

The Appearing of the Lord

1 Thessalonians



The Forum Terrace Church of Christ

Adult Bible Class Sunday Morning

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A Workbook By Daniel R. Vess

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Introduction to 1 Thessalonians

1 Thessalonians 1:1a

1 Thess. 1:1a Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians...

City of Thessalonica

Few of the ancient cities that played a major role in the New Testament continued to exist throughout history and flourish. Today, Thessalonica is known as Solonica and is the second largest city on Macedonia with a population of over 320,000.

Before the time of Alexander the Great the town which was built on fertile grounds was known as Therma being named for the hot springs in the area. Later Cassander, one of Alexander's generals, married the conqueror's half sister, Thessaloniki. The city was rebuilt and named after her in 316 BC.

In 168 BC at the Battle of Pydna, Aemilius Paullus defeated Perseus, the Macedonian king. The Romans divided up Macedonia into four districts. In 146 BC Thessalonica became the Roman capital of the province of Macedonia. During the Roman civil "war with Brutus and Cassius Thessalonica sided with Antony and Octavian, as a result, Antony granted Thessalonica the honor of being a 'free city,' which meant exemption from taxation to Rome, freedom to mint coins, liberty to govern according to ancient custom, and exclusion of Roman troops garrisoned within the city walls" (Burge 1414).

In the time of Paul's second missionary journey Thessalonica was the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia with close to two hundred thousand people. The population was sustained by the rich and well-watered plain surrounding the city. It was the largest city in the province with a very important seaport located on the Thermaic Gulf which is part of the Aegean Sea.

The citizens of Thessalonica enjoy a high level of prosperity as the abundant amount of coinage found in the area suggests. The ability of some of the members of the church their to stop working, the fact that it consisted of "*leading women,*" and Jason was a householder able to pay a bond indicates that the church there was also well off. Its wealth was due in part to it being located on two commercial crossroads. The Egnatian Way was a great road built by the Romans between 146-120 BC. It ran for over five hundred miles to connect the Adriatic Sea with the Aegean Sea. The port of Thessalonica on the Aegean sea was second no none in the area.

The city also enjoyed great political advantages. It was the seat of the Roman governor of Macedonia. It was allowed self-government by half a dozen men called "politarchs." It had the favor of the Roman emperors for its long time support during civil wars.

Although Thessalonica is now inhabited by a large modern city, important archaeological sites and items have been uncovered. Archeologists have discovered a Roman wall, a Roman forum from the first-century, an agora from the Hellenist period, a hippodrome, and part of the arch of Galerius commemorating the victory of the Romans over the Persians.

Archeologists have also discovered inscriptions which give proof of a strong Jewish presence during the Roman period. Acts 17:1 indicates that there was a well-established synagogue. By the time the Nazi Germany captured the city in 1941 it has a Jewish population of about sixty thousand. Most of the Jews were deported and executed during the Holocaust. This permitted Paul a launching point for the proclamation of the Gospel in the city. William Barclay wrote, "the coming of Christianity to Thessalonica was crucial in the making of it into a world religion" (Barclay 181). The pagan religions were numerous. The patron god of the city was Cabirus whose story has some parallel characteristics to that of Jesus and may have helped in the initial acceptance of the Gospel by the Gentiles. The city

also practiced a time of syncretism by merging the various beliefs and the multitude of pagan gods and goddesses. Not only did they have the traditional Greek cults being in site of Mount Olympus, but also those of the Egyptians gods and the Emperor worship to honor both caesars Juilius and Augustus.

Historical Background to the Epistle

The historical background to the church established at Thessalonica can be found in Acts 17:1-10. At Troas Paul had a vision one night of a Macedonian man imploring him to come over and preach the Gospel (Acts 16:6-10). Paul and company left for Philippi where Paul and Silas were beaten and imprisoned for preaching the Gospel. Yet a sound congregation was established. Departing from Philippi and leaving Luke behind they passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia. on their way to Thessalonica.

After arriving in the city as Paul's *"custom was, (he) went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures"* (Acts 17:2). According to Paul the Gospel was *"first to the Jew, and then to the Gentile"* (Rom. 1:16). This was the logical order. If he went to the Gentiles first, he would have estranged the Jews. By winning some of the Gentiles who worshiped with the Jews at the synagogue he would have had smoother in-roads into the pagan community.

Paul's preaching consisted of declaring Christ's cruel death on the cross and his subsequent resurrection to prove, *"this Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ"* (Acts 17:3). The outcome of his preaching was *"some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas"* (Acts 17:4).

It was not long before some negative opposition arose from the Jews. These "Jews" are not to be confused with those who were persuaded to obey the Gospel. They were motivated by their enviousness over Paul's success with the Gentiles while at the same time the synagogue was losing members. So these Jews *"took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people"* (Acts 17:5). Not finding Paul and Silas they took their host, Jason, before the *"rulers of the city."* The term "ruler" is from the Greek term *politarchas* which is transliterated in English as "politarches" (Acts 17:6)

For many years critics of the Bible claimed that the writer of Acts invented this term. No where in history and archeology was their evidence to substantiate the existence of this form of leadership. Proof has been found from the Vardar Gate from the first century. The Archaeological Study Bible states *"it was torn down in 1867, but an inscription from the arch is now on display in the British Museum. It mentions officials called politarches, a Greek word Luke used to designed the Thessalonian officials (Acts 17:6). Since no previous usage of this word had been found in Greek literature, scholar had once wondered whether Luke's usage of the term was an error" (1710).*

Bringing the Christians before the politarches the Jews leveled the charge *"these who have turned the world upside down have come here too. Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king—Jesus"* (Acts 17:6b,7). Since Paul preached the kingdom of God and the Christ or Messiah who was made to sit upon the throne of David, one can see how the Jews would use this against the Christians. Suetonius called the Christians *"a class of people of a new and damaging superstition"* (Life of Nero 16:2). According to Tacitus they were *"hated for their vices, which the multitude calls' Christians'"* (Annals 15.44). Michael W. Holmes in *The NIV Application Commentary* says, *"a perceived attack on the cult of the emperor was viewed as a serous threat to the city's economic and political well-being. ...was virtually to attack the city itself. In such an environment, to preach Christianity was tantamount to treason"* (Holmes 19).

The issue of the civil unrest and the threat of insurrection against Rome was resolved by obligating Jason to give an security to assure this new sect would not cause any further trouble (Acts 17:8,9). This was not the end of the persecution the saints at Thessalonica would have to endure (1 Thess. 2:14).

Paul and Silas avoided capture by the mob, because the brethren has sent them away to Berea

by night (Acts 17:10). A first verse four would seem to be indicating Paul has been in Thessalonica for only a month since it only mentions “*three Sabbaths*” of preaching in the synagogue. However, it is more likely that he was there for a few months. He had been there long enough to work at his trade to provide for his own needs and be an example to the brethren there. How long he stayed in Jason’s home is not mentioned. It is likely that the Philippian church sent assistance to Paul while he was working in Thessalonica (Phil. 4:15-16).

After a couple days journey Paul and Silas would have arrived at Berea which is fifty miles west of Thessalonica. Paul received a welcoming reception from his fellow Jews in Berea. “*These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men*” (Acts 17:11,12).

Jews from Thessalonica, however, followed Paul and stirred up trouble there was well. So the brethren sent Paul to Athens three hundred miles to the south by way of the sea, “*but both Silas and Timothy remained there*” (Acts 17:14b).

Paul arrived in Athens to minister by himself. He had left a “*command for Silas and Timothy to come to him with all speed*” (Acts 17:15b). Apparently 1 Thessalonians 3:1,2 indicates that these two did join Paul at Athens and Timothy was sent back to Thessalonica to check up on the progress of the church there. Perhaps Silas at this time was sent back to the church a Philippi.

After a mediocre reception at Athens “*Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth*” (Acts 18:1). Here he labored for about eighteen months (Acts 18:11). Sometime during his stay at Corinth Timothy and Silas rejoined Paul. From Timothy Paul received a glowing report concerning the Thessalonians “*faith and love*” and how they maintained their faith (1 Thess. 3:6,7). It would have been at this time Paul wrote his first letter to the Thessalonians. Timothy would have taken the letter and later returned with more news from the brethren there. Thus, Paul may have written a second letter to them a few months after the first. Timothy may again have been the “*mailman*” who delivered another inspired message from the apostle of Jesus Christ. In so doing Timothy would have been a trip from Thessalonica to Athens and back then to Corinth and back to Thessalonica twice.

Date and Origin of the Epistle

An early date of 43 AD has been suggested by some for Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians. This is based on the belief that the expulsion of the Jews by Calusdius mentioned in Acts 18:2 was in that year. However, the date is uncertain and there may have been more than one expulsion.

Although the Thessalonians are two of the earliest inspired writings of the New Testament, Galatians was most likely the first written. It was penned by Paul before the Jerusalem Council. The date of these letters can be accurately ascertained from the evidence from within the Bible and the extra biblical evidence. Paul arrived in Corinth while Claudius was emperor of Rome (AD 41-54). According to the Delphic inscription Claudius made Gallio proconsul of Achaia. He took his post on July 1 of AD 51 for just one year. Paul was brought before the judgment seat to face Gallio concerning the accusations of the Jews (Acts 18:12-17). Therefore, Paul would have written both letters from Corinth between late AD 50 up to early AD 52.

Authorship of the Epistle

According to the *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, “the opening section of letters in the ancient world follows a fixed pattern consisting of three elements: the sender, the recipient, and the greeting” (Arnold 410). The major difference between these letters and others is in neither of the Thessalonian epistle does Paul call himself an apostle. The other letter where he did not mention his apostolic appointment by Christ is Philippians. Perhaps the relationship between Paul and these congregations did not require any proof as to which Paul was writing or the need for him to make a defense of his authority. False brethren may have not yet begun to challenge his apostleship.

Paul not only addresses the letter coming from himself but includes Silvanus and Timothy. Silvanus was the Greek name for the Greek name Silas. Whereas Luke, a Greek, calls this co-worker of Paul “Silas” throughout the book of Acts, both Paul and Peter call him Silvanus. Silas was not with Paul on his later journeys, but appears to have become a messenger for the apostle Peter (1 Pet. 1:1; 5:12).

Timothy was naturally mentioned along with Silvanus. After all, they were both instrumental in the establishment and development of the congregation at Thessalonica. Timothy had been picked up early in the second missionary by Paul at Lystra (Acts 16:1-3). He was well spoken of by the believers there. His father was a Greek and his mother Jewish. So Paul circumcised him so he could join the apostle when he worked among the Jews in the synagogues. Although it was a spiritual “son” to Paul (Phil. 2:20; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2) it is very unlike Paul actually baptized him. He was taught well by his mother, Eunice and his grand mother, Lois. He was very important in the ministry of Paul to the very end. He is named in six of his letters as a co-worker.

Since this letter is written in the first-person plural instead of the singular, some believe that Silvanus and Timothy were co-authors. Yet Paul does say that this epistle was written by him (1:1; 2:18). Even though Silvanus and Timothy are mentioned again with Paul in the second epistle to the Thessalonians, Paul says he has written it with his own hand (2 Th. 3:17). Perhaps this was to point out that the letter could not be a fraud. Although it would not have detracted for these inspired letters if Silvanus and Titus had offered suggestions or comments. After all, they were prophets. The fact that the first-person plural verbs dominate this letter, there are three exceptions (2:18; 3:5; 5:27). These “we” versus “I” passages may reflect that Paul was merely referencing his co-workers. Luke uses “we” not to show that Paul and others helped him write Acts, but to show where he was a co-worker with the others.

Many of the early Christians writers have long accepted the authenticity of these Pauline epistles. In their writings Ignatius, the Shepherd of Hermas, Polycarp, Tertullian, Eusebius, and Justin all cite the Thessalonians letters as the work of the apostle Paul.

Recipients of the Epistle

The letter is addressed “to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess. 1:1b). The Greek term *ekklesia* for “church” is not a distinctively holy word. It is used for any type of group who have been called out into a gathering. The mob at Ephesus would be referred to as an *ekklesia* (Acts 19:32,39). The term was at times used to refer to the gathering of those who assembled at the Jewish synagogues. This gathering is separated and unique from a public mob and Jews meeting in a building. They are the local group of believers at Thessalonica who have a relation with both the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

When Paul and others initially founded the “church of the Thessalonians” they were composed of three groups: Jews, devout Greeks, and chief women. Perhaps some have suggested, this local congregation may have consisted of mostly Gentiles. Neither of the letters to the Thessalonians quotes from the Old Testament. They are described as those who have turned “from idols.”

Purpose of the Epistle

The epistles of the Thessalonians are perhaps the most practical of all Paul’s letters. The first one in particular is very encouraging and displays a friendly tone throughout. For this reason some refer to this as “the epistle of friendship.” Good news of their continued and well known faith prompted Paul to write to them. Yet there were some issues that Paul needed to address and behaviors that needed to be encouraged.

- **Showing Gratitude**

All of Paul letters to the churches included a prayer or expression of thanksgiving, except

Galatians. 1 Thessalonians is unusual in that it has three affirmations of gratitude in the first three chapters (1:2-5; 2:13; 3:9-13). One thing he was clearly thankful for was their continued faith and love.

- **Saluting Spiritual Growth**

The first epistle to the church at Thessalonica is filled with positive praises. They have spread their example of faith and the Word to many (1:7-8). Concerning their suffering they “imitate” the churches of Judea, the apostles, and the Lord (2:14-16). They were comforted concerning their faith (3:7). He commends them for their love for one another: *“concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another”* (4:9). Paul encouraged by how well they have progressed in their growth and is confident in them and motivates them to keep up the good work.

- **Sincere Motives of Paul**

After Paul expresses thanksgiving for their faith and remembrance of him, he deals with defending his reasons for leave so suddenly and not returning (2:1f). Was his departure motivated by his self-seeking greed or was it simple cowardice? “Religious charlatans and frauds were a dime a dozen in the ancient world. And the way Paul and Silas slipped out of town in the middle of the night would have made it only too easy to pigeonhole them as just one more pair of rip-off artists out to scam people. From here it was only a short step to the conclusion that their message was not more truthful than they were, and thus the people might reject it along with them” (Holmes 22).

Paul defends himself and his companions against the idea that they were preaching just for what they could get out of the brethren. They called to their remembrance *“our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you”* (2:9) *“nor did we eat anyone’s bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you”* (2 Th. 3:8). Their motives were sincere in that they wanted to preach and encourage them.

Paul had a strong desire to return to them after being *“taken away”* from them (2:17), but *“Satan hindered”* them (2:18). Since Paul could not return he sent Timothy *“to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith”* (3:2b). In the meanwhile Paul was *“night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith”* (3:10). Paul’s motives were for love of the brethren and God and not love of money.

- **Suffering Persecution**

Paul also wrote this letter to encourage the Thessalonian saints in face of much suffering through persecution (1:6; 2:1,2; 14-17; 3:3-8). This may have been brought on by the Jews leaving the synagogues and following Paul or when the Gentiles *“turned... from idols to serve the living and true God”* (1:9). The world is not very tolerant of radical changes in the lifestyle of its friends. Paul writes them so *“that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this”* (3:3).

- **Sexual Purity**

Many of the Gentile converts came from the hedonistic world view. Christianity represented an alternative lifestyle choice which required sexual purity. Fornication was a common and accepted behavior in marriage even with the same sex. Pagan religions not only encouraged it but through temple prostitutes provided for it as a means of worship. God’s will for these new converts was that they *“should abstain from sexual immorality”* (4:3b).

- **Second Coming**

As far as the structure of this letter it naturally falls into two sections: narrative in chapter one through three and in chapters four and five Paul covers several specific exhortations. The one that runs throughout the letter is the “coming” or “appearing” of the Lord. The Second Coming is mentioned in every chapter by Paul (1:3,9,10; 2:19,20; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:1-11,23). Paul had already spoke to them of this doctrine. Some of their members had died and now they were wondering whether or not these dead believers had missed out of the appearing of Christ. Paul comforts them with the fact the dead in Christ will raise first and then they all will meet the Lord in the air and always be with Him (4:13-18). Next, Paul reminds them not to focus on when Christ will appear but whether they will be ready when He does appear (5:1-11). In His next letter to the church he deals with the false doctrine that *“the day of the Lord*

has already come" (2 Th. 2:2).

- **Sundry Exhortations**

He calls upon them to respect those in leadership (5:12,13); fulfill their duties to various members of the congregation (5:14,15); maintain proper attitude and communication with God (5:16-18); and respect the truth (19-22).

Questions:

True/False

1. T F Thessalonica was named after Alexander the Great's half-sister.
2. T F The city of Thessalonica was large but was of very little significance politically and commercially.
3. T F Paul and his co-workers were of the habit of beginning their preaching in a new city at the local synagogue.
4. T F The Jews attack the house of Jason and brought Paul, Silas, and Timothy before the city rulers.
5. T F Paul sent Timothy from Athens to Thessalonica to check up on the brethren.

Multiple Choice

6. Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians while he was working in
 - a. Berea
 - b. Corinth
 - c. Athens
 - d. Philippi
 - e. Macedonia
7. The letters of 1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians were written around
 - a. AD 47
 - b. AD 50-52
 - c. AD 68-70
 - d. 51 BC
 - e. AD90/91

Matching

8. Draw a line to match the individual with who they were in relation to Paul
 - a. Polycarp searched scriptures daily
 - b. Timothy proconsul of Achaia.
 - c. Silvanus rulers of the city
 - d. Gallio Accepted Paul's epistles as inspired
 - e. Berea Silas
 - f. politarches Paul "son" and co-worker

9. Draw a line to match the purposes of the epistle:

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| a. | Showing Gratitude | attacked Jason's house |
| b. | Suffering Persecution | mentioned in every chapter |
| c. | Sincere Motives | mentioned three times |
| d. | Sexual Purity | not for love of money |
| e. | Second Coming | abstinence |

An Exceptional Church

1 Thessalonians 1:1b-10

1b To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 2 We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, 3 remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father, 4 knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God. 5 For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake. 6 And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. 8 For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything. 9 For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 10 and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

All the basic ingredients that Christ would want in a young congregation can be found in the church at Thessalonica. It contains no reference to the number of members. It does not tell us about their goals, kind of sermons, programs, number of children, etc. Yet, Paul's epistle tells us that they were off to a great start.

- **An Exalted Church**

In verse one Paul gives a dual location of the congregation: "*To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*" (1:1b). First, it is the church or "called out" congregation located in the city of Thessalonica. This is the physical location of the local believers who make up the church which met in that city. The Greek word for "church" is *ekklesia*. It was used to describe an assembly called out of their homes into a public gathering. This term was used by both the Greeks and the Jews. Sometimes the spiritual reference is to the church as a whole. Here the term is used to reference a local assembly at a given location. Next, the apostle shows the spiritual location of the church is in God. Notice that it is in both the Father and the Son. This is why the church was referred to as the "church of God" and "church of Christ." Jesus is called Lord. This recognizes His authority in the church (Eph. 1:22,23). He is the uncontested Head of the church whether it be the local congregation at Thessalonica or the church universal.

- **An Eulogized Church**

Next Paul sends the church his greetings: "*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*" (1:1c). Paul combines the common Hebrew greeting "peace" or shalom with a variation of the Greek greeting. Instead of using the Greek word *chairein* meaning "greeting," he used *charis* which is "grace." The saints which made up the church at Thessalonica had this blessed relationship in God and Christ through divine unmerited favor. Through God's grace they were forgiven of the enmity which had existed between them. Now through Christ they are reconciled into a peaceful relationship. This peace is an outcome of God's grace. The Greek word for "peace" is *eirene*. It represents the wish of Paul that they have health both spiritually and physically with safety and blessings. It is not a wish for them to be free from conflict but to have an inner calm even if the storms about them

are raging.

These blessings come from both God the Father and the Son. Paul makes it very clear concerning the equality of both in relation to the church and the origin of grace and peace. This three-fold description of the Son of God identified the various roles He has played in the scheme of redemption. As “*Lord*” He reigns as ruler over His dominion. The meaning of the name “*Jesus*” is “*savior*.” He is the Savior of the church (Eph. 5:23). He is the fulfillment of all the Old Testament passages about the coming Messiah and is thus called the “*Christ*.”

Paul further expresses appreciation for the congregation: “*We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers*” (1:2). Notice the twofold request implied by this statement. Paul not only expresses thanks to God for them, he also prays to God about them. This was not a one time event in the life of Paul but part of his continual practice of “*always*” praying for and about them. “*We*” shows that Timothy and Silas also were praying on their behalf.

- **An Energetic Church**

Part of the prayer of thanks to God concerning the Thessalonians is “*remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father*” (1:3). Paul joined faith, hope, and love as a triumphant triad of virtues in the Christian life. He often used this trilogy of virtues in his letters (Rom. 5:1-5; 1 Cor. 13:13; Gal. 5:5,6; Eph. 4:2-5; Col. 1:4,5; 1 Thess. 5:8) and other New Testament writers have done the same (Heb. 6:10-12; 1 Pet. 1:3-8, 21,22).

The three terms “*work*,” “*labor*,” and “*patience*” all demonstrate the effort or energy they were exerting in their growing relationship with the God. God has done His part through grace. Now Paul tells of the responsibility they are fulfilling. Weaver noted “*work proceeds from faith, labor proceeds from love, and endurance proceeds from hope*” (48).

The term for “*work*” is *ergou* which is the idea of vocation instead of toiling at a job. Christians have a vocation or job. They are to have a working faith. The saints do not merely believe in some facts about God and Christ, but they are to live out that belief in day to day life.

On the other hand, “*love*” does require toil and effort. “*Labor*” is from “the Greek word *kopos*, which denotes an arduous, wearying kind of toil, done to the point of exhaustion” (MacArthur 17). This love is not the emotional love of mere friendship or brotherly love, but *agape* love. It is the kind of love Christ demonstrated for us with His toil upon the earth which resulted in His death on the cross (Rom. 5:6-8). It is the same love shown toward our enemies (Matt. 5:44f). This love acts whether or not it feels like acting. It acts in the best interests of the person. *Agape* is not dependent upon reciprocation. A very irate husband said during marriage counseling, “I’m sick and tired of giving, giving, giving, and getting nothing in return.”

The Greek term for “*patience*” is *hupomone* and can be translated steadfastness or endurance. It is the sustaining of our hope. The concept of hope is not mere desire but desire plus expectation. This is not a passive despair in regard to the future. It is not the hope of the lazy college student who bemoans: “I hope I can ace this chemistry final so I can pass the course.” Instead, it is the energetic stick-to-it mentality that the future blessings are going to be theirs.

All this energetic effort in Christ is seen by the Father. Our toil is not going to be unnoticed. The saints must maintain their job of a working faith, work hard at loving God and others, and stand firm in the hope of reward when Christ returns.

- **An Elect Church**

Paul reminds the Thessalonian church “*knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God*” (1:4). This is not the same “*election*” taught in the doctrine of Calvinism. It says that God determined which specific individuals would be saved in Christ before the world was ever created. Those who were not so blessed by God to be the elect are condemned as the reprobate chosen from the beginning of time for damnation.

The election is determined on the basis of those who respond to the call of the Gospel by believing in Christ. Believers are chosen by God. “*But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name*” (John 1:12). Paul remembered

when they were made brethren beloved by God who choose them and added them to the church as the were being saved (Acts 2:47).

- **An Embracing Church**

Paul continues his remembrance of their election by God through the means of their embracing the Gospel they preached to them: *“For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake”* (1:5). Paul not only preached the Gospel, but it came to them in power. Since this power is coupled with the Holy Spirit it may be referring to the miracles which often accompanied the proclaiming of God’s Word. Throughout his ministry he performed various miracles to confirm that he was speaking forth the very Word from God. The Gospel comes not only *“in word,” “in power,” “in the Holy Spirit”* but also *“in much assurance.”* This could mean several things but in light of the general context of this epistle, Paul is perhaps referring to the example set forth by him and his co-laborers in the Gospel. They did not just preach and do miracles, these preachers of the Word lived it out in their lives. They were not the type of men who came in as fast-talking, here one day and gone the next religious hucksters.

- **An Emulating Church**

The result of embracing the Gospel preached, confirmed, and assured by Paul was that the Thessalonian saints *“became followers of us and of the Lord”* (1:6a). The word translated *“followers”* is *mimetes*, from which the English word “mimic” is derived. The Thessalonian Christians were not just talkers; they were true imitators. They did not merely talk about their experience with the Gospel, but something to be emulated when observing the conduct of Paul, Silas, and Timothy.

- **An Enduring Church**

Not only was Paul aware of them embracing His message and emulating his faith, but they also had to endure suffering as a result: *“having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit”* (16b). It has well been said, “a faith that cannot be tested is a faith that cannot be trusted.” From its inception the church did not have it easy. When a mob sought for Paul and his fellow preachers they came to the house where they had been staying. *“But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, ‘These who have turned the world upside down have come here too’”* (Acts 17:6).

Joy is one of the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22,23). The Holy Spirit enables believers to endure persecution with joy. This is a peculiar coupling of suffering and joy. R. Leonard Small wrote, “joy is the standard that flies on the battlements of the heart when the King is in residence.” Suffering is part of the Gospel experience. Jesus suffered (John 15:18,20), Paul suffered with joy and singing (Acts 16:25; Col. 1:24), and Christians should not be surprised that they will endure persecution and trials (2 Tim. 2:13). However, they can rejoice in that they were counted worthy to suffer for the cause of Christ (Acts 5:41).

- **An Exemplary Church**

The result of their joy in suffering was that they *“became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe”* (1:7). *“Example”* is *tupos* from which comes the English term “type.” As the mark left by the striking of a hammer on the wood when you missed the nail. The impression left by a seal, a pattern, etc. This young church was leaving quite an impression on the saints throughout Greece. Thessalonica was the main city of Macedonia. Achaia is the region of Greece to the south of Macedonia which included the cities of Athens and Corinth. Perhaps Paul was writing from Corinth at this time.

- **An Evangelistic Church**

Through the example of the Thessalonian Christians they became a soul-winning congregation. *“For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything”* (1:8). The word for *“sounded forth”* is *exechetai*, from which we get the English word “echo.” The verb actually means “to sound as a trumpet.” When it came to the Gospel, the Thessalonians believed it, lived it, and shared it. They were both “receivers” and “transmitters.” Trumpeters of the Word in every place. So effective was their evangelism that Paul did not need to preach. This of course is a hyperbole to demonstrate their effectiveness of sharing the Gospel in Greece. *“For they themselves declare*

concerning us what manner of entry we had to you” (1:9a). A recent survey of church growth indicated that seventy to eighty percent of a church’s growth is the result of friends sharing with friends and relatives with relatives.

- **An Exchanging Church**

Not only was the Gospel and the work of Paul being trumpeted forth to others, but the news of the repentance of the Thessalonians was spreading. “*And how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God*” (1:9b). Thessalonica was only fifty miles from Mount Olympus. It was supposedly the residence of the Greek gods. The turning of these pagans to the true God would have been front page news. Apparently, the Gospel is powerful enough to bring about this great transformation.

Idolatry is still a major feature of American culture. A Chinese man who visited here and was asked upon his return to China whether Americans worshiped idols. “Yes, they do,” he reported. “They have three of them. In the winter they worship a fat man in a red suit. In the spring they worship a rabbit. And in the fall they sacrifice a turkey!” Many worship money and others sex. The greatest god of all is “self.”

These Christians did not just turn away from idols but to the “*living God*.” God is often called “*the living God*” in contrast with idols, which have no life at all. Our God is not a fake or counterfeit. Christians are “*children of the living God*” (Rom. 9:26). Their bodies are the “*temples of the living God*” (2 Cor. 6:16). The church is “the church of the living God” (1 Tim. 3:15).

- **An Expectant Church**

Throughout this epistle Paul emphasized Christ’s Second Coming. “*And to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come*” (1:10). The Thessalonians were turning from Idols to serving God and waiting for Christ’s return. To “*wait*” means “to await someone with patience and confidence, expectantly.” The Second Coming is the object of their hope.

God is a just God who will punish the disobedient. Just as the return of Christ is strong motivation for the saints to turn, serve, and wait so is the wrath of God (Jn. 3:36; Rom. 1:18; 9:22; Eph. 5:6; Col. 3:5,6; 2 Th. 1:6-10; Rev. 11:18; 14:19; 19:15,16). Knowing that Christ is coming gives me a sense of urgency about sharing the good news with others (2 Cor. 5:11).

We should turn from sin to God because Christ is coming to judge the earth. We should be fervent in our service because we have little time before Christ returns. We should be waiting for Christ to return and always be ready because we don’t know when He will come.

Questions:

True/False

1. T F The term church or “called out” is used by the Apostle Paul to refer to an assembly of local believers in a given location (Thessalonica).
2. T F Being saved by God’s grace implies we can have peace from God the Father without being in Jesus Christ.
3. T F God has done his part through grace; therefore, the virtues of faith, hope, and love are not really crucial and noteworthy in a Christian’s life.
4. T F The doctrine of Calvinism teaches election is determined on the basis of those who choose to respond to the call of the Gospel by believing in Christ.
5. T F The church in Thessalonica knew what kind of men Paul and his co-workers were when they were among them.
6. T F The example of Paul and his co-workers was worth mimicking.

7. T F The church in Thessalonica was full of joy because they had little affliction.
8. T F The example of the Thessalonian church was limited to Christians within their city.
9. T F Both the word of the Lord and the church's faith toward God were evident beyond the regions of Greece.
10. T F Paul was thankful to see these new converts turn from idols, even though they were skeptical about the existence of a living God.
11. T F In one verse, we get a glimpse of Paul's teaching and the Thessalonian's conviction concerning the death, resurrection, and return of Jesus.

Matching

12. Draw a line to match what Paul remembered without ceasing in his prayers concerning the energetic efforts of the Thessalonian church:
- | | | |
|----|-------------|-------|
| a. | work of | love |
| b. | labor of | hope |
| c. | patience of | faith |

Multiple Choice

13. In relation to the Thessalonian's evangelistic influence, to what extent did the word of the Lord sound forth?
- Throughout the Macedonian region
 - Throughout the city of Thessalonica
 - Throughout the regions of Macedonia and Achaia
 - Throughout Macedonia and Achaia, and in every place

Application and Discussion

14. What lessons can local churches of Christ today learn from the first century church of Thessalonica?

Exceptional Preachers

1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

Thessalonica was a perfect place for roaming philosophers and false prophets of all shades to congregate new followers. They would come into two one of the major crossroads. After they would gain a following and fleece them of all the support and wealth they could, they would move on to the next city in search of new victims.

Paul and his cadre came into town and made a big splash by preaching a new doctrine while quickly gaining a following. When a mob formed these itinerant preachers disappeared one night during a time of persecution. On the surface they would look like every other fast-talking huckster that blew through town. Paul explains that they knew as well as God could witness, that this was not so. Paul and the others with him were like faithful stewards of the Gospel, caring mothers of the babes in Christ, and hard working fathers in support of the kingdom of God.

As Faithful Stewards of the Gospel

1 Thess. 2:1 For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain. 2 But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict. 3 For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit. 4 But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. 5 For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness—God is witness. 6 Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.

▶ **Successful**

Since Paul and his helpers had to leave Thessalonica so quickly their actions and motives could have been maligned by their enemies. Furthermore, the short time they had to work with the church may have seemed to be unsuccessful. Paul reminded them *“for you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain”* (2:1). *“In vain”* denotes something that is empty of significance or worth. They knew that Paul’s efforts among them was by no means a failure. He had taught the Gospel to several of them (Acts 17:4). The fact that they were such an exceptional young congregation proved the value of his ministry among them. Preachers need to work effectively to achieve spiritual growth among the members.

▶ **Endure Persecution**

No only did the saints at Thessalonica know that Paul’s labors were not in vain among them *“but even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know”* (2:2a). As Philippi Paul and Silas cast out a demon from a girl who was used by unscrupulous men to make money. They were captured by a mob, insulted, beaten, and imprisoned (Acts 16:20-23). They were treated dishonorably and illegally (16:37). Any materialist preacher looking for easy money would have given up this scheme at that point. Even at Thessalonica the brethren knew how Jason was treated. An exceptional preacher will put up with suffering and ill-treatment to bring the Gospel to the lost.

▶ **Bold Preaching in Conflict**

What every persecution or hardship Paul’s crew had to endure did not weaken or water down the

message. He said, *“we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict”* (2:2b). The term *“bold”* is more than speaking with a lack of fear, but preaching with full confidence in the message. Public speakers often fear rejection. This can alter the way one presents the Gospel. Good men naturally want to avoid creating conflict with their fellow man. At Corinth Paul preached *“in weakness and fear, and with much trembling”* (1 Cor. 2:3). He had *“conflicts on the outside, fears within”* (2 Cor. 7:5). Despite preaching *“with much contention,”* Paul struggled through the contest with his opponents. They may have run the apostle out of town but he will never run away from his duty to boldly proclaim the Gospel. Former Yale football coach, Herman Hickman, said, *“if they are chasing you out of town, get up front and make it look like a parade.”*

To preaching boldly is based on one’s attitude and reception of the message. Paul preached the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ the Son of God. He did not modify the Gospel. As a good steward entrusted with the Word, he boldly preached it.

▶ **Exhortations With...**

Paul uses three negatives in describing his manner of exhortation. *“For our exhortation did not come from deceit or uncleanness, nor was it in guile”* (2:3). First, there was no deceitfulness to be found in his exhortations. Paul spoke the truth in love. His message was not fraught with error. The acid test of any preacher’s teaching is whether it is true. Second, no uncleanness accompanied his preaching. The term implies a message motivated with impure connotations to procure sexual relations. Many pagan religions practices cultic prostitution as part of their devotion to a god or goddess. This was a main means of making money for the pagan temples. Many false prophets and philosophers came through taking advantage of women. Finally, Paul’s preaching was guileless. The term originally was used for fishing with bait. The Gospel is not baiting people or trapping them. Gospel preachers do not use trickery, gimmickery or clever sales pitches to sell their message and win converts. Today, many mega-churches employ the marketing strategies of big business to grow their congregations instead of the simple appeal of the Gospel.

▶ **Proved and Approved to Speak the Gospel**

Paul, Timothy, and Silas were all stewards of God. The Lord had placed the Gospel in their stewardship. *“But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel”* (2:4a). The word *“approved”* means *“tested.”* The word was used of testing a coin to see if it was genuine. Through the persecutions and hardships God knew that these preachers had past the test and could be trusted with carrying the good news to a lost world.

▶ **Seeks to Please God, Not People**

Paul’s motive was never to advance his own cause or reputation. This he affirms to the church at Thessalonica *“even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts”* (2:4b). Many modern preachers just like their ancient counterparts loved the praises of men. When the message is manipulated by ministers who use their mouths to tickle the ears of their audience they expose their spineless backs. Trying to please people is like the circus act where the man tries to keep all the plates spinning on a stick at the same time. Sooner or later there are all going to crash and break, if he does not cease his vain efforts. Men can be impossible to please. God knows when preachers are so motivated and then it is He who is not pleased. Herbert Swope said, *“I cannot give you the formula for success, but I can give you the formula for failure: which is: Try to please everybody.”*

▶ **Does Not Resort to Flattery**

When striving to please men poor preachers will resort to using flattery. Genuine praise is one thing but flattering is phony, selfishly motivated, and is in truth a form of lying. Paul and his companions did not utilize such tactics. *“For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know”* (2:5a). Flattery is a tool used by false teachers (2 Pet. 2:18) not preachers of the Gospel. Notice how Paul once again calls upon the recipients of this letter to be a witness to the fact they did not use flattering words.

▶ **Never Wearing the Cloak of Covetousness**

“Timothy must have smiled or laughed aloud when he reported to Paul: ‘They say you are a strolling sophist, living on the earnings of harder working men, and greedy of money’” (International ILL. Comm. of the NT). Paul made it clear: *“nor a cloak for covetousness God is witness”* (2:5b). Although

there is nothing wrong with Paul and others who preached the Gospel to live of the Gospel, he did not take advantage of this young congregation. For a witness Paul now calls upon God Himself. Only God can see into the hearts of men and see their true motives.

▶ **Does Not Seek Personal Reward from Others**

Paul was not a men-pleaser, greedy or a seeker of personal fame. *“Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ”* (2:6). Unlike many wandering philosophers Paul was not out to win a name for himself. He was not preaching the good news about Paul, Paul was preaching about the good news. Paul and others had the right to claim monetary assistance and recognition but they did not.

Notice the “we” refers to “apostles of Christ.” The term “apostles” was used in the New Testament in a general sense of one sent by another and in a specific way to refer to those men who had been chosen by Christ to represent him to the World. These men had to have seen the risen Lord and commissioned to the office of an apostle. Paul was one of the apostles. Yet, in a secondary and limited and general sense Timothy and Silas were also apostles commissioned to preach the Gospel. The term is clearly used for Barnabas (Acts 14:14) in this manner.

As a Gentle Mother to God’s Children

1 Thessalonians 2:7 But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. 8 So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.

• **Gentle**

Paul moves from describing their efforts to teach them to a new metaphor. They are not just good stewards of the Gospel, but they were like mothers in how they cared for the new converts at Thessalonica. *“But we were gentle among you”* (2:7a).

• **Nourishing**

The Apostle goes into greater detail. They were *“just as a nursing mother”* (2:7b). A nursing mother will get up and feed her baby at all hours of the night. She will deprive herself of sleep to make sure the babe is fed. Paul and others worked night and day supporting themselves and feeding them the Word. Just as the baby needs her milk to survive, so the novices need the milk of the Word to grow in Christ.

• **Cherishing**

These evangelist were like a mother who *“cherishes her own children”* (2:7c). The word used here is *thalpo* which involves an attitude and care couples with tender love. She will protect her child at all cost. It was this motherly attitude which allowed wise King Solomon to discover the real mother of the living child (1 Kings 3:16-28).

• **Affectionate**

“So, affectionately longing for you” (2:8a) describes a mother’s need to be near her child and misses them greatly when apart. Paul was apart for these children in the faith and he felt a need to be with them to care for them.

• **Giving of Self**

Paul explains to what length they would go to impart the Gospel and why they felt so strongly. *“We were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us”* 2:8b). What mother would not understand the willingness to sacrifice her life for her helpless child. Mothers know all too well the time and energy it takes to care for infants. A nursing mother just cannot up and leave her child to a stranger or to fend for itself.

As the Concerned Father For Citizens of God’s Kingdom

1 Thessalonians 2:9 For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that

we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God. 10 You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; 11 as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, 12 that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

■ **Work of a Father**

Paul appears to switch to a new thought or metaphor to illustrate the care he had for them. *“For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God”* (2:9). Like a father to them, Paul and his co-laborers were working around the clock to provide for their spiritual needs seeing to their own physical needs. A father does not burden his children for support, but provides for his children. Preachers and teachers cannot baptize the lost and leave the babe in Christ dripping wet on the steps of the baptistry. Paul often showed that he was an exemplary model of self-reliance unlike the wandering, greedy false prophets of the day.

The terms *“labor”* and *“toil”* are from the Greek words *kopos* and *mokthos* respectively. The first work means to put such wear and tear on the body as create great fatigue. The second term is used to refer to the effort put forth to surmount obstacles. Again, he calls for them to remember and witness his former conduct among them. These efforts prove his care as a spiritual father.

■ **Walk of a Father**

Once more Paul calls them forth as witnesses of Timothy, Silas, and himself. *“You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe”* (2:10). Surely, good fathers set good examples before their children. He uses three terms to describe his behavior in Thessalonica: *“devoutly,” “justly,”* and *“blamelessly.”* They had a devout or holy walk. By the way they lived life it was clear they had set themselves apart for the ways of the world. Their just walk was seen by their righteous conduct. They modeled what was right instead of doing what was wrong. No one could find fault in their walk. They lived above any just criticism. The Gospel not only must be taught it must be caught. Preachers must walk the walk as well as talk the talk.

■ **Words of a Father**

A father not only supports his family and provides a noble example for them to follow, he must also instruct and correct with edifying words. Again, Paul indicates that they were well aware of their instructions. *“As you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children”* (2:11). A good teacher of the Gospel must be firm like a father as well as gentle like a mother. Loving words of discipline are seen in three more terms: exhort, comfort, and charge. To exhort them by words of encouragement. Words that come along the side of them while they are struggling and motivate them to keep going. Next to encouraging words are words that comfort by showing concern and sympathy. Young Christians can fall asleep and need to be stimulated with words of strong urging to stay on task.

Paul was personally involved in their spiritual development: *“every one of you.”* Novices were given individual attention. One on one edifying is essential. Once a former elder would not teach and new converts class unless there were enough of them attending to make teach the class *“worth his time.”*

■ **Wish of a Father**

Paul sums up his wish for them: *“that you would have a walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory”* (2:12). He walked and talked as a caring father so they would walk worthy of God. Although God had called them to salvation through their obedience to the Gospel (2 Thess. 2:13,14). He continues to call them to be in His *“kingdom and glory.”*

Questions:

True/False

1. T F The brethren in Thessalonica were heartfelt toward Paul but they felt his visit was in vain.
2. T F Paul and Silas were bold among the Thessalonians even though they had suffered and were spitefully treated at Philippi.
3. T F Paul was careful to ensure his message pleased others by avoiding doctrinal subjects that were offensive.
4. T F As a preacher of the gospel, Paul could have “made demands” such as requesting monetary assistance from the Thessalonians.

Matching:

5. Draw a line to match the opposite of each term:
 - a. vain lack confidence
 - b. bold genuine praise
 - c. approved successful
 - d. flattery not tested

Multiple Choice:

6. What motherly traits were used by Paul to describe their presence among the new converts at Thessalonica?
 - a. Gentle, Nourishing, Carefree, Affectionate, & Giving of Self
 - b. Affectionate, Carefree, Gentle, Giving of Self, & Nourishing
 - c. Gentle, Nourishing, Cherishing, Affectionate, & Self-centered
 - d. Affectionate, Cherishing, Gentle, Giving of Self, & Nourishing
7. What three terms characterized the behavior (fatherly walk) of Paul, Silas, & Timothy among the Thessalonians?
 - a. devoutly, godly, & positive
 - b. devoutly, godly, & open-minded
 - c. devoutly, justly, & blamelessly
 - d. devoutly, justly, & open-minded

Application and Discussion:

8. Describe some of the characteristics Paul and his fellow laborers displayed which modern-day preachers, striving to serve as faithful stewards of the gospel, can adopt.

9. What motherly and/or fatherly actions can you and I model to benefit others, especially those who are new converts in Christ?

Reception and Opposition to God's Word

1 Thessalonians 2:13-20

13 For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe. 14 For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans, 15 who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men, 16 forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost. 17 But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire. 18 Therefore we wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but Satan hindered us. 19 For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? 20 For you are our glory and joy.

Of Paul's labor among the Bereans Luke wrote, "these were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). Luke was not condemning the attitude of all those who lived in Thessalonica any more than he was commending all Bereans. Some of those at Thessalonica made up the exceptional church, received the Word of God from exceptional preachers like Paul, Timothy, and Silas, as they exemplified the characteristics of exceptional students of the Bible. However, there were some in the city who opposed the Word of God.

Again, Paul takes time to express his gratitude for the church in Thessalonica. His was an unending thanksgiving for the proper reception of God's word by these Christians. Especially sense they were enduring opposition and Paul was unable to return to further teach them.

Proper Reception of God's Word

1 Thess. 2:13. For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

- **Appreciate the Word**

Abraham Lincoln called it "God's best gift to man." The Thessalonians had an appreciation for the Word of God preached them by Paul and others: "you received the word of God which you heard from us" (2:13a). The Bible is not just another great work of mere mortal men. To properly receive the Word of God with due regard one must understand its unique source, nature, content, and value. The Bible is from the very mind of God through the inspired prophets and apostles by way of the Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20,21; Eph. 3:3-5). The nature of the Bible is seen in Psalm 19:7-9: holy, pure, perfect. The Bible contains the truth (John 17:17). Every prophecy of God has come true or will come true. Unlike the many false predictions of today. It has been predicted that Michael Jackson would leave music and become a Televangelist and Khadaffi would become paralyzed in 1987 by a bullet from one

of his own body guards. Both men are now dead without ever fulfilling these prophecies. The value of the Bible to the soul is seen throughout by men who really understood its worth. Job said, "I have not departed from the commandment of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth" (Job 23:12). The Psalmist wrote, "therefore I love Your commandments More than gold, yes, than fine gold!...my eyes are awake through the night watches, That I may meditate on Your word" (Ps. 119:127,148). An exceptional student of God's Word will learn to genuinely appreciate it for what it is.

- **Accept the Word**

Paul uses two words to describe the Thessalonaian Christians' reception of God's Word: "received" and "welcomed." The first term means to hear words from another. While the second refers to the attitude of the heart when receiving the Word. Paul told them, "*you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God*" (2:13b). As a host would welcome a guest into their home a good Bible student will welcome the Word into their heart as the very words from God. Jesus constantly encouraged his disciples to not just physically hear the sounds of His words but to accepted into their lives the message He spoke. "*He who has ears to hear, let him hear!*" (Matt. 13:9). For too often many congregations no longer welcome the preaching of God's Word. They would rather listen to opinions of men or be entertained.

- **Apply the Word**

Merely appreciating and accepting God's Word is not enough. However, such an attitude toward the Bible message result in personal application of its truths: "*which also effectively works in you who believe*" (2:13c). From the word "work" is derived the terms: "energy" or "energize." When one receives the Gospel and with active, working faith obeys it, he will notice that it is powerful enough to transform his life. Being a doer of the Word, produces change within the life of the believer.

After the mutiny of the HMS Bounty the crew traveled to Pitcarin Islan in the South Pacific where they continued to fight among themselves. After the killing stopped there were only several native wives from Tahiti and their children from the mutineers left alive with one lone sailor, Alexander Smith. He found a Bible in a chest. He read it. He applied it. Today, there are not jails on the island because there is no crime. The Bible transformed the community to this day into a society of men, women, and children who love the Word and each other.

Opposition to God's Word

1 Thess. 2:14 For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans, 15 who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men, 16 forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost. 17 But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire. 18 Therefore we wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but Satan hindered us. 19 For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? 20 For you are our glory and joy.

- ▶ **Imitators of Suffering Saints**

It is often the case, that those who suffering from persecution tend to think that they are alone, that is, no one else is suffering like they are for the cause of Christ. Perhaps, this was the feelings of those persecuted Christians who made up the church at Thessalonica. Nevertheless, Paul reminds them, "*for you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans*" (2:14). This would encourage these novices in the faith for they were in fact experiencing the same thing the early disciples and apostles endured. Like them, the Thessalonians were being afflicted by their own

country men.

► **The Sinful Opposition Of The Jews**

The Jews were initially behind the persecution of the church at Thessalonica. Paul says were the ones who killed the Lord Jesus who was also a Jew. The apostles suffered imprisonment and beatings for preaching this fact along with the fact of the resurrection (Acts 2:23,36; 3:14-15; 4:10; 5:30). As they were plotting against the life of Jesus, they accepted responsibility for this murder (Matt. 27:25).

They "killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets" (2:15a). Jesus condemned His generation for being murders of God's spokesmen. *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, ... Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. ... Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. ... O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!"* (Mt. 23:29, 31, 34,35, 37). However, as they would soon find out, one cannot kill the message from God but simply murdering the messengers.

Paul also reminds his readers that his group were also targets of the Jews persecution: *"and have persecuted us" (2:15b)*. They not only gave them trouble at Thessalonica but would follow him from place to place disrupting the ministry of Paul (Acts 14:19; 17:5,13).

The nature of these trouble-making Jews is further described: *"and they do not please God" (2:15c)*. Although the Jews were very proud of being sons of Abraham and God's chosen people they were not met with the approval of God. John the Baptist warned them that God was able to take mere stones and create physical sons of Abraham. Paul said that those who are *"in the flesh cannot please God"* (Rom. 8:8). Prior to this, Paul, himself, had been one of these persecutors of the Faith. Then one day when he met the Lord on the road to Damascus and heard him ask, *"why do you persecute me."* From that day on Paul knew that God was not pleased with him.

Not only did these Jews fail to receive God's approval for their hatred of the saints, they did not get along with anyone. Paul further describes them: *"and are contrary to all men" (2:15d)*. Of the Jews the Roman historian Tacitus wrote, "they have a hostile hatred of all other men" (Histories, 5.5). Juvenal says of them, "they would not even point out the way to any one except of the same religion; nor, being asked, guide any to a fountain except the circumcised." In his commentary Albert Barnes quotes Diodorus Siculus who describes them as "those alone among all the nations who were unwilling to have any intermingling with any other nation, and who regarded all others as enemies."

Paul notes that these persecuting Jews were also *"forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved" (2:16a)*. Paul witnessed this at Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:42-51). At the council of Jerusalem Judiazing teachers demand the Gentile converts to circumcised and keep the Law of Moses to be saved (Acts 15:5). Jesus condemned the like attitude expressed by the Pharisees. *"But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in"* (Matt. 23:13).

The result of their opposition to the church of Christ was they *"so as always to fill up the measure of their sins" (2:16b)*. Paul is not being anti-semitic in this passage. He was a Jew and many of his converts were Jews. He is referencing the sins of a specific group of Jews who are fighting against God's kingdom and the messiah sent to save them. Nowhere does the Bible accuse all Jews of what a few Jews did.

These sinful Jews would be rewarded: *"but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost" (2:16c)*. Divine wrath may have been behind the severe famine in Judea in AD 45-47; the massacre of Jews in the temple area in AD 49 and the expulsion of Jews from Rome by emperor Claudius (Acts 18:2). No doubt Jesus prophesied destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman in AD 70.

► **Opposition to Paul's Plans**

Paul's plans to return and help the Thessalonians would not be stopped by the opposition of the Jews described above. He wrote these reassuring words: *"But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart"* (2:17a). The mob, stirred up the Jews, stormed Jason's home looking for the preachers of the Gospel. Paul and his companions were shipped off to Berea under the cover of darkness (Acts 17:10). Although Paul could not be with them in the flesh his concern and care for them could never be removed from his heart. It was as he wrote in a future epistle to the church at Colossae: *"for though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ"* (Col. 2:5).

Regardless of the opposition Paul was "endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire" (2:17b). Adversary of the Truth will never be able to stop earnest efforts of the saints.

"Therefore we wanted to come to you even I, Paul, time and again but Satan hindered us" (2:18). The Greek word for *"hindered"* in this verse is *egkptien*. It was used by the military to describe the actions of a retreating army who would breaking up the road or place obstacles in it to impeded their enemies from following them. Paul recognizes that it is Satan who is ultimately behind the opposition to the preaching of God's Word and his effort to return and encourage the Thessalonian congregation.

Paul refers to these children of God at Thessalonica his "hope," "joy," and even a "crown of rejoicing" when Christ returns. Even though Paul cannot come to them now, he has a great hope that they will meet him in the air with the Lord at the resurrection. Like the apostle John, Paul could proclaim that he "no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (2 John 4). The would make up Paul's victory crown he would receive in the Last Day. Perhaps many preachers glory in all the visits they are able to make to the brethren in various places, but Paul saw that his greatest joy and glory was in the prospect of spending eternity with these saints. Our hope should be to see each other in heaven! What a glorious reunion! Our glory should be seeing each other in the presence of the Lord!

Take a moment to examine your own life in light of this lesson. Are you a good student of the Bible by appreciating, accepting and applying God's Word. Are you willing to endure persecution for the sake of obeying and preaching the Word? Will you let the opposition keep you from edifying the saints? Show by your faith and determination that the adversaries of the Gospel will not stop your caring heart, halt your earnest efforts, hinder your path or rob you of your hope, joy and glory in the future with the saints. Just what is your hope, glory, crown, and joy? Is it your possessions, your job, your family or your fellow-brethren?

Questions:

True/False

1. T F Paul was thankful to God because the Thessalonian Christians were open-minded to his opinions.
2. T F The church in Thessalonica suffered persecution from their countrymen.
3. T F Since the Thessalonians were new converts, Paul did not name the identity of the group who killed Jesus and the prophets.
4. T F Regardless of the opposition, Paul endeavored more eagerly to see the Thessalonian Christians again.

Multiple Choice

5. How did the Thessalonians react when they heard the word of God?
 - a. They were closed-minded and rejected it

- b. They sought guidance from other sources
 - c. They were indecisive and skeptical
 - d. They received and welcomed it
6. What did the church in Thessalonica and the churches of God in Judea have in common?
- a. Suffered persecution from fellow laborers
 - b. Suffered persecution from their countrymen
 - c. Formed interfaith alliances with their countrymen
 - d. Formed mission societies with their fellow laborers
7. Who did Paul recognize as being the source behind the opposition to hinder his plans?
- a. Countrymen
 - b. Fellow-laborers
 - c. God
 - d. Satan

Application and Discussion

8. Explain how we and others can be or have a hope, joy, or crown of rejoicing?

Ten Ways to Establish New Converts in the Faith

1 Thessalonians 3:1-8

1 Thess. 3:1 Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone, 2 and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith, 3 that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. 4 For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know. 5 For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain. 6 But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you— 7 therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith. 8 For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord.

Paul, Timothy, and Silas were forced to leave Thessalonica quickly because of opposition started by the Jews. They went to Berea where the Gospel received a better reception. However, Jews followed them there and made enough trouble that Paul was taken to Athens while Paul wrote his letter to the Thessalonians after a forced absence. Silas and Timothy stayed behind with instructions to “*join him as soon as possible*” (Acts 17:13-15). Apparently, they came to Paul while he was still in Athens and Silas perhaps was sent to Philippi while Timothy returned to the congregation at Thessalonica. Later both Silas and Timothy later rejoined Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:1-5). With fresh news about the young congregation Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica with this first epistle.

The key word in this section of chapter three is the word “*establish*” (3:2,13) and a key phrase in verse eight: “*stand fast.*” Paul knew the young Christians needed to be established in their faith. Before they could walk they had to learn to stand. In this paragraph Paul outlines ten things needed to establish new converts in the faith.

1) **Be Seriously Concerned**

Paul and his co-workers were so concerned about the congregation that when they “*could no longer endure it*” Timothy was sent to check on them. Paul was a spiritual “father” to these babes in Christ. As in the physical realm, babes in Christ are both a delight and a huge obligation. In the first century communication was very slow. His serious concern for these novices moved him to do something. They needed someone to come and follow-up on the teaching and report back to Paul.

2) **Be Willing to Make Personal Sacrifices**

Paul wrote “*we thought it good to be left in Athens alone*” (3:1b). The word “*left*” could be translated “bereaved”. He used it to show how deeply Paul felt a loss at not being with Timothy and Silas. To take care of the new churches in Macedonia meant Paul was to be alone at Athens. This appears to be a mutual decision. Loneliness is part of preaching the Gospel to the lost and edifying the saints in the faith. Paul was willing to make the personal sacrifice of sending one of his greatest helpers to Thessalonica. This type of sacrifice is seen throughout Paul’s missionary journeys. To the church of God at Corinth he wrote, “and I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; though the more

abundantly I love you, the less I am loved" (2 Cor. 12:15).

3) Send Qualified Help

While staying behind in Athens Paul *"sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ"* (3:2a) back to the Thessalonians. Paul like the FTD florest care enough to send the very best. Of Timothy, Paul told the Philippians, *"for I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state"* (Phil. 2:20). The word for *"fellow laborer"* is *synergos*. The English term synergy is derived from this word. It means "the interaction of two or more agents...so that their combined effect is greater than the sum of the individual effects" (the free dictionary.com). Paul had many such working relationships during his ministry.

4) Establish and Encourage Them in the Faith

Paul explained why he sent Timothy to the church *"to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith"* (3:2b). The members there needed strengthening and support. They needed someone to put the courage in them. William Arthur Ward said, "Flatter me, and I may not believe you. Criticize me, and I may not like you. Ignore me, and I may not forgive you. Encourage me, and I will not forget you." Perhaps, the biggest reason for losing our new converts is due to them being neglected by maturer Christians. Many babes are left standing there "dripping wet on the baptistery steps" as members wait to see if the baptism is going to take or not. If we treated our babies like that, the infant mortality rate would be appalling.

5) Strengthen Them in Facing Trials

One of the main reasons it was so vital to send Timothy so soon was to build up their strength and courage in order to have a faith that could face the trials and opposition. Paul explained, *"that no one should be shaken by these afflictions"* (3:3a). The term *"shaken"* is from *sainesthai* meaning to be unsettled or disturbed. Literally, it means to "wag the tail." Like a dog will flop its tail back and forth so the afflictions would shake them like a dog does his tail. Interestingly, "afflictions" means to be "under the thumb." It is describing the pressure they were under. So one of the first things needed in strengthening the saints so they can deal with afflictions is to have them recognize the threat they are facing.

Paul tells them that suffering through affliction is a normal aspect of the Christian life. *"For you yourselves know that we are appointed to this"* (3:3b). Those who are going to follow Christ will suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:12). Christianity is not a means of avoiding all the troubles of life. To be different from the world is to anticipate a world of trouble. Persecution is not foreign to be believers (1 Pet. 4:12ff), but a normal part of the Christian life. Instead of avoiding afflictions Christians are appointed to grow through trials and tribulations. Each trial or temptations is controlled by God the temptation regulator (1 Cor. 10:13).

Previously, Paul had warned them that afflictions were coming their way. *"For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you"* (3:4a). Just has Jesus warned His disciples that the world would hate them because the world hated Him, so Paul warned them. There is no such thing as a trouble free ride to heaven. Remember it is the little piece of sand the irritates the oyster and so it secretes some protection against it. Over time the irritations it turned into a priceless, beautiful pearl.

With is companions Paul also had to endure afflictions: *"that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know"* (3:4b). It is much easier to endure when you know of or have seen the example of another who was able to go through the trial and come through it a stronger man or woman. Paul did not just warn them about persecution, he showed them how to respond to it in his life. Paul could demonstrate that trials in life develop patience and character (Js. 1:2-4) as well as perseverance (Rom. 5:3-5).

Ultimately all trials, tribulations, temptations, and troubles come by way of the Devil, the Tempter. Paul told them *"lest by some means the tempter had tempted you"* (3:5a). Paul believed Satan was real and he posed a real threat to them. The Tempter knows the troublesome times can tempt the saints to give up their faith. Paul's victory at Thessalonica brought souls into the kingdom of light from the kingdom of darkness. The Devil is a sore loser and wants them back. He will use any means at his

disposal to make them fall.

6) Access Their Growth in Faith and Love

Again, Paul explains why he sent Timothy back to Thessalonica. *“For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith”* (3:5b). He had to know how they were getting along. All new converts need someone who cares enough to check on their spiritual progress. Paul was to receive good news concerning their growth.

7) Recognizing It Is A Waste to Convert and Not Develop New Converts

If Paul and others failed to assist these new saints their *“labor might be in vain”* (3:5c). Although no matter how careful leaders are in following up on novices some will still fall back into the world. Nonetheless, let us do our part to provide for their needs knowing our labor is not in vain (I Cor. 15:58). It is never a waste of time to develop the faith of new babes in Christ even if it is just one soul. It is a great waste not to work at establishing the faith of even one soul.

8) Create Pleasant Memories

“But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us” (3:6a), Paul wrote of the fond memories he had of their faith and love. To remember babes in Christ and care for them is to be remembered by them in the future.

9) Desire to Spend Time Together

The brethren had a mutual desire to spend time with each other. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians that they were *“greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you”* (3:6b). A special bond is only natural between the proclaimer of the Gospel and those saved through his efforts.

10) Be Comforted By Their Growth

The report of their steadfast faith has encouraged Paul. *“Therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith. For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord”* (3:7,8). Preachers and teachers of the Gospel need positive feedback concerning the spiritual growth of their students. As John wrote, “I rejoiced greatly that I have found some of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father” (2 John 4). Such good news from Timothy about the Thessalonian brethren gave him a new lease on life and stimulated him to continue his efforts in sharing the Gospel at Corinth.

Questions:

True/False

1. T F Prayer to God is really all we can offer to establish others, especially new converts, in their faith.
2. T F Paul did not think it was a good idea to be left alone in order to send Timothy to the church in Thessalonica.
3. T F Timothy was sent to the church in Thessalonica to establish and encourage them so they would not be shaken by afflictions.
4. T F Our labor is in vain if we spend time establishing the faith of new converts since they can pray and study on their own.

Multiple Choice

5. The English word synergy is derived from the term *synergos*, which corresponds to what term used by Paul?
 - a. countrymen
 - b. encourager

- c. fellow laborer
- d. new convert

6. The term "*shaken*" literally means:
- a. fallen leaf
 - b. rolling stone
 - c. wag the tail
 - d. stand fast

Application and Discussion

7. Consider at least five (5) of the ten ways we can establish new converts in the faith. Discuss ways we can make these practical in our own life?

A Prayer for New Converts

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

1 Thess. 3:9 For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God, 10 night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith? 11 Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you. 12 And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you, 13 so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.

The Public Broadcasting Service use to air a show from Canada called the *Red Green Show*. During the course of the show the men of Possum Lodge would recite *The Man's Prayer*. It goes something like this: "I'm a man . . . but I can change . . . if I have to . . . I guess."

Paul draws a close to the first part of this epistle to the young congregation at Thessalonica with a prayer. In the previous paragraph Paul gave ten ways to establish new converts in their faith. This perhaps could well serve as number eleven: pray for them. This prayer can serve us as a guideline to pattern our prayers. Unlike *The Man's Prayer* from the *Red Green Show* Paul prays with great confidence that these new Christians will continue to change, grow, and be established in their faith.

■ Pray With Thanksgiving for Them

Paul began this epistle and the next one to the Thessalonians with a prayer (1:2; 2 Th. 1:3). Over forty prayers of thanksgiving or intercession can be found through Paul's letter. He begins this prayer by saying: "*For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God*" (3:9).

The brethren were doing well at Thessalonica and for this Paul was thankful to them and for them before God whose goodness made it possible for the church to survive and thrive. Paul had a multitude of things to be thankful for concerning this congregation. One of them was the joy he had over the great news of their steadfast faith. When someone obeys the Gospel they need to know how thankful we are for their reception of the Gospel and the joy that we have as well, as the joy it brings the angels in heaven.

■ Pray Frequently For Them

Notice the frequency in which Paul and his co-workers prayed for them: "*night and day*" (3:10a). Later in the letter he would command them to "*pray without ceasing*" (5:17). Paul commanded the brethren at Ephesus, "*praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints*" (Eph. 6:18). Samuel knew that it was necessary for him to pray continually for the Israelites else he would be sinning. "*Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you the good and the right way*" (1 Sam. 12:23). The Apostles were motivated to have seven men appointed over the care of the needy widows so they could give themselves "*continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word*" (Acts 6:4).

Corrie Ten Boom: "When a Christian shuns fellowship with other Christians, the devil smiles. When he stops reading the Bible, the devil laughs. When he stops praying, the devil shouts for joy" (Cited in Prayer Powerpoints, Victor Books, p. 109). Without the prayers of Paul the saints may have not have grown or survived. There is great power in the prayer of a righteous man like Paul or Timothy

or Silas (Js. 5:16).

■ **Pray Earnestly For Them**

Paul said that they were *“praying exceedingly”* (3:10b). This could be translated, “super abundantly.” True prayer is hard work because there is so many souls to prayer for, so many needs to ask for, so many blessings to be thankful for, and so many problems to requiring God’s assistance. To be sure Paul did not just quickly bow his head at night and pray a quick “bless my friends in Thessalonica.” and then jump in bed. His prayers show that the needs and deeds of the brethren were one his mind and that he had meditated upon them. Prayer must spring from a deep well of concern and love for the brethren.

■ **Pray to Have Fellowship With Them**

One of Paul’s constant longings was *“that we may see your face”* (3:10c). Satan had hindered him. God had the power, if it was His will, to remove all these obstacles. Although he had sent Timothy to check on and comfort them, this was not enough. If God permitted him to go nothing could stop him. It is possible that Paul did pass through Thessalonica on his third missionary journey.

Just as prayer is needed for the individual Christian to maintain his relationship with God so our joint communion with each other requires use to pray for opportunities to be with each other.

■ **Pray For Perfected Faith in Them**

The purpose of Paul’s longing to see the Thessalonians against was that he might *“perfect what is lacking in”* their *“faith”* (3:10d). He prayed that their faith might mature. The word translated *“perfect”* does not mean that he was going to give them a faith where they could never sin or fail but it means to equip or adjust anything lacking in their faith. The term is used in regard to the mending of fishing nets (Mk. 1:19). Faith like a muscle needs to be made stronger. God even tested Abraham’s faith calling upon him to sacrifice his beloved son, Isaac. Just as God tries are faith through trials to purify and strength it, Paul knows that further preaching and teaching will fully supply what may be lacking in their faith.

■ **Pray To Their Father and Lord for Them**

Paul teaches us that the focus of prayer is on the power and will of Deity: *“Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you”* (3:11). Prayer is directed by Paul to both the Father and Jesus Christ. While praying it is good to remember that it is to our spiritual Father who has the right to answer according to what he deems best. God is not a glorified cosmic bell hop who stands ready to fulfill our every request. Father know best. Likewise, Jesus Christ is the Lord or boss or master. Prayer is by no means a servant bossing around his master. If Paul is ever to see them again it will be because the Father and the Lord made it possible.

■ **Pray for Love to Abound in Them**

The prayer for the Thessalonians continues: *“and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you”* (3:12). Obviously, brotherly love is not something which naturally happens as two people met and greet and form a mutual bond of affection based upon compatible likes and dislikes. The love of the brethren goes deeper and involves more than just passing opinions on non-essentials. Love is something more than an emotion it is a command which must be fulfilled and must grow and grow. If you have a hard time loving a brother you have so little in common, pray and work harder at loving him. The fact that Paul and the others love them is used to motivate them to abound in love for each other. A church family must love each other in order to wether the storms which will arise from within the congregation and from without. The type of love Paul was praying for was a love without borders. It is a love the continues to grow and grow and abound to every one and in every situation. Peter wrote, *“above all things have fervent love for one another, for “love will cover a multitude of sins”* (1 Pet. 4:8).

■ **Pray for a Blameless and Holy Heart in Them**

Paul wants the Lord to *“establish”* their *“hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father”* (2:13a). This indicates that the Lord is not the same as the Father and they have different roles in the spiritual development of the saints. The goal of purpose of this prayer is blameless holy hearts. This

does not mean sinless. A Christian is blameless because he corrects himself and is forgiven before God. He does this by praying without ceasing. He sins, he prays, he is forgiven before God and now has nothing deserving of condemnation by God. His heart is a heart after God's own heart. God is Holy and he is holy.

■ **Pray Till the Lord Returns For Them**

A time limit is placed upon the use of prayer for these saints: "*at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints*" (3:13b). He prayed that they might continue to live righteously until the Lord comes. After the Lord returns there will be an end to all intercessory prayers. The phrase "*all His saints*" could be translated "all his holy ones." Thus, some believe this is a reference to the angels. It is true that Jesus will return with angels but also with the dead saints who will arise to meet Him in the air at the Second Coming.

This prayer can serve as a model for us to use in prayer for the brethren, especially those who are young in the faith.

Questions:

True/False

1. T F Paul prayed with thanksgiving to God for the saints in Thessalonica.
2. T F The frequency in which Paul and his coworkers prayed for the saints was on the first day of the week and during midweek bible study.
3. T F To "perfect what is lacking in your in faith" means to adjust or equip anything that is lacking in faith.
4. T F Paul was simply thankful these new converts had just enough faith to hang on.

Multiple Choice

5. To whom did Paul address his prayer on behalf of the Thessalonians?
 - a. God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost
 - b. God the Father and the Blessed Mother Mary
 - c. God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ
 - d. God the Father and His Holy Angels
6. He prayed that their love will:
 - a. be genuine
 - b. increase and abound
 - c. not suffer shipwreck
 - d. be steadfast and unmovable
7. What type of hearts did Paul pray theirs will be?
 - a. open and pure
 - b. pure and sinless
 - c. without hypocrisy
 - d. blameless and holy

Application and Discussion

8. What do we normally have a tendency to pray for/about? How often do we pray for the spiritual well-being of others?

Maintaining Sexual Purity

I Thessalonians 4:1-8

1 Thess. 4:1 Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God; 2 for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus. 3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, 5 not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; 6 that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. 7 For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. 8 Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit.

Like almost every preacher, when Paul says “*finally then, brethren*” (1:1a), he doesn’t really mean “in conclusion.” The word indicates the division of Paul’s epistle. He is now entering the half of the letter dealing with practical application. He told the Thessalonians that they were doing great in their faith, but prayed for their continued growth. Now, he points to the need for more spiritual growth in some specific areas. “*We urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more*” (1:1b). Paul gives them ten good reasons why they should live a holy life and abstain from sexual sin.

Sexual immorality is rampant in our society. Just turn on the television, browse the internet, look up at the billboards that dot the highways with half-naked models selling every product on the market and you will see more pornography in a day than many of our great-grandparents viewed in a lifetime. Access to pornography has never been so easy with the advent of the internet. Movie stars like David Duchovny have checked themselves into rehabilitation centers for sex addiction. Many more celebrities are coming out of the closet boasting of their alternate lifestyles. As one preacher put it “we live in a culture that sweats sensuality from its pores” (quoted in *Secret Sex Wars: A Battle Cry for Purity*). Sex on the first date is now a natural expectation. Casual sex is called “friends with benefits.” Children are using the phone to text explicit sexual messages and videos to other youth. This new sexual immorality is called “sexting.” As bad as it is today, the ancient world was also overrun with sexual immorality.

◆ **Sexual Sins are Not Part of the Christian Walk**

Paul has already mentioned to the Thessalonians about the conduct of a Christians: “*just as you received from us how you ought to walk*” (4:1c). Walking was the most common means of transportation in the ancient world. Here the term refers not to how they travel on foot, but the manner of life they are living in the world. “*Enoch walked with God*” (Gen. 5:24). This is in reference to his spiritual relationship with God.

The walk of a Christian is to be very different from all others. They do not walk the popular broad way to visit prostitutes, hook up with lovers, view pornography, expose their bodies to the opposite sex. Sex is a God-given desire to be fulfilled in marriage. Too many wish to take shortcuts to fulfill their lusts.

◆ **Sexual Sins Do Not Please God**

The saints are to live life “*to please God*” (4:1c). Sexual sins are about pleasing oneself. “If it feels good, do it” is the motto of many. Christians cannot go through life pleasing only themselves (Rom. 15:1).

God created man and He created man’s desires. One of these desires is sex. To please the

Creator means to operate and function as He was designed. Marriage is the designated relationship in which sexual desires are to be fulfilled.

God is the Father of all His children. Children ought to live in such a way to please the father. Our Father is perfect. Only Jesus Christ, the Son of God was perfect. He lived a perfect life by perfect obedience to the will of the Father. *“And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him”* (John 89:29). Although none of His children are perfect God still loves us and desires the best for us.

To love the Father involves a desire to please Him. Pleasing Him requires His children to know and follow His will. Joseph understood sexual immortality would not be pleasing to God. *“And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, ‘Lie with me.’ But he refused and said to his master's wife, ‘Look, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?’”* (Gen 39:7-9).

◆ **Sexual Sins Are Contrary to the Command to Be Holy**

Paul goes on to explain what is the will of God. *“You know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification”* (4:2,3a). God's will is our “*sanctification*” which comes from the same Greek word (*hagios*) which is the root for “holy,” “holiness,” and “saint.” Separation from the world of sin and devotion to God are two components of sanctification. The commandments found in God's will are what lead to a life of sanctification or holiness. Sex is from God and is holy. It is not dirty or inherently immoral. It is set apart for marriage between one man and one woman for one life time with one exception which allows for divorce: sexual immortality. This is what God the Father knows is best for His Children. The 1994 University of Chicago study: *Sex in America: The Definitive Survey*, found that monogamous conservative Christians reported the most physical satisfaction from sex. First, the saints long to please God by doing His will by obeying the commandments which leads to their sanctification or holiness. In this context the sanctification is sexual purity.

◆ **Sexual Sins Are to be Avoided**

To maintain a life of sexual purity Christians *“should abstain from sexual immorality”* (4:3b). The term *“abstain”* means “to keep away,” “to hold oneself aloof” or “to be distant.” Faithful Christians do not fool around with sexual desires, they are to *“flee from sexual immorality”* (1 Cor. 6:18).

Christians live in a world filled with sexual temptation on every turn of the page, every turn of the channel, and found on every other web page. So how can a Christian avoid it? A saint can try to maintain his sanctification by not frequenting places of temptation; by say “no” to fornication, extramarital sex, homosexual sex, and pornography; by not flirting with others; by not fantasizing in the mind; by turning away the head from immodesty, by turning off the channel; by turning over to another page, by keeping yourself modestly dressed before the opposite sex, and by running from it. Paul wrote, *“but fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints”* (Eph. 5:3). The question is asked in the Proverbs: *“Can a man take fire to his bosom, And his clothes not be burned?”* (Pr. 6:27). No! The closer you get to sexual sin, greater is the danger in being burned by it. David a man after God's own heart gave into sexual desires and was burned. Are you a stronger man or woman? So do not look at television shows or movies or internet sites that promote sensuality. Avoid listening to music that will fill your mind with impure thoughts. Turn your eyes away from looking at women or men who dress in tantalizing ways.

◆ **Sexual Sins Defile the Body**

The end result of avoiding sexual immorality is *“that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor”* (4:4). This applies to all Christians: *“each of you.”* No one is exempt from this command, no matter what gender you are, how old you are, how young you are, your job, your hobbies, your sports, etc. The phrase *“know how to”* suggests that learning is involved. When it comes to sexual desires every saint can learn how to control the lust of the flesh.

The term “vessel” is subject to various interpretations. The wife is called by Peter “*the weaker vessel.*” Yet, in this context it is perhaps more fitting to view “vessel” in reference to the body. Our bodies are vessels of our soul and the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19,20). When one commits sexual sin he sins against this own body. Clearly other sins also affect the body, such as gluttony or drunkenness, but no other sin has the same effect on the memory, personality or soul of a person as does sexual sin.

◆ **Sexual Sins Are Ungodly Lust**

The way to live a life of sexual purity is: “*not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God*” (4:5). Sexual promiscuity in the first century was just as bad if not worse than in the twenty-first century. While we live in a society that is in the throes of trying to throw off sexual restraints, they lived in a society that knew no such restraints. The Gentiles simply accepted immorality as a way of life. Women of the Roman Empire counted their years by the number of their husband. Juvenal tells of one woman who had eight husbands in five years. Homosexuality was common and accepted. Incest was overlooked. Slaves were kept and used for sex. Some Pagan temples employed prostitutes for the pleasure of “worshippers.” Demosthenes said “we have to prostitutes for pleasure, we have concubines so that we can have regular sex, and lastly we have wives for the purpose of having children legitimately and for looking after our household affairs.”

In the eyes of the world sex is seen as a bodily function. Just as food was for the body, they thought sex was for the body and the body was for sex. “*Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body*” (1 Cor. 6:13). Just as the human appetite for food, drink, rest, etc. naturally need to be satisfied by all, so sexual desires are to be met. However there is still a need for self-control over our God-given appetites. Eating and drinking too much is the sin of gluttony. Sleeping too much is the sin of slothfulness. And sex outside of marriage is sinful.

The problem of sexual immorality is an ignorance of God and His will. They do know the ways of the world, but do they know the will of God. Today failure to preach God’s will and a lack of a spiritual relationship with God has led many to be involved in many unholy sexual relationships. Holy marriage and its vows are no longer sacred and jealously guarded. Anything now goes between “consenting adults.” Unbridled expression of all desires has become the norm.

◆ **Sexual Sins Hurt Others**

Not only does sexual immorality have a negative impact on our relationship with God but also our relationship with our brother: “*that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter*” (4:6a). The term “defraud” means to “take advantage of.” It is an act of taking advantage of another individual either directly or indirectly. It refers to fellow members of the body of Christ, both male and female. We have no right to that which belongs to another man. When one takes another’s wife and daughter to engage in any form of sexual immorality he robs others of their sexual purity. It is like stealing their property and destroying their rights. It also defrauds some fellow Christian who eventually will take this woman as his own wife.

How often is heard the excuse: “I am not hurting anyone” when a man or woman engages in sexual immorality. There is no such thing as a “victim-less” sexual sin. Sexual sins hurt a vast multitude of people both socially, physically, spiritually, and emotionally. AIDS, babies born out of wedlock, abortion, STDs, damnation of one’s soul are just a few of the ways others are taken advantage of one’s sexual promiscuity.

Even premarital sex has lasting consequences for future relationships. Sex with a multitude of various partners is one way to prepare for future divorce before one ever gets married. Historians tell us that during the 520 years of the Roman Republic, there had not been a single divorce. In the first century the Roman philosopher Seneca said, “women were married to be divorced and divorced to be married.”

◆ **Sexual Sins Are Judged by God**

The wrath of God upon sexually immoral persons is a strong motivation to avoid it. “*Because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified*” (4:6b). The Bible is filled with

warnings against sexual promiscuity. Sodom and Gomorrah went up in smoke because of sexual sin. King David lost a son because of his sexual sin. The Hebrew writer warned, *“marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge”* (Heb. 13:4). Paul told the Romans, *“for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness”* (Rom. 1:18). In this verse Paul is most likely warning of God’s final vengeance upon them on Judgment Day.

Sexual Sins are Unclean, Not Part of Your Holiness

“For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness” (4:7). *“Uncleanness”* is a sexually impure life. Pagan religion called its worshipers to commit fornication. God calls Christians to a separate life from the uncleanness of the world. They are not to conform to the ways of the world but to the holy character of God. Christians do not wallow around in the filthy beds of sexual impurity, but save their bodies for the holy marriage bed (Heb. 13:4).

◆ **Sexual Sins Are a Rejection of God’s Will and His Gifts**

“Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit” (4:8). Still another reason for compliance with sexual purity is that they are God-given. These are the God-given rules which men are rejecting. The Holy Spirit has revealed that sex is for married people only. Anyone rejecting this is not just rejecting Paul, but God and the Holy Spirit. Remember one of the fruits of the spirit is self-control.

Questions:

Short Answer

1. Demonstrate how prolific sexual immorality is throughout our society by listing some examples.
2. How had they learned to walk as Christians?
3. How can the saints please the Father in regard to sexual morality?

Matching

4. Draw a line matching terms to the meaning:
 - a. Sanctification to keep away from
 - b. Gentiles robbing or taking advantage of others
 - c. Abstain separation from the world of sin and devotion to God
 - d. Vessel God
 - e. Defraud do not know God
 - f. Avenger Body

True/False

5. T F Sexual immorality is far more common today than it was in Paul’s day.

Dealing With Insiders and Outsiders

1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

Paul had just finished commanding them to be holy by maintaining sexual purity. He now moves on to his next subject. This paragraph starts with an affirmation of their love for one another followed by an exhortation to increase their love, followed by three commands concerning their conduct before the world which will result in two benefits.

Love Those On the Inside

1 Thess. 4:9 But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; 10 and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more;

If any one group should love one another it should be the church of Christ. Paul knew that the congregation of believers at Thessalonica loved one another. The Greek language used four different words which can be translated “love.” First, there is sexual love from the word *eros* from which is derived “erotic.” This word is never used in the New Testament. *Storge* is family love and refers to the love a parent would have toward a child. *Philio* is found many times in the Bible and is part of a compound word used here in the Greek text translated “brotherly love.” *Agape* is the philosophical Greek word for love and it is found not only in this text but abundantly throughout the New Testament. Agape love treats others as God would treat them, regardless of feelings or personal preferences.

God has taught these new Christians how to love the brethren. God is the perfect teacher of what it takes to love others. After all, “*God is love*” (1 Jn. 4:8). Anyone looking for a good education on learning to love one another had no further to look than God’s actions in sending His Son Jesus Christ to die on the cross for us so that we might be saved. God was able to love us when we were most unlovable. Paul wrote, “*for when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*” (Rom. 5:6-8).

Animals act out of instinct. They are born with the ability to do things that require humans many hours of instructions to master. For example, we have to learn how to swim. Although fish swim in schools, they do not have to go to school to learn how to swim. God is love. It is part of His nature. But due to sin man does not always have love in his heart and does not know how to love. Jesus came to teach man how to love one another on a level that was never known to man before. “*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another*” (Jn. 13:34).

The love which Christians have for one another is not limited to just those in their age group or group of friends at the congregation. The church at Thessalonica loved all the brethren in Macedonia which included those in Berea and Philippi.

The love these early Christians had sounds great, especially when you consider they were new converts. Love is not a stagnant virtue. It does not reach a certain point where it can no longer expand and grow. Love must “*increase more and more.*” They could never have too much of a good thing. The brotherhood can never have too much Christian love. Paul knows how to get the most out of new

converts. He does not come on strong and castigate them for all the things they are doing wrong. He points out what is good and right in their Christian walk and believes they can do even better. He affirms they know how to love one another and then goes on to ask them to keep it up while striving to do more.

Behavior Toward Those on the Outside

1 Thess. 4:11 that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you,

Whereas the Thessalonians are to have brotherly love, the next three commands from Paul focus on their behavior toward those who are outside the body of Christ. First, they are to *“aspire to lead a quiet life”* (4:11a). The word *“quiet”* indicates “a tranquil disposition free from the inner turmoil that causes disturbances in the community” (ISBE, Volume 4, p. 11). The phrase is rather paradoxical: be ambitious not to be so ambitious. How can this be achieved in such a busy world? Being a Christian does not require them to be loud and boisterous. They do not need to live life in a panic or have frantic behavior.

Next, the Thessalonians were *“to mind”* their *“own business”* (4:11b). This is the opposite of a busybody who meddles in the affairs of others. The New Testament gives several warnings against such: *“For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies”* (2 Th. 3:11). *“But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people’s matters”* (1 Pet. 4:15). This does not mean Christians are not to care about their fellow man and neighbors. F.F. Bruce wrote, “there is a great difference between the Christian duty of putting the interests of others first and the busybody’s compulsive itch to put other people right.” If Christians are busy with their own business, they will less likely get involved in the business of others.

Finally, Paul commands them *“to work with your own hands”* (4:11c). Perhaps, some of the brethren were too idle. This may have been due to the attitude of the Greco/Roman mind set that work was for slaves and to be avoided by good Romans. Idle hands and idle minds lead many to be busy making trouble for others. Paul was a tentmaker and knew the value of working with one’s hands.

Another reason for their proneness to become idle may have been a misunderstanding about the Second Coming of Christ. If Christ is returning soon why work when all is to be left behind? In 1846, a man named William Miller predicated that Jesus was coming at a certain day and hour. A group of his followers quit their jobs, sold their possession, and went out on a hilltop to wait for the Lord to appear. There was tremendous expectancy on their part, but, of course, Jesus did not come.

There are several good reasons why Christians need to stay busy working before God and among their fellow members of society. 1) Christians need to work to provide for their daily bread. *“Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread”* (2 Th. 3:12). 2) The saints work take care of family to demonstrate good faith. *“But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever”* (1 Tim. 5:8). 3) They must work to help the needy. *“Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need”* (Eph. 4:28). 4) God created men to work. *“And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it”* (Genesis 2:15).

Notice that Paul says he had previously commanded them to practice these three duties in their lives. Much of Paul’s letters are not teaching things that are new. Instead, they are filled with reminders of what he had taught them publically and privately when he worked with them.

Two Results

1 Thess. 4:12 that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack

nothing.

By fulfilling the three commands found in verse eleven the saints would experience two very positive rewards. First, they would “*walk properly toward those who are outside*” (4:12a). Those on the “*outside*” is in reference to those who are unbelievers. In other words, they are not in Christ. The term “*walk*” means their manner or the conduct of their day to day life which could be viewed by non-Christians. If they lead a quiet life, minding their own business, and busied themselves with work, they would have a commendable influence on the world. Those who were not yet Christians would find them respectable. The world needs to hear the Gospel. But the ears of the lost are not open to the good news until it first see the good conduct of those who live it out day by day. Evangelism is made easier when the saints practice what they preach. When the sinful unbelievers see good behavior they will respond in a couple of ways: they may become envious and speak out against the righteousness of the righteous or they may be impressed and want to become like what they admire or they could turn a blind eye to what they witness and apathetically go back to indulging in a self-centered life. Either way God will be pleased with His children.

The second result of obeying Paul’s commands in verse eleven is they will lack nothing. This may be in direct reference to their material needs. If they work with their hands they will not have want of the basic necessities of life. This is most likely what Paul has in mind. This is similar to what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. “*But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you*” (Matt. 6:33).

Questions:

Matching

1. Draw a line to match the Greek word for love with its corresponding definition.
 - a. Eros affection, friendly love
 - b. Storge sexual relations
 - c. Philio love that seeks the best for another regardless of feelings
 - d. Agape family love

True/False

2. T F God is the perfect teacher on how brethren ought to love each other.
3. T F The brethren at Thessalonica loved each other to the point they could not be asked to increase it.
4. T F Paul had no need to encourage them to stay busy working.
5. T F Paul commanded them to have a tranquil disposition free from the inner turmoil that causes disturbances in the community.

Multiple Choice

6. Which of the following represents Biblical reasons why they should stay busy.
 - a. For daily bread
 - b. Help the needy
 - c. Support family

- d. God created men to work
7. Those who are on the “*outside*” refers to
- a. Those who are not Christians
 - b. Christians who are not members at Thessalonica
 - c. Those who are not in the church building
 - d. Those who are gentiles instead of Jews
 - e. All the above
8. How might the unbelievers respond to the good example of Christians?
- a. All the below
 - b. Persecute Christians
 - c. Become a Christians
 - d. Ignore the Christians

Application and Discussion:

9. List some ways a Christian should act toward unbelievers.

Will We Ever Meet Again?

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

4:13 But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. 15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

As Paul switches to a new subject, he begins to answer questions which were most likely on the minds of the members of the church at Thessalonica. What happens to those who die before He comes? How can we know when He will come? How should we live while we await His coming? Perhaps this is part of the feedback Paul received from Timothy's report. He will answer these pertinent questions in the next three paragraphs.

Note that the phases "Second Coming" and "end of the world" are not used here in this discussion of end times. The most common word for the return of Christ is from the Greek word *parousia* meaning "appearing." It is used among secular writings to refer to a visit by royalty. In fact, the King of kings will one day return for His Kingdom. Contrary to popular views He will not come to establish His Kingdom on earth but to gather His kingdom from the earth: both the living and the dead.

Revelation of the Return

What about life after death? Philosophers have wrestled with the question of immortality. Mediums have attempted to communicate with the dead. Others have looked for some kind of evidence of messages from beyond the grave. Scientists have researched in vain to obtain proof from their experiments. All this effort only results in human speculation. What man needs is divine revelation on the matter. Therefore, Paul wrote, "*but I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, ...For this we say to you by the word of the Lord*" (4:13a, 15a). The use of the term "ignorant" shows that Paul needs to correct some possible false conclusions that they had concerning the appearing of the Lord. This is a phrase Paul used in several of his letters (Rom. 1:13; 11:25; 1 Cor. 10:1; 12:1; 2 Cor. 1:8).

The revelation of God in the past only gave some sketchy details about life beyond the grave. Information about this has come gradually to light from Heaven. What Paul taught agreed with what Jesus taught (Jn. 5:24-29; 11:21-27). Paul first focuses on what will happen instead of when it will happen. In chapter five he will indicate that nobody knows. No where does Paul give himself to speculating as to when the Lord will appear. Which generation of Christians will witness the appearance of the Lord is not known. What is known is that every generation of Christians must live in the hope of His coming.

► **Regard for the Dead Saints**

Perhaps the greatest concern concerning these living saints had was "*concerning those who have fallen asleep*" (4:13b). "*Asleep*" is in reference to the death of the saints. Jesus used it in reference to the death of Jarius' daughter (Matt. 9:24) as well as for His friend Lazarus (Jn. 11:11-13). The same phrase is used in conjunction with the martyrdom of Stephen. Pagans of the time even used "sleep" as a

metaphor for “death.” In contrast, the New Testament writers never speak of a non-believer’s death as a “sleep.”

What Paul is saying here should not be taken as proof for the doctrine of soul sleep held by the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Seventh-day Adventists. This false concept of death holds that when a person dies his soul is in a state or condition of unconsciousness and will not be aware of anything until the future resurrection of the dead. Paul did not say that the soul went to sleep at death. Paul taught the Philippians that death is being with Christ (Phil. 1:23). He wrote, “we are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord) (2 Cor. 5:8).

Perhaps the Thessalonians falsely concluded that the brethren who had died were going to miss out on being with the Lord when He appeared. By saying they are “*asleep*” Paul pictures them in a condition of comfort and rest awaiting to be “awaken” when the Lord returns.

▶ **Relief from Sorrow and Hopelessness**

The Thessalonians had been waiting for Christ to return and now some had died. Not only have they lost brothers and sisters these souls had not been able to see the promise fulfilled. This may have left them in a state hopelessness. Paul was writing about the appearing of Jesus “*lest you sorrow as others who have no hope*” (4:13c). Christians are not to live without hope in regard to death. The Greeks thought that the grave may have not meant the end of one’s existence but it did not offer hope. The Jewish sect of the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection.

Paul is not teaching these Christians that it is wrong to weep when a loved one passes from this life. “*There is a time to weep*” (Ecclesiastes 3:4). One of the Beatitudes states, “*blessed are those who mourn*” (Matthew 5:4). It was prophesied that even Jesus would be a man of sorrows acquainted with grief (Isaiah 53:3). If there is no hope beyond the grave and the faith of the Christian is vain. “*If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable*” (1 Cor. 15:19).

▶ **Resurrection of Jesus as Proof**

Faith in the death and resurrection of Christ is essential for their hope. Paul wrote, “*for if we believe that Jesus died and rose again*” (4:14a). When Paul preached the doctrine of the resurrection to the Athenian philosophers, most of the them mocked him (Acts. 17:32). They did not believe there was any hope in death. Death was a means of getting rid of the problems and troubles associated with living in the body. So a bodily resurrection was an absurd assertion. However, the Good News taught by Jesus: “*I am the Resurrection and the Life*” (John 11:25). When Jesus said to Martha that her brother Lazarus “*will rise again*” Martha said to Him, “*I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day*” (John 11:23b,24). Of course Jesus was speaking of the miracle He was about to perform: the bodily resurrection of Lazarus. The miracle proved the Jesus can give hope over death. Furthermore, the fact that Jesus arose from the dead proves that there is a resurrection.

▶ **Restoring the Dead in Christ**

“*Even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. ...that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep*” (4:14b,15b). This means that God will raise the dead. Those who “*sleep in Jesus*” will not miss out at the appearing of Jesus. In fact, they will precede us in meeting the Lord. This also reassures the living saints the faithful dead are currently with God in a sense and will be brought with Him.

As taught elsewhere by Paul Christians shall receive glorified bodies, like the glorified body of Christ at the resurrection (Phil. 3:20,21; 1 Cor. 15:47-58). This does not mean they will be resurrected with the same physical body. As some have explained, the dead body is the “seed” that is planted in the ground; the resurrection body is the “flower” that comes from the seed. The Old Testament scriptures taught this doctrine (Job 14:13-15); 19:23-27; Ps. 16:9-11; Dan. 12:2).

▶ **Resounding Shout, Voice, and Trumpet**

No one is going to miss out on the Lord’s appearing because three unique sounds will be involved in this event: “*For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God*” (4:16a). What order these may occur or whether they occur simultaneously is anyone’s guess. Yet the purpose of these three great sounds in that the appearing

of the Lord will be unmistakable and unmissable.

The word *"shout"* is a commanding, loud word given by someone in authority, such as, an officer would give a soldiers or a charioteer commands to his horses. The purpose is to awaken from death. As Jesus resurrected Lazarus commanding, *"Lazarus, come forth"* (Jn. 11:43). My mother used to tell us children when we were playing to rowdy, "Quite it down! You kids are being loud enough to wake the dead." This of course was an exaggeration. But when the Lord shouts at His return those *"in the grave shall hear His voice"* (Jn. 5:28).

The next sounds is that of *"the voice of an archangel."* Some believe like the Jews and the Muslims that there are several archangels. Perhaps Michael is the only archangel (Jude 9; Rev. 12:7). Angels will be present with Christ when He appears (1 Thess. 1:7).

The third sound is *"the trumpet call of God."* When Moses gather the people at Mount Sinai the trumpet sounded by God so great that all the Israelites trembled with fear (Ex 19:18-20). In the Roman Empire, trumpets were used to announce the arrival of a great person. Paul told the Corinthians that the bodily resurrection would take place when the last trumpet sounded. *"Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed-- in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed"* (1 Cor. 15:51,52),

▶ **Raising the Dead First**

Who is first in line at the appearance of the Lord. Paul said, *"the dead in Christ will rise first"* (4:16b). Instead of missing out, they are first in line. Not only will the living saints know that it is the appearing of the Lord by the three sounds, but they will see the dead in Christ be the first to rise and meet Him in the air.

Living near an Air Force base in Florida we would hear sonic booms from time to time. When they occurred it was sudden and very loud. They would cause the house and every thing in it to shake and sometimes the glass to break. Early one morning while we were still asleep Beverley and I were awakened by a sonic boom. In a panic she shot up in bed and screamed "what was that, what was that!" Holding her I exclaimed, "it was only a sonic boom." She responded, "I thought it was Second Coming." "Don't be silly I said" I said. "If the Lord has returned the dead would rise first and then the saints. So I wouldn't be hear with you right now."

▶ **Rapture of the Living Saints**

"Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (4:17a). In the Latin the word used for *"caught up"* is *raputs* which is the term from which the English word "rapture" is derived. However, the Greek term is not used exclusively in the Bible for the Second Coming. Paul wrote of being *"caught up into the third heaven"* (2 Cor. 12:2).

The reason for the living saints being caught up is to *"meet the Lord."* The term used for *"meet"* is the idea of meeting important persons and every royalty. Those living when Christ appears will meet and greet the arriving visitor.

The location of this meeting of the disciples with their Lord is *"in the clouds"* and *"in the air."* *"Clouds"* often represents the presence of deity in the Bible. *"Air"* is the space between earth and heaven.

▶ **Reunion for Eternity**

Paul tells the Thessalonians of the outcome of this meeting with the Lord: *"And thus we shall always be with the Lord"* (4:17b). It will be an everlasting meeting. The end for the believer is an endless beginning with Christ. It will be one great big family reunion where no one will ever go home because every one is already home. Timelessness may be difficult for our finite minds to grasp. Time consists of past, present, and future, but eternity only consist of now.

▶ **Relieving Words of Comfort**

The present blessing Paul hopes to bestow upon these Christians with this information: *"therefore comfort one another with these words"* (4:18). Paul expects them to spread the word and comfort each other. The term comfort is from the Greek *parakaleo* meaning "to call one alongside." It

is used of the Holy Spirit whom Christ promised would come to the apostles after His ascension as the Comforter. It is comforting to know that our brothers and sister who are asleep in Christ will be with God and the Lord and we will be reunited with them at the Second Coming. Furthermore, when He appears it will bring endless comfort. Paul would later write, “*we are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord*” (2 Cor. 5:8).

Found on a tombstone in a British cemetery not far from Windsor Castle is the following epitaph:

Pause, my friend, as you walk by;
As you are now, so once was I.
As I am now, so you will be
Prepare, my friend, to follow me.

Someone came along and aptly wrote,

„,To follow you is not my intent,
Until I know which way you went.

Questions:

Matching

1. Match the terms with the event of the Second Coming.
 - a. *parousia* appearing
 - b. sleep dead in Jesus
 - c. dead in Christ first to raise
 - d. Voice of archangel
 - e. Trumpet of God
 - f. rapture from the Latin for “*caught up*”

Multiple Choice

2. When Christ comes again the living saints will meet the Lord
 - a. In the air
 - b. In the clouds
 - c. After the dead in Christ arise
 - d. All the above

Short Answer

3. How long will the saints, both living and dead, be with the Lord after the “rapture”?

4. What is the end result of this revelation concerning Christ’s appearance?

Application and Discussion:

5. How can Paul's information about Christ's return be used to comfort saints today?

6. How does this paragraph contradict the modern doctrines of premillennialism?

The Day of the Lord: “Ready or Not Here I Come”

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Kids love to play the game Hide and Seek. It is a simple game. One child hides his face and counts to a predetermined number. When he finishes count he calls out the warning: “ready or not here I come.” Christ has promised to return. He calls upon us all to be ready. There will be no countdown. He will not give us signs and warnings of His appearance.

The Day of the Lord is the same as the appearing or second coming of Christ discussed by Paul in the previous chapter. The purpose of the previous information was to comfort. This section is a warning to believers to be spiritually alert and morally prepared for the great Day that is coming.

The Day of the Lord is...

1 Thess. 5:1 But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. 2 For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. 3 For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.

Unpredictable

“But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you” (5:1). Why? Did they already know when Christ was to appear? In fact, there are no signs of the time of Christ’s return. Jesus, Himself, said, “but of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only” (Matt. 24:36).

Many false prophets have come and gone through the years claiming they can predict the arrival time of the Lord with great accuracy. Someone wrote an article titled, *50 Events Pointing to the Return of Christ by AD 2000*. The second millennium after the birth of Christ has begun and still no sign of His coming. When AD 1000 was approaching predictions swept across Europe warning of the return of the Lord. When the black plague and famines ravaged Europe in the fourteen century it was believed the end was near. The Jehovah’s Witnesses claimed that Jesus was coming back in the year 1914. They have had to amend this day several times. Seventh-Day Adventists have had to do the same. In Hal Lindsey’s *The Late Great Planet Earth* he claimed that 1988 was the year. Edgar Whisenant sent out a little booklet giving 88 alleged reasons why the Rapture would happen between Sept. 11 and 13, 1988, when it did not, he firmly stated that it would occur in 1989. Yet all this proves that no one can predicted the unpredictable.

Unexpected

Would it not be nice if thieves were kind enough to call ahead and make an appointment with their intended victims. That way they could be ready for them by leaving the door unlocked, making sure the house of clean, and having the police setting in the living room waiting for them. Just as a burglar does not announce his arrival ahead of time, Jesus will come when He is least expected. *“For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night” (5:2).* Jesus said, *“but know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have*

watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” (Matt. 24:43,44).

This “*day of the Lord*” is used throughout the Bible as an appoint time by God to bring judgment. However, in this context it refers to the Second Coming.

Unplanable

Pax et securitas was a popular slogan of the imperial Roman propaganda machine. Paul uses the phrase here. It is what the unprepared saints might say in regard to the Lord’s return. “*For when they say, “Peace and safety!” (5:3a).* The first century enjoyed an unprecedented peace in the Roman Empire. Historians refer to this period as the *Pax Romana*.

Often when things are calm and peaceable people will tend to let their guard down. In times of peace few are concerned with making plans for war. During the Deluge and in Sodom and Gomorrah people were be eating, drinking, and marrying when suddenly the destructive judgment of God fell upon them (Lk. 17:26,27). False prophets like to leave people unprepared for the Day of Judgment by proclaiming false peace (Jer. 6:14; Ezek. 13:10). Since that Day will come according to God’s plans Christians can carelessly get caught up in the things of the moment.

Consider for a moment if God would let everyone in on His timetable. So everyone knew exactly when Christ would appear. Sinners would wait till the last moment to be baptized to wash away their sins. Christians would forsake their duties and live like the world until the time was almost upon them. The fact that no one knows motivates all to seek God now.

Unpleasant

Those who are unprepared for the Day will find that “*sudden destruction comes upon them*” (5:3b). In 2 Thesslonians 1:9, the phrase “*eternal destruction*” stand was the opposite of “*eternal life.*” Those who are found to be disobedient to God will find themselves separated from God forever. It will come upon them so suddenly there will be no chance of them repenting and establishing a relationship with God. When the end comes there will be no reprieves, no second chances, no escape.

Uncertain

A pregnant woman knows that her time will eventually come. No expectant mother knows the hour when a natural birth will begin. The Second Coming of Christ is “*as labor pains upon a pregnant woman*” (5:3c). When a woman is ready to give birth, she can’t change her mind. Ready or not, the baby is coming. Because He has not come yet does not mean that the Lord will not come. Some false teachers have taken advantage of delayed coming of the Lord. “*Scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation” (2 Peter 3:3,4).*

Unavoidable

When the Day does finally arrive Paul says “*they shall not escape*” (5:3d). After 120 years the rains finally came and only eight souls were saved on the ark. No one else escaped the flood. When fire and brimstone finally began to rain down on Sodom and the cities of the plain only Lot and his two virgin daughters were spare. No one else escaped. Knowing something is unavoidable should encourage a mature, reasonable person to prepare to face it.

Be Ready

1 Thess. 5:4 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. 5 You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. 6 Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. 8 But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.

Stay in the Light and Day

The contrasting phrases “*light and darkness*” and “*day and night*” are often used in the Bible to

denote the contrast between good and evil. Thieves come in the night under the cover of darkness to catch their victims unprepared. Today with electricity and security lights would be victims protect themselves by staying in the light and avoid the dark passages. Whereas thieves operate in the night and in the dark, Christians live their lives working in the light of day.

Stay Awake

As a soldier is commanded to "stay alert" on his post so Christians must be ready. Those found asleep on duty were subject to execution. Sleeping is akin to not being careful and being apathetic about the condition of one's soul. Jesus warned of the need to watch. *"Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming"* (Matt. 25:13).

Stay Sober

In contrast to the condition of those who sleep and drink, Paul commanded, *"but let us who are of the day be sober"* (5:8a). Getting drunk the opposite of sober. The use of alcohol lowers inhibitions to sinful behavior and makes it harder for the mind and make good moral decisions. This stupor leaves one out of control and inattentive.

Stay Armed

In Ephesians 6:10-20 Paul speaks of the breastplate is righteousness and the helmet is salvation. In this passage he commands Christians to put *"on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation"* (5:8b). Not only do good soldiers stay awake and sober watching out for the sudden appearance of the enemy, they must also stay armed. Although Christ is not the enemy spiritual armor is to be worn by Christians at all times. The intent of the verb *"putting"* is that the soldiers of Christ keep on putting on this armor. Faith and love act as a breastplate to protect their hearts. Paul again mentions the triumphant triad by including hope. The helmet keeps the minds focused on the goal of the Christian: his eternal salvation in the end.

God's Future Plan for Us

1 Thess. 5:9 For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.

Appointed to Salvation

The word *"appoint"* means "a destiny, an appointed end." The term *"wrath"* most likely means the final judgment of the wicked. Christians were saved to be saved, not saved to become the subjects of God's eternal wrath. Salvation that is to be obtained in the future is referring to eternal life. The destiny of the disciples is different then the appointed destiny of the disobedient. Just as Noah and Lot escaped the wrath of God which came upon those wicked generations. So the saints will escape the wrath of God appointed for this generation. Thus the sinner faces the future with apprehension, while the saved looks forward to it with anticipation. Remember, Christ did not die for the lost to suffer the wrath of God, He died for them to be saved throughout eternity.

Destined to Be Together

In verses 6 and 7, wakefulness and sleepfulness represent godly and ungodly living. Now Paul reverts to the meaning of "sleep" in the previous chapter. Here sleep means those who are dead on Christ. *"Wake"* refers to those saints who are alive at the appearing of Christ. Paul is saying that it really does not matter when one is still alive when Christ returns or whether he is dead. Since Christ died and arose all saints dead or alive with live with Him forever when He appears.

Mutual Responsibilities

1 Thess. 5:11 Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing"

Considering all these characteristics of the Day of the Lord, the need for Christians to always be

ready, and God's eternal plans for the saved (living or dead), Paul now commands the Thessalonians to "comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing" (5:11). They are to keep on comforting and keep on edifying. They have been doing this in the past and need to continue it the future.

In light of the facts about the end times, people would be far better off if they would stop wasting their lives away making predictions and forecasts concerning the day and hour of Christ's return. Instead, comfort those who have lost loved ones who are now asleep in Christ. Edifying others by teaching them and helping them to be sober and prepared for that Day.

Questions:

Matching

1. Draw a line matching the false prophet with false prophecy.
 - a. Jehovah's Witnesses Christ returns in 1988
 - b. William Miller Changed the return date to 1989
 - c. Edgar Whisenant Christ returns in 1839
 - d. Hal Lindsey Christ returns in 1914

2. Draw a line matching the events of the Second Coming with their meaning.
 - a. Day of the Lord "peace and safety"
 - b. Thief in the night Second Coming of Christ
 - c. Pax et securitas judgment upon the wicked at Second Coming
 - d. Sudden destruction unannounced appearing of the Lord

Short Answer

3. How is the Day of the Lord like a pregnant woman?

4. Show from this passage that no one will have a second chance to escape the wrath of the Day of the Lord.

5. Show how Christians are to stay in the light versus the darkness and in the day versus the night.

Multiple Choice

6. Paul's command to "watch" means:
 - a. Stay awake
 - b. Stay sober
 - c. Stay armed

7. Paul's command to be sober implies:
 - a. To be free from the intoxicating effects of alcohol and drugs
 - b. To have an alert mind
 - c. Both

8. To put on one's breastplate and helmet means:
 - a. Stay awake
 - b. Stay sober
 - c. Stay armed

9. What is NOT God's future plan for the saints?
 - a. Appointed to salvation
 - b. Appointed to wrath
 - c. Live forever with the saints

10. Two mutual duties of brethren based on the information in this passage:
 - a. Admonish and rebuke
 - b. Comfort and edify
 - c. Awake and arm
 - d. All the above

Application and Discussion:

11. Why is it more important for Christians to be ready for the appearing of the Lord instead of knowing when He will return?

Duties: Leaders & the Church

1 Thessalonians 5:12-15

Having concluded his discussion about questions pertaining to the coming appearance of Christ in the end, Paul lists several sundry exhortations. These are parallel to the list of commands given by Paul in Romans 12:13-18. They are not random and unstructured. These are the duties the brethren are urged to fulfill as leaders toward the congregation, the congregation toward its leaders, children toward God the Father and students toward the Truth.

Duties of the Leaders

1 Thess. 5:12 And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, 13 and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves.

As a young congregation the Thessalonians needed leadership. It is doubtful that they had time to establish an eldership with deacons assisting in this short of time. Yet, all congregation will have men who will step up and fill the need for leadership. While Paul urges the brethren to serve the leaders of their congregation, he mentions the service being performed by the leadership.

- **Labor Among You**

The church definitely had leaders for Paul speaks of “*who labor among you*” (5:12b). The term “*labor*” means to work hard to the point of exhaustion. These leaders were not members of another congregation but were “*among*” the brethren. The fact the Paul describes them by the work they do shows that leadership in the church is not wearing a title of respect and honor, it involves receiving respect and honor for the hard work the leadership performs for the church. Leadership is a matter of function, not a mere place of honor rewarded for faithful service. FF. Bruce said it well, “leaders did not do the appropriate work because they had been appointed as leaders, they were recognized as leaders because they were seen to be doing the work.” David Bercot, in his book *Will the Real Heretics Please Stand Up* speaking of church leadership in the early centuries: “The...elders weren't outsiders brought into the congregation; they had generally lived in it for years. Their strengths and weaknesses were well known to the entire congregation. Furthermore, they didn't qualify to serve as overseers or elders by studying in school and stuffing their heads with knowledge. The congregation wasn't as interested in the depth of their knowledge as they were in the depth of their spirituality. How close was the man to God? Had he lived for years as an example to other Christians? Was he ready to lay down his life for Christ? As Tertullian told the Romans, “Our elders are proven men who obtain their position not by purchase, but by established character.”

- **Over You**

Paul told the church at Thessalonica that these leaders “*are over you*” (5:12c). “*Over*” literally refers to the action of taking the lead. It involves someone protecting and caring for another. As a father care for his household (1 Tim. 3:4,5) and elders show care for the church (1 Tim. 5:17).

This oversight of the leadership is modified by one qualifier: “*in the Lord.*” This is to say that the authority of their leadership is from the Lord and Master Jesus Christ. They are not to use their position of leadership as a means of lording it over the congregation.

- **Admonish You**

Not only do the leaders care and protect the congregation, but Paul tell the brethren that they “*admonish you*” (5:12d). To admonish to “put in mind” or as one translation renders this commandment: “warn you against all that is wrong” (NLT). Much of leadership involves reminding the brethren of things they often forget. Paul told the elders of Ephesus at Miletus that for three years he did this for them “*night and day*” (Acts 20:31). To constantly instruct, remind, and correct requires personal discipline on the part of the leadership.

Duties of the Brethren Toward Their Leaders

1 Thess. 5:12 And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, 13 and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves.

Productive leadership necessitates co-operative disciples. No matter how qualified and hard working the leadership the congregation may have they can only lead those who are willing follow and feed those who have the appetite to eat.

- **Recognize Them**

The members of a congregation are “*to recognize those*” (5:12a) who are leading them. This involves appreciation and acceptance. They are to know them well enough to be able to value the work they are doing. Just as the good shepherd will know his sheep by name (John 10:3) and know of their needs, so the congregation needs to know those who strive to shepherd them. Recognize their value to you personally, and congregationally. This does not teach brethren to give their leaders honorary titles and positions. It is a shame when the congregation does not know who its overseers are. This could be just as much a negative reflection on the leadership as on the church.

- **Esteem Them**

The next duty of the congregation toward its leaders is “*to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake*” (5:13a). “*Esteem*” could be translated “respect” or “acknowledge.” “deserve recognition.” This is to be done “*very highly*” or higher honor than high honor. The high the value one places on the work these men do the greater ones evaluation of these men.

The manner in which this esteem is rendered is “*in love*.” This is not out of a sense of duty as a soldier is obligated to salute his officer.

The reason for this high esteem: “*for their work's sake*.” Not because of their education, financial portfolio, title, etc. The high esteem is commensurate with their hard work. The leaders who work hard are easier to highly respect.

- **Be At Peace**

One of the best ways to respect and encourage the leaders of a congregation is for the members to “*be at peace among*” themselves (5:13b). Nothing makes leadership harder than when the members are bickering and biting. Nothing makes leadership easier than when the members are loving each other and pursuing peace. Leaders who spend all their time playing referee with squabbling members will not have the time or energy to hope the church grow.

Duties of the Brethren Toward the Congregation

1 Thess. 5:14 Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. 15 See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.

It is said the ninety percent of the work accomplished in a congregation is performed by ten

percent of the membership. Leaders can only do their work. Members must not only encourage the leadership, but they must also fulfill their responsibilities to the other members.

◆ **Warn the Unruly**

First, the members are to “*warn those who are unruly*” (5:14a). The “unruly” are those who are disorderly, behaving irresponsibly, show a lack of spiritual discipline. Like a soldier marching out of rank or out of step. This is found in those who are rebellious and defiant Christians.

Such unruly members to be warned is the same word translated “admonished” in verse twelve. These must be told to shape up and to mend their ways. This is a grave responsibility according to Ezekiel 3:18-19: “*when I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul.*”

◆ **Comfort the Fainthearted**

Next, they are to “*comfort the fainthearted*” (5:14b). “*Feebleminded*” in the King James has too harsh a connotation. Literally the “*fainthearted*” means those who are “small-souled” or “little of soul.” Those in the congregation who are discouraged, who have lack of self-confidence and self-worth. These are the ones who need “*comfort*.” The word is used in relation to the comfort friends were being Mary and Martha at the death of Lazarus (John 11:19).

◆ **Uphold the Weak**

Another duty is to “*uphold the weak*” (5:14c). This may refer to those who are weak in the faith as newborn babes in Christ. However, this is nothing said that this command be limited to novices. It could refer to those who are simply not as strong as they ought to be. Of these Paul wrote, “*that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting*” (Eph. 4:14). Perhaps a phone call, an invitation to lunch.

These weak members need someone to prop them up to support them. It is like the “buddy system” where the instructor assigns a strong swimmer to buddy up with a weaker swimmer. During the Israelites battle with the Amalekites, Joshua was leading the children of Israel into battle. As long as Moses was able to hold up the rod they were winning, but when his arms grew heavy the Amalekites began to prevail in battle. Seeing this Aaron and Hur set Moses on a rock and each one took an arm to support until the battle was over (Ex. 17ff). Sometime we all become weak and need someone to hold up our arms in battle.

◆ **Be Patient Toward All**

The next command of Paul will benefit everyone. “*Brethren, be patient with all*” (5:14d). Patience comes from the Greek *makrothumia*. It is longsuffering. As Noah who patiently endure everyone in the wicked world while preaching righteousness and preparing the ark. A sign in an office read, “Please be patient with me, God is not finished with me yet!”

◆ **Stop Revenge**

“*See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone*” (5:15a). Retaliation is not a right granted to every man. The “eye for an eye” concept taken out of the Old Testament has been greatly abused. The Law of Moses was not granting everyone a fair chance to see personal revenge. It was used to limit the punishment of the criminal so as not to exceed the crime. Jesus taught His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount, “*but I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. ...But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you*” (Mt. 5:39,44). To the Romans Paul wrote, “*repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. Therefore 'if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you*

will heap coals of fire on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:17-21). William Arthur Dunkerley said, “wrong cannot right the wrongs that wrong has done”. When somebody does wrong to a Christian the latter must respond by doing good in return.” Only God can exact true and just revenge. Christians must let God do His job, otherwise the cycle of revenge may never end.

◆ **Pursue Good**

*“But always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all” (5:15b). This is the counter command to the prohibition of repaying evil for evil. It is to be obeyed in relationship to the brethren and to the world. This would be a good definition of *agape* love. This reminds us of the Golden Rule in Matthew 7:12. In every situation stop and think about achieving the best possible positive outcome.*

Ever wonder what you could do for the church. Here Paul lists three things you can do as a leader for the brethren: work hard, care and protect them, and admonish them. He lists three things you can do for the leadership: recognize them, esteem them, and be at peace. When it comes to the rest of the brethren and the world he commanded six more duties: warn the unruly, uphold the weak, comfort the fainthearted, be patient with all, stop revenge, and pursue good.

Questions:

True/False

1. T F There is absolute proof the church at Thessalonica had elders and deacons.
2. T F Productive leadership necessitates co-operative disciples.
3. T F Avenging a wrong is a right of everyone whose rights have been violated.

Matching

4. Draw a line matching the duties of leaders with the correct meaning.

a. labor	authority of the leadership
b. among you	warn you against all that is wrong
c. are over you	work to the point of exhaustion
d. in the Lord	in the congregation
e. admonish you	care and protect
5. Draw a line matching the duties of Christians toward their leaders with the corresponding point.

a. to recognize	cooperative members make happy leaders
b. to esteem very highly	appreciation and acceptance
c. for their work’s sake	in love
d. Be at peace among yourselves	motive for esteeming them

Duties Toward God & His Truth

1 Thessalonians 5:16-22

Having given several duties for leaders and the brethren to do toward each other and with regard to the church, Paul now gives several commands to be fulfilled by the saints at Thessalonica toward God and His Truth.

Duties of the Brethren Toward God

1 Thess. 5:16 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

✓ **Always Rejoice**

Paul's first commandment is for the brethren at Thessalonica to *"rejoice always"* (5:16). Paul gave a similar command to the Philippians. *"Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!"* (Phil. 4:4). Yet how can a Christian be happy when bad things happen to them for behaving like Christians. They were suffering persecution. Whereas happiness depends on happenstance, joy is not based on one's circumstances in the world, but on one's relationship to the Lord. Suffering in this life is inevitable. Be miserable is optional. Paul wrote about his life experience in serving God *"as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing"* (2 Cor. 6:10). When Paul and Silas were beaten and chained and put in the inner prison at Philippi they *"were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them"* (Acts 16:25). *"And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance"* (Rom. 5:3). James wrote, *"my brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials"* (James 1:2). True joy is able to transcend one's troubles. True joy can have a positive inward up-look when the outlook is negative. True joy is more about attitude and expression instead of an emotional experience.

The world needs to see that living for Jesus is always and in everything a great joy. Atheist Friedrich Nietzsche said scornfully about Christians of his day, "I would believe in their savior if they looked a little more like people who have been saved."

✓ **Never Stop Praying**

The next commandment seems impossible: *"pray without ceasing"* (5:17). What is Paul demanding of us? Praying 24/7 three hundred and sixty five days out of the year. To answer the call some have redefined prayer to mean some sort of sub-conscious rambling of the mind to God on a continual basis. Yet no where in the Bible do we find evidence that this is what prayer means.

Other passages with similar commands about the prevalence of prayer in the life of a Christian might help. A widow indeed is one who *"continues in supplications and prayers night and day"* (1 Tim. 5:5). Paul has previously assured the Thessalonians that *"night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face"* (1 Thess. 3:10) and *"we also thank God without ceasing"* (1 Thess. 2:13). To the Romans Paul wrote that they should be *"continuing steadfastly in prayer"* (Rom. 12:12). Jesus spoke in a parable to His disciples *"that men always ought to pray and not lose heart"* (Luke 18:1). F. F. Bruce interprets it to mean "pray incessantly" (Bruce 124). Just as one who eats without ceasing does not mean they have food in the mouth all the time. Instead it means they never fast, they never miss a meal. A faithful child of God never misses an opportunity to talk to his Father. Prayer is a constant part of the Christian's daily life.

✓ **In Everything Give Thanks**

Christians are to pray at every opportunity and *"in everything give thanks"* (5:18a). Joy, gratitude, and prayer naturally go well together. Again it looks like Paul is making another impossible request of us. How is it that a Christian can be thankful for *"everything"*? Should one be thankful to God that the family who lived next door to them were all suddenly killed by a drunk driver on the highway? Note, Paul is not saying for us to thank God for everything but in everything give thanks. There is a big difference.

For example, a little boy said he was not thankful for his poor eyesight. Yet he was thankful for his glasses. Not only did it enable him to see, but it kept the boys from fighting him and the girls from kissing him.

✓ **Do the Will of God**

All three of the previous commands represent *"the will of God in Christ Jesus"* (5:18b). Paul is not talking about the will of God in general but the will of God that they always express joy, prayer, and gratitude.

Duties of the Brethren Toward the Truth

1 Thess. 5:19 Do not quench the Spirit. 20 Do not despise prophecies. 21 Test all things; hold fast what is good. 22 Abstain from every form of evil.

✓ **Quench Not the Spirit**

"Do not quench the Spirit" (5:19). The word *"quench"* is translated *"stifle."* Yet the Holy Spirit is pictured as a fire in Acts 2:1-4. The word means to douse a fire with water or dirt. It is an effort on the part of the disobedient to hinder the work of the Holy Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit in the first century was to reveal the Word of God. Any effort to stop or hinder it would be a violation of this command. Revelation has been completed for nearly two thousand years. However, Christians can still quench the Spirit indirectly by refusing to hear or accept the Spirit revealed Word. The Pharisees quench the Holy Spirit reveal words of Stephen when they stopped their ears and stoned him to death. This also can be done in relation to the very next prohibition by Paul.

✓ **Despise Not Prophecies**

"Do not despise prophecies" (5:20). One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the early church was the ability to prophecy. This did not just involve future telling of world events but forth telling God's Will. According to F. F. Bruce prophesying is *"declaring the mind of God in the power of the Spirit"*

In the Corinthian letter Paul dealt with the brethren who were exulting the gift of speaking in tongues over the other gifts, even the gift of prophecy. Paul claimed that all gifts would one day be done away. However, to prophecy was of no less value than to speak in tongues and in some ways superior.

Today, many are casting aside Gospel preaching as boring and ineffective. They are looking to other forms of speaking based on more interesting topics. They want music and entertainment in their worship. Are these not despising the forth telling of God's Word?

✓ **Test All Things**

Paul's final duty given to the Thessalonians is for them to *"test all things"* (5:21a). To test something means to sift through it or closely examine it in order to determine whether or not it is genuine. As a Jew in the first century would test a pair of oxen or a prospective buyer today would test drive a car.

Everything needs to be questioned, criticized, checked out or evaluated in light of the Holy Spirit revealed Word. It is a fair-minded person who searches all doctrines. Of the Bereans Luke wrote, *"these were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so"* (Acts 17:11). John commanded, *"beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard"*

was coming, and is now already in the world” (1 Jn. 4:1-3).

Every sermon we hear, every Bible class we sit through and every religious article we read should be tested by comparing what they say to what God has said in the Bible. Only the Bible can be the correct standard for testing. Testing implies a standard of measure. The testing cannot be based on personal preferences, public opinion or the wisdom of current experts or personal experimentation.

Remember the burden of proof is on the shoulders of the one who is proclaiming a particular doctrine. This is not only true of something that is taught but moral behavior as well. Smoking marijuana is not okay so long as no one seems to be able to find a verse in the Bible to condemn it to the users satisfaction. In fact, they should test it out first and only smoking it after proving it.

Paul gives two results of or responses to this testing: *“hold fast to what is good, abstain from every form of evil” (5:21b, 22).* “Good” means that which is genuine as opposed to that which is counterfeit. When the testing is over and the teaching is true to God’s Word and the behavior is morally pure than by all means latch on to it and never let it go. Preach the true and practice the godliness. Beware of fixing the results of the test. Isaiah warned, *“woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (Is. 5:20).*

Verse twenty-two has been misused due to an inadequate understanding of some translations. In some this verse reads, “abstain from the very appearance of evil” or “stay away from things that have an outward appearance of evil.” Some think this verse is teaching Christians to avoid anything - good or bad - which might even give the impression of evil. For example, a preacher should never stand in the parking lot of the church and drink water out of a whiskey bottle. Although he should not, this is NOT what this verse is teaching. Jesus did not keep for healing on the Sabbath just because it might appear to be the evil of breaking the Sabbath day. Instead, Jesus warned, *“do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment” (John 7:24).* A thing is not evil just because someone thought it looked that way.

Perhaps some other translations can help clear up this misunderstanding. J.B. Philips translates this as “steer clear of evil in any form.” Nestle’s Interlinear: “From every form of evil, abstain.” Although the Bible condemns all sin, it does not list every type of sin in detail. It abortion is a form of the evil of murder than Christians are to avoid it. If a Christian tests gambling and finds it to be the evil of stealing and covetousness then he must abstain for it. If taking a certain recreational drug hinders one from being temperate or being sober-minded get rid of that habit. If a woman discovers that allowing men to massage their bare body causes them to lust in their hearts, she needs to stop and repent immediately. If a man finds that being a lifeguard causes him to lust after half-naked girls on the beach he must repent and quit his job.

A faithful Christian will test and question everything!

Questions:

True/False

1. T F A Christian can rejoice at all times except when circumstances are negative.
2. T F It is impossible for a Christian to literally pray twenty-four hours a day seven days a week.
3. T F There are times when Christian cannot find something for which to be thankful.

Short Answer

4. Give an example of “*quenching*” the Spirit.

5. Give some examples and other passages of those *“testing all things.”*
6. What standard is used for *“testing all things”*?
7. What are the two results of or responses to this testing?
8. How is the verses translated *“abstain from the very appearance of evil”* often misinterpreted?

Application and Discussion:

1. How can Christians today despise prophecies?
2. List some commonly accepted practices among Christians which ought be to tested to see if they are scriptural.

Final Remarks

1 Thessalonians 5:23-28

Typically Paul will close out an epistle with a list of various exhortation, a prayer, a command to greet each other, greetings to them for other saints, and a benediction. In this letter there is little need for a list of greetings. The letter itself was from Paul, Timothy, and Silas who had been in contact with them. In his final remarks he does offer a final prayer, a few final commands, and a final blessing.

Final Prayer

1 Thess. 5:23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.

Paul had given thanks for them and prayed for them in chapter three. Now he begins this prayer by praise God as the source of peace. Worldly peace is the absence of conflict whereas Christian peace is the presence of God.

The first intercession in this prayer is for the complete sanctification of the Thessalonians. Only God can cleanse them and make them wholly holy. It is God who sets them aside for His service, exclusively for His use. As has been already seen in this letter, sanctification is an on-going process. The saint moves further and further away from the sinful world and closer and closer toward a purer relationship with a Holy God. This process began when the sinner heard the truth and obeyed the truth. Jesus prayed, “*sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth*” (John 17:17). As we live the life of a Christians we are continually cleansed by the blood of Christ when we repent our sins, confess our sins, and pray for the forgiveness of our sins (1 John 1:7-10). The end goal of a holy life is to be separated for all eternity to be with our Holy God in the Most Holy of Holies - Heaven.

The second intercession in this prayer was for God to keep them wholly blameless. Their “*whole spirit, soul, and body*” is intrinsically a synonym for “*you*.” Paul is not using this prayer to teach a doctrine concerning the difference in these three terms. No where else in the New Testament do these terms appear together. These are most likely being used to sum up all or the whole of a man. To be blameless before God at Jesus’ appearing. If the Bible really teaches “once saved, always saved” why did Paul pray for their preservation. And if they were saved once for all with no fear of falling from grace why the need to pray for God to sanctify them in the future. If they are to be holy and blameless in the future they are going to need God’s help. Paul prays for this because he knows that they cannot maintain sanctification and blamelessness. In effect Paul is saying, “I have been urging you to do certain things, but it is only in God’s strength that you will be able to do them” (Morris 179).

When Christ does come for the saints, Paul prays that they will be found without any embarrassing sins revealed. “*And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming*” (1 John 2:28).

This prayer mentions the source of their confidence: “*He who calls you is faithful*” (5:24a). God did not call us into His kingdom through the Gospel and then not to help us be ready when He sends His Son. Whereas the gods created by men are unfaithful and man in general cannot be trusted, God always fulfills His end of the deal. God gets things done, but that is only if Christians will do their part.

Paul's prayer was one of total confidence in God "*who also will do it*" (5:24b). God is trustworthy and capable. Concerning his own soul he trusted God to keep his soul safe till the Second Coming. "*For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day*" (2 Tim. 1:12). This is not a blind trust or mere wishful thinking. God can be trusted with the saint's future because He saved them in the past and has always kept His promises. "*Has His mercy ceased forever? Has His promise failed forevermore? ... I will remember the works of the Lord; Surely I will remember Your wonders of old. I will also meditate on all Your work, And talk of Your deeds*" (Ps. 77:8, 11,12). Another reason to trust God's faithfulness in our future salvation is His divine nature. "*God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?*" (Num. 23:19).

Final Commands

1 Thess. 5:25 Brethren, pray for us. 26 Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss. 27 I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren.

Pray for Us

"*Brethren, pray for us*" (5:25) is a very common request made by Paul throughout his epistles. (Rom. 15:30-32; Eph. 6:19,20; Col. 4:3,4; 2 Thess. 3:1,2). He needs their prayers just as much as they are in need of his.

Greet All Brethren

The next command: "*Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss*" (5:26) reminds us of Romans 16:16. The mode of greeting in the east involved and in some place still does involve kissing the cheek or cheeks. The manner of greeting is not the issue as much as the motive or characteristic of the practice. However one may greet whether it be kissing, bowing or shaking of the hands it must be holy. Usually the men kissed the men, and the women kissed the women. These greetings between Christians were to be special. They had a special relationship unlike any other group of people on earth. They were a holy people set apart to serve a holy God. Christians should be able to show their love and appreciation to one another. One day they will greet all the saints when the Lord appears. It is wise to get to know a few of them while living on this earth.

Read Letter to All

"*I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren*" (5:27). Like most ancient letters this epistle was hand written and the only copy. The contents were to be shared with others. There is good reason to believe Paul intended the Thessalonians to share its contents with other brethren in Macedonia as well. His demands are put in the form of an oath. This information is too important not to be read.

Final Blessing

1 Thess. 5:28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

Paul closes this epistle to the Thessalonians as he does most of his letters with a final blessing upon them from God. Until the Lord Jesus Christ comes again he wants His grace to be with them. This letter began with grace and ends with grace.

Questions:

True/False

1. T F Worldly peace is the absence of conflict whereas Christian peace is the presence of God.
2. T F The phrase "*spirit, soul, and body*" are most likely being used to sum up all or the whole of a man.
3. T F Paul prays for the Thessalonians because he knows they cannot maintain sanctification and blamelessness without the help of God.

Short Answer

4. In what way is God faithful according to this passage?
5. Upon what basis does the Christian have confidence that God will do what is best for us? List other passages.
6. In what manner are they to greet all the brethren?
7. What was to be done with this letter?

Application and Discussion:

8. Why is it important for the saints to greet one another in a holy manner?

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