be less complicated, and more closely following Paul's style.

III. Possible Situations of a Non-Pauline 2 Thessalonians

If the letter is a forgery, Menken writes, "we shall have to ask why its author posed as Paul; when, where, to whom and why the letter was written; and we have then to explain it in accordance with our answers to these questions."⁴⁸ There is no lack of such hypothetical reconstruction. Hughes suggests that a late first-century Paulinist had used 1 Thessalonians as his base because at least to the Paulinist, 1 Thessalonians was assuredly written by Paul.⁴⁹ This Paulinist wanted to warn his readers that anyone who opposed the true Pauline doctrine (thus Paul's enemies) would suffer undesirable consequences (2 Thess. 3:14). The readers were urged to make the right choice to avoid eschatological judgment.⁵⁰

Richard sees the community of 2 Thessalonians suffering from persecution, which was thought by the sufferers to be a signal of the end-time. The community was therefore inclined to focus its time and energy on the issues of eschatology to the extent that it had been neglecting its duties (2 Thess. 3:6-12).⁵¹ Richard concludes, "The letter is composed to combat this apocalyptic fervor and its multifaceted effects. The author adopts an anti-apocalyptic strategy, whether in sympathizing with the members' afflictions, suggesting that divine judgment awaits such ungodly people, or especially in pointing out, by using the audience's knowledge of the standard end-

⁴⁸ Menken, *2 Thessalonians*, 3. To this list we may add Holmes questions, "How it came to be accepted as part of the Pauline corpus." Michael W. Holmes, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, The NIV Application Commentary, ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 27.

⁴⁹ Frank Witt Hughes, *Early Christian Rhetoric and 2 Thessalonians*, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series*, vol. 30, ed. David Hill (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 92.

⁵⁰ Hughes, *Early Christian Rhetoric and 2 Thessalonians*, 93.

⁵¹ Richard, *First and Second Thessalonians*, 28.

time scenario, that the important final stages of the process have not yet begun to unfold."⁵²

Menken, arguing along a similar line, agrees that the writer was writing against the proponents of realized eschatology, who were suffering from persecution.⁵³ As for the location and date, Menken states, "How intense or widespread this persecution was, or who the persecutors were, does not become clear from the text. Asia Minor anyhow meets the condition of an area where persecution took place: we know that Christians were persecuted there towards the end of the reign of Domitian (81-96 CE). However, small-scale persecutions may have occurred at various times and at various places (see, e.g., 1 Thess. 2:14-16)."⁵⁴

Marxsen suggests that the Thessalonian believers were incorrectly using 1 Thessalonians as their support for their enthusiasm. So, the Paulinist wrote 2 Thessalonians some time after 70 AD to combat their erroneous view by implicitly discrediting 1 Thessalonians (2 Thess. 2:2).⁵⁵ Marxsen also suggests that when the recipients read 2 Thessalonians 3:17, they would have wanted to compare it with 1 Thessalonians, which to them could have been a forged letter due to their awareness of the warning of 2 Thessalonians 2:2.⁵⁶ If they still had the original first letter in their possession, this first letter which was without Paul's signature would have caused it to lose its authority. If they did not have the original, then they would still have held 1 Thessalonians in suspicion, since there was no way to prove that the

⁵² Richard, *First and Second Thessalonians*, 28.

⁵³ Menken, *2 Thessalonians*, 64.

⁵⁴ Menken, *2 Thessalonians*, 64-65.

⁵⁵ Marxsen, *Der zweite Thessalonicherbrief*, 34-35.

⁵⁶ Marxsen, *Der zweite Thessalonicherbrief*, 33.

first letter was genuinely from Paul. Whether they still had the original first letter or not, the Paulinist was assured that by his rhetorical tactic, 2 Thessalonians would have taken over the authority of 1 Thessalonians.

Giblin, in his revised view, thinks that the letter was written in the late eighties or later, when 1 Thessalonians had become sufficiently known. Giblin suggests that the writer had intended to "stabilize the community's faith as based on apostolic tradition which they already know.... At the same time, as in 2 Thess 1:5, the present test or trial of their faith contains an advance indication to the Thessalonians of the coming day of reward or requital (2 Thess 1:5)."⁵⁷

Three common elements can be deduced from the above arguments: (1) the writer was writing against the teaching of realized eschatology; (2) the community was under persecution; and (3) the writer was at least twenty years removed from the first letter. As far as the first two points are concerned, most scholars are in agreement with one another. The third point is problematic. If, for a moment, we assume that the letter was written by a Paulinist some time after 70 AD, we would need to answer several questions that arise from such a suggestion. If the letter was directed to the Thessalonian congregation who were very familiar with the content of the first letter (since they had the original), would they not have immediately detected it as a forgery?

⁵⁷ Charles H. Giblin, "2 Thessalonians 2 Re-Read as Pseudepigraphal: A Revised Reaffirmation of *The Threat to Faith*," in *The Thessalonian Correspondence*, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium, vol. 87, ed. Raymond F. Collins (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1990), 461.

Would the Thessalonians not have been suspicious of a letter written to them but whose delivery was delayed for more than forty years, especially when the letter itself raises issues about letter writing? Would they not, on the basis of 3:17, have compared the signatures of the two letters, or why must we assume that the original copy of 1 Thessalonians was no longer available? How would the pseudonymous letter actually have been delivered to the Thessalonians?... And how could a letter addressed to the Thessalonians have been in circulation elsewhere before being delivered to its addressees?⁵⁸

Furthermore, Marxsen's hypothesis does not have a high view of the level of intelligence of the ancient readers. There is no reason to suppose that 1 Thessalonians was the first letter Paul wrote (for those who hold to the priority of Galatians, 1 Thessalonians was Paul's second canonical letter). And it is incorrect to assume that Paul had not been habitually signing his letters just because he did not mention it in some of his other letters. This is not to say that there were no pseudonymous letters in antiquity. However, it is entirely a different issue to suggest that the first Christian community could not have detected a letter's authenticity.

One may argue in turn that pseudonymity was "a commonly accepted practice" in the first century.⁵⁹ Therefore, 2 Thessalonians might have been accepted by the Christian community as Paulinistic (i.e. they knew for a fact that it was not written by Paul but they still went ahead to accept it based on its value). However, we do know for a fact that the first-century church leaders did not condone this

⁵⁸ Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, 374.

⁵⁹ Holland, "A Letter Supposedly from Us'," 396-97; Menken, *2 Thessalonians*, 41.

kind of pseudonymity.⁶⁰ Hughes himself states clearly, "Not only does this letter claim to be an authentic Pauline letter (2 Thess. 1:1; 3:17), the letter also purports to identify its own teaching with that of the historical Paul when he was in Thessalonika founding the Thessalonian congregation (2 Thess. 2:5, 15)."⁶¹ This means that the author had intended for the readers to believe that it had been written by Paul. Furthermore, by disclosing itself as non-Pauline, the letter would have lost the very authority it purported to have had in the name of Paul.

IV. Conclusion

In this writer's opinion, the strongest argument presented by those who argue that 2 Thessalonians is pseudonymous is the apparent difference in eschatology. Hughes' statement sums it up well: "Thus, if the literary similarities between the two epistles are to be explained by Paul's having written both of them, 2 Thessalonians rather soon after 1 Thessalonians (thus effectively throwing literary dependence out of court), the remarkable theological differences – at both the theoretical and practical levels – become all the more difficult to explain."⁶² Yet, as this writer has attempted to show, the argument

⁶⁰ In Carson's article, he cites several writers in antiquity who had rejected pseudepigraphy as legitimate, e.g. Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 6.12.3; Cyril of Jerusalem *Catechesis* 4.36. D. A. Carson, "Pseudonymity and Pseudepigraphy," in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 863. On the other hand, Dunn suggests that pseudepigraphy was accepted by ancient church authorities. However, he cannot provide any supporting evidence. J. D. G. Dunn, "Pseudepigraphy," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997), 977-84.

⁶¹ Hughes, *Early Christian Rhetoric and 2 Thessalonians*, 92.

⁶² Hughes, *Early Christian Rhetoric and 2 Thessalonians*, 83.

for pseudonymity based on theological differences relies on an unsatisfactory reconstruction of a plausible situation. And as this writer has also argued above, the proposed reconstruction has created serious difficulties. Until scholars can provide an alternative situation, their argument for the pseudonymity of 2 Thessalonians is not better than the argument for the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians.

Therefore, for those who hesitate to affirm Pauline authorship for 2 Thessalonians, they will have to take this letter into consideration when discussing issues such as Paul's view on eschatology and politics. At the very minimum, they will need to reassess how the inclusion of this letter might have changed their view on Paul.

ABSTRACT

Since the late eighteenth century, scholars have questioned the adequacy of the historical situation reconstructed for understanding the relationship between 1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians if both were written by Paul. Hypotheses that purportedly prove the pseudonymity of 2 Thessalonians have been proposed and can be grouped into: (1) un-Pauline characteristics; (2) literary dependency; (3) theological discrepancy; and (4) stylistic differences. Un-Pauline characteristics are subjective and fail to convince. Literary dependency argues certain passages show that 2 Thessalonians had 1 Thessalonians as their sources. However, similar phrases are also found in other undisputed Pauline letters such as 1 Corinthians 1:4. Furthermore, if both letters were written within very short interval, then it is possible that Paul still remembered what he had written in the first letter. Although it is true that a possible reconstruction of historical situation is still requesting apparent theological differences, the tension between the certainty of the pending Parousia and the uncertainty of timing is not something unusual, as can be seen in the little apocalypse in Mark 13. Stylistic differences can be explained adequately by Paul's use of different amanuenses (cf. Rom. 16:22). When one examines further the hypothetical situations as reconstructed based on pseudonymity of 2 Thessalonians, one finds that the hypotheses have to assume certain naivety on the part of the recipients. Therefore, until a more plausible historical situation can be suggested, the arguments for the pseudonymity of 2 Thessalonians are not better than those that assume genuine Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians.

撮 要

自18世紀末開始，學者便質疑保羅作為帖撒羅尼迦前後書作者所重建的歷史語境。反對他是帖撒羅尼迦後書作者的理論可綜合為以下數項：(1) 非保羅思維；(2) 文體仿照；(3) 神學差別；及(4) 風格差異。非保羅思維的論點過於主觀，且缺說服力。文體仿照則忽略了其他保羅書信也有同樣現象；再者，帖撒羅尼迦前後書的完成時間相隔甚短，故同一作者很有可能記得曾寫過的內容。雖然目前所認知的歷史語境有待修改，但是對於基督再來的緊迫性和其時間的未知性，亦可見於馬可福音十三章中有關耶穌的終末言論。另外，風格差異也可能是保羅選用不同的代筆人所造成的問題（如羅十六22）。以帖撒羅尼迦後書為冒名書信作出發點所重建的歷史語境，亦須假設收信的教會群體相當無知。因此，這理論除非能提供一個較完整的歷史語境，以支持帖撒羅尼迦後書不是保羅所寫的，否則其理據並不強於支持保羅為作者的看法。