
a *Grace Notes* publication

1 Thessalonians

Dr. Grant C. Richison

1 Thessalonians

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Foreword

These lessons in **1 Thessalonians** are compiled from the writings of Dr. Grant C. Richison, which were published on the Internet beginning in 1997 in the Campus Crusades (Canada) daily online devotional Today's Word.

Dr. Richison is a highly experienced pastor, lecturer, and Christian servant who is dedicated to a lifetime of studying and teaching God's Word. Almost immediately after his salvation he began to desire to teach the Word, and he set about a lifelong program of preparation and ministry.

Dr. Richison has a diploma from Detroit Bible Institute, a bachelor's degree in religious education from William Tyndale College (Detroit), a Masters in Theology from Dallas Theological Seminary, and a doctorate in ministries from Luther Rice Seminary in Jacksonville, Florida.

Dr. Richison has been pastor and senior pastor of Baptist churches from 1965 to 1992. His most recent pastorate was at Grant Memorial Baptist Church, Winnipeg, Manitoba, where, over a 20 year period, he had oversight of a ministry that expanded from about 350 to more than 2500 communicants. During the period of his pastorates, Dr. Richison was also a lecturer at Detroit Bible College and Winnipeg Theological Seminary.

From 1993 to 1995, Dr. Richison was Director of Leadership Ministries for Campus Crusade for Christ (Canada). He currently has a world-wide lecture ministry with Campus Crusade.

Dr. Richison is an experienced writer, and he provides materials for three areas on the Internet: Sermon on the Net; Today's Word, and Pastors' Power Points. He has considerable ability to communicate God's Word verse by verse in a relevant, clear, applicable and insightful manner and to communicate vision and establish a philosophy of ministry in the local assembly. .

Dr. Richison has served on the following boards and conferences:

- Lower Michigan Baptist General Conference (district of Baptist General Conference, board member)
 - Great Lakes Baptist Conference (district of Baptist General Conference, chairman)
 - Central Canada Baptist Conference (district of Baptist General Conference, chairman)
 - Child Evangelism Fellowship (Manitoba)
 - Evangelical Fellowship of Canada
 - International Ministries to Israel (Canada)
 - Chairman of Greater Manitoba Sunday School Convention
 - Chairman of Marney Patterson Evangelistic Crusade (city-wide in Winnipeg)
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- Chairman of Terry Winter Evangelistic Crusade (city-wide in Winnipeg)
 - Chairman of the "Why Campaign" (city-wide evangelistic trust in Winnipeg)
 - Chairman of the Board of Regents of Canadian Baptist Seminary (part of consortium of seminaries on Trinity Western University)
 - Baptist General Conference of Canada (board member)
 - Briarcrest Bible College and Seminary, Moose Jaw, Sask.
 - Electronic Bible Society, Dallas Texas
 - President's Cabinet, Campus Crusade for Christ, Canada

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Verse-by-verse courses are available in more than 30 books of the Bible. Some of the courses include word studies (categorical doctrine) or historical articles (isagogics) that are relevant to the passages being discussed. Other courses offered are Bible character studies, comprehensive studies of the Christian Life and Basics of the Christian Life, an extensive series on the Person and Word of Jesus Christ, and a thorough study of the Attributes of God. You are invited to write to the address below, or write by e-mail, to inquire about Grace Notes materials.

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Introduction

VALUE OF STUDYING 1 THESSALONIANS

- A. We get a powerful picture of the ministry of the great apostle Paul.
- B. We get a picture of the dynamics of an early church.
- C. We receive the encouragement of our hope in Christ.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO MINISTRY AT THESSALONICA

- A. At Troy, Paul received the Macedonian vision to go to Europe, Acts 16:8-14.

This was the beginning of spreading the gospel from the continent of Asia to the continent of Europe.

Going to Thessalonica brought the ministry of the gospel to Western civilization.

Macedonia was the former kingdom of Alexander the Great (he wanted to dominate the world and spread one world domination and enlightenment through the Greek culture. He wanted to marry East and West).

- B. Paul came to minister in Thessalonica for three successive and successful weeks.

The Jews accused Paul's evangelistic team of "turning the world upside down." Paul fled the city in the face of much opposition.

- C. The principal people in the church at Thessalonica were Gentiles (1 Thessalonians 1:9; Acts 17:4).

THE CITY OF THESSALONICA

- A. In Paul's day, Thessalonica was a famous city in the zenith of its splendor.

- B. Famous harbor:

Situated on the Thermic Gulf, a natural harbor. When he invaded Europe, Xerxes the Persian established his naval base in this bay. It was one of the world's greatest dockyards of Roman

- C. Free city:

No troops quartered within it.

Autonomy in all internal affairs.

- D. One hundred miles Southwest of Philippi and more important than Philippi.

While Philippi was a Roman colony, Thessalonica's culture was distinctly Greek.

- E. Most populous city in Macedonia.
- F. Large share in the commerce of the Aegean.
- G. Strategic importance:

Harbor and the Egnatian Way were crucial to spreading Christianity to all the world.

The Egnatian Way went West to Rome and East to Asia.

- H. In post-apostolic times the gospel made rapid progress in Thessalonica.

- I. Thessalonica is the city of Salonica today (or Thessaloniki),

- J. Population in the first century: about 200,000 people

FOUNDING OF THE CHURCH, ACTS 17:1-10

Paul founded the Thessalonian church on his second missionary expedition.

Paul got an immediate response to the gospel.

When Paul left Thessalonica, he went to Berea, then Athens and finally Corinth where he wrote First Thessalonians.

OCCASION

- A. Immediate occasion: report of Timothy to Paul at Corinth about the state of the Thessalonica church. His report indicated that they were steadfast and making progress in their faith.

- B. On the whole, affairs of the church were in good state, especially in view of the fact that most believers were new Christians (1 Thessalonians 1:7; 2:14; 3:4-6; 4:9,10).

- C. The problems:

Some people were seeking to undermine Paul, accusing him of false teaching, immoral teaching and hypocrisy.

Some indicated that he was afraid to return (1 Thessalonians 2:17-18).

They accused Paul of being greedy and using flattery (1 Thessalonians 2:5,6).

There were Cliques in the church (1 Thessalonians 5:13,20, 26-27).

There was confusion about the end times (1 Thessalonians 4:11-18; 5:1-6).

Some believers despised authority (1 Thessalonians 5:12-14).

Some had relapsed into immorality (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8).

PURPOSES

- A. To fortify young believers in basic doctrine.
- B. To encourage them in holy living.
- C. To comfort them with the coming of Christ.
- D. To correct false doctrine.
- E. To urge respect for leadership.
- F. To remove suspicions which would undermine their faith.
- G. To encourage them through persecution.
- H. To express thanks to them.
- I. To instruct them in church life.
- J. To combat errors of conduct rather than errors of belief.

PLACE OF WRITING: CORINTH

DATE: WINTER AD 51-52

Gallio was proconsul of the province of Achaia, AD 52

About 20 years after the resurrection

DESIGNATION

Some Jews.

Great number of Gentiles.

Great number of chief women.

THEME - RAPTURE (EVERY CHAPTER)

- A. Anticipating Christ Himself (1 Thessalonians 1:9,10).
- B. Anticipating reward (1 Thessalonians 2:19,20).
- C. Anticipating advance (1 Thessalonians 3:12,13).
- D. Anticipating reunion with Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).
- E. Anticipating perfection (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

KEY VERSES: 1 THESSALONIANS 1:9,10

"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, 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 Thessalonians 1:9-10).

PECULIARITIES OF THE EPISTLE

- A. One of the earliest epistles that Paul wrote.
- B. Contains no Old Testament quotes.
- C. Church composed largely of ex-Gentiles (1 Thessalonians 1:9).
- D. 5 chapters; 89 verses; 1,857 words in the King James Version.
- E. A friendly, personal letter.
- F. "Lord" applied to Jesus 25 times.
- G. Young Christians in the church.
- H. 1 Thessalonians is older than Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, and every other New Testament book except Galatians.
- I. The Thessalonian church is the only church not censured for anything.

OUTLINE

- A. Salutation (1 Thessalonians 1:1).
- B. The model church (1 Thessalonians 1:2-10).
- C. A model ministry (1 Thessalonians 2:1-12).
- D. Suffering (1 Thessalonians 3:1-13).
- E. Sanctification (1 Thessalonians 4:1-5:24).
- F. Conclusion (1 Thessalonians 5:25-28).

1 Thessalonians 1:1

"Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, 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"

We now come to the second book Paul wrote, the book of 1 Thessalonians.

The first verse of 1 Thessalonians is the salutation or the greeting. Usually the salutation included three landmarks: names of the writer/s, the addressee(s) and a formal greeting.

Paul,

Paul is the author of First Thessalonians. He was known as Saul of Tarsus in his non-Christian days. He became the greatest missionary the world has ever known. Thirteen books start with the name "Paul." Paul says nothing specific about himself in this verse. In many of his epistles, he calls himself "the slave of Jesus Christ" or "an apostle of Jesus Christ." The Thessalonians did not doubt his credibility, so he did not feel the need to establish his trustworthiness here. They knew full well that he served Jesus the Lord. Paul does not begin his epistles with the customary introductions common in our day. Salutations of our day are irrelevant. We begin a business letter with the term "Gentlemen" even though there may not be a gentleman in the whole crowd! We write, "Dear Sir," when we know that they are neither "dear" nor "sir!" However, we cannot start a letter with "Hey, you" either!

The name "Paul" means "little." If there was anyone who could call himself "Mr. Big," it was the apostle Paul. He was the greatest missionary of the first century.

In Judaism, he had a promising career. He was a Pharisee. He was an outstanding persecutor of the church. When he ran out of victims in Jerusalem, he went to Damascus to capture more Christians (Acts 9:1-2). He was on his way to murder disciples in Damascus.

On the road to Damascus, he met the risen Lord and received Jesus Christ as his Savior. As a Christian, he spread the gospel to the Gentile Roman world. The Lord Jesus ruined his previous career. One look at Jesus changed everything in his life. Jesus' worst enemy became his greatest emissary.

Paul was not one of the 12 original Apostles. One qualification for apostleship was seeing Jesus. He saw the risen Christ (1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:8-9). God gave him miraculous powers to authenticate his apostleship (2 Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 2:3-4).

The word "apostle" conveys the idea of special commission from God. The apostle was under a divine commission to found the church and write Scripture. This is the highest-ranking gift in the Bible. There are no more apostles today. No one today has the right to write Scripture. This gift, as

all gifts, can only be bestowed by the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:11,13).

Paul was the human author of Scripture but the Holy Spirit was the divine author (2 Peter 1:20). This does not mean that the human author mechanically writes Scripture with little or no input from His person. It means that the Holy Spirit guides every word he writes to convey accurately what God wants to communicate to humans.

Paul was Christ's apostle, not an apostle of the church. He was a special emissary on a special divine assignment from Christ (John 17:18). He took his marching orders from Jesus Christ.

Paul concluded his brilliant career in a dungeon. Jesus promoted him to heaven by virtue of a guillotine--the Roman government decapitated him. This is a thumbnail sketch of the former Saul of Tarsus. He gave his entire life to Christ. His philosophy was this - "for me to live is Christ."

Principle

When Jesus Christ fills our horizon, we can do nothing else but serve Him.

Application

When we truly meet the Lord Jesus, we lose interest in pleasing our self. The greatest thing that can happen to young people is to meet the Lord Jesus young enough so that they can give their entire lives to the Lord. Boyfriends, girlfriends, cars, careers do not compare with knowing and serving Him (Philippians 3:10). When we devote our life to the Son of God, we live without regret.

Paul makes his own commitment clear in 1 Corinthians 9:16,17, "If I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!" He said, "I must preach the gospel whether I want to do it or not. Whether it is convenient or not, I have no choice."

God is not a cruel taskmaster. He is a wonderful Master who gives us a sense of satisfaction when we serve Him. Paul did not quit. He served to the best of his ability, which is all God asks. This kind of commitment gives us direction, point and purpose. We keep our drive no matter what opposition may come our way.

A hundred years from now it will make very little difference where we stood before the great people of our day. However, a hundred years from now it will be of utmost importance where we stand in reference to Jesus Christ. That will determine where we will be in eternity; it will demarcate how we lived our life in time.

Silvanus,

Silvanus and Timothy united with Paul in sending this epistle to the Thessalonians. Silvanus is the Latin spelling of "Silas" (Acts 15:22) so Silvanus is the same as the Silas of the book of Acts. Silvanus served both great missionaries of the first century. He served Paul, the great apostle to the Gentiles. He also served the apostle to the Jews. Silvanus was an amanuensis (secretary, 1 Peter 5:12). Here is an anonymous Christian who did not take the credit to himself, but faithfully did his job as unto the Lord.

Silvanus was a prophet from the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:22, 32). That church dispatched him along with Paul and Barnabas to take the decree from the Jerusalem conference to the church in Antioch.

At Antioch, Paul and Barnabas quarreled over Mark, because Mark defected from the first missionary mission (Acts 15:36-41). Mark was a relative of Barnabas. They divided over this. Paul refused to take Mark on his next mission, because of his earlier desertion. Paul chose Silvanus to accompany him on his missionary expedition to Asia Minor, and ultimately to Macedonia and Achaia. Barnabas chose Mark to go with him (Acts 15:41-18:5). We do not hear of Mark again in the book of Acts. An opportunity of a lifetime came to Silvanus because he was available for God to use him.

Setting out from Antioch, Paul made his way through Syria and Cilicia to the towns of Southern Galatia (Derbe and Lystra) where he took Timothy as a companion (Acts 16:1-3). From there he passed through Phrygia to Northern Galatia (Pessinus, Ancyra, and Tavium) and founded new churches.

Prevented from proceeding to Bithynia, Paul's team moved on from Galatia into Mysia and Troy. Here Luke joined (Acts 16:10-17) the team. Silvanus accompanied the team through Syria, Asia Minor, Philippi and Thessalonica. He helped form the church in Thessalonica. He fled

Thessalonica with the team to Berea. When Paul left Berea for Athens, Silvanus stayed at Berea and then joined Paul later at Corinth (Acts 16-18).

Silvanus was an important figure in the churches in Macedonia. Acts 18:18 suggests that he may have remained in Macedonia when Paul left. His early connections with the church in Jerusalem were helpful in giving added theological legitimacy to Paul's missionary enterprises. Silvanus was a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37-38). He was also a Jew. This was a help to Paul as well.

Paul mentions Silvanus in his introductions to some of his epistles (1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Corinthians 1:19). Except in 2 Corinthians 1:19, Paul mentions him in reference to the writing of these epistles. He was a secretary to Paul and both secretary and a courier for Peter. The New Testament does not name him again until a reference in 1 Peter.

The fact that Silvanus worked closely with both Paul and Peter shows the theological closeness of Paul and Peter. Although their theology was compatible, the way of expressing that theology is very different. There are some people today who try to make us believe that Paul and Peter were at odds theologically. This disproves that assertion. There was no schism in the early church between Paul and Peter. There was a clear, cordial alliance between them.

Silvanus probably penned the epistle of 1 Peter. Peter may have penned the conclusion by his own hand. It was a general practice that writers of Scripture to use amanuenses (secretaries) to write their epistles (Galatians 6:11-18; 1 Corinthians 16:21-23; Colossians 4:18; 2 Thessalonians 3:17-18).

Silvanus stands in similar relationship to Peter that he did to Paul. After ministering with Paul as a secretary, he joins Peter's ministry. Paul was probably in prison by then. Silvanus was conversant with and known to the churches to whom 1 Peter is addressed (1 Peter 1:1). They knew what kind of man he was. They recognized his character.

The Scripture doesn't record any word from Silas. This affirms the importance of subordinate work. One little chip in a computer can cause the computer to stop operating. There is an importance to little things. Little things are indispensable to ministry. No doubt, some people

will receive more glory in Christian work than others will. Glory, however, is not how God measures things. God places value on our faithfulness to the role He gives us.

Principle

God uses unknown, unsung believers for His glory.

Application

Who has thought much of this man Silvanus? The two greatest missionaries of the first century were Paul and Peter. Both of these mighty missionaries depended on Silvanus. Neither Paul nor Peter could have done what they did without him. He was their right-hand man.

Silvanus was available for God's use. It did not matter whether he was the underdog. He played second fiddle to both Paul and Peter. He did not seek glory for himself, but only for his Lord. That is why he could serve the way he did.

Paul and Peter were the "stars" of the first-century community. God left to the lot of Silvanus to be a satellite to move around the greater orbs. If God calls you to this lot, will you willingly accept it?

May God give us many more like Silvanus.

"Therefore, when I was planning this, did I do it lightly? Or the things I plan, do I plan according to the flesh, that with me there should be Yes, Yes, and No, No? But as God is faithful, our word to you was not Yes and No. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us – by me, Silvanus, and Timothy – was not Yes and No, but in Him was Yes. For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us" (2 Corinthians 1:17-20).

A principle in the nation Israel was that some were to "stand by the stuff." "As his part is that goes down into battle, so shall his part be that carries by the stuff; they shall part alike." Stand by the stuff in your service for the Lord!

and Timothy,

Paul led Timothy to Christ as a young man (1 Timothy 1:2) on his first missionary expedition (Acts 13-14). Timothy's father was Gentile (Acts 16:1) and his mother Eunice was a Jew turned

Christian (2 Timothy 1:5). He joined Paul on his second missionary expedition.

Upon the writing of 1 Thessalonians, Timothy had just returned from Thessalonica with a report about the state of the church there (3:1-6).

Timothy was a vest-pocket edition of the apostle Paul. He was Paul's companion on many of his travels (2 Corinthians 1:1; Philippians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1) and his son in the faith (1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 2:1). Timothy had a Gentile father (Acts 16:1) but a Jewish mother and grandmother (2 Timothy 1:5). They taught him the Old Testament from a young age (2 Timothy 3:15).

Paul hand-picked Timothy to serve with him. Timothy joined Paul on his second missionary journey at Lystra, where he was reported to be effective in ministry (Acts 16:2). Thereafter they were almost inseparable. Wherever Paul went, he took Timothy. Wherever Paul could not go, he sent Timothy. "Now if Timothy comes, see that he may be with you without fear; for he does the work of the Lord, as I also do" (1 Corinthians 16:10). Paul personally polished him as a leader. He addressed 1 & 2 Timothy to this young pastor.

Paul had numerous colleagues and friends but none of them was quite as close as Timothy. Note his view of Timothy in Philippians 2:10-23, "But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state. For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus [but not Timothy]. But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel. Therefore I hope to send him at once, as soon as I see how it goes with me."

God brought these two men together and they remained together. Their friendship made them as one. Their friendship glued them together with a divine adhesive. Others forsook Paul, but Timothy remained loyal. When the going got tough, they quit:

"This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me, among whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes" (2 Timothy 1:15).

Paul knew what it was like to have some bitter disappointments in his friends and co-workers.

What kept Paul and Timothy together? It seems they had little in common. Paul was much older than Timothy (Philemon 9).

In 1 Timothy, Paul said, "Let no man despise your youth." Usually, people separated by a large gap in age do not remain together for very long unless they are relatives.

Paul and Timothy also had different family backgrounds. Paul was a pure blood Jew (Philippians 3:5). Timothy was half-Jew, half-Gentile. His father was a Gentile (Acts 16:3). He was a mongrel. He was neither Jew nor Gentile, fish nor fowl.

Moreover, Paul and Timothy's education was not at par. They were on different planes. Paul had the equivalent of a graduate degree today. He sat at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). There is no record of any formal training for Timothy. But here, these men were together--Jesus Christ made the difference.

Here was an old man and a young man serving together who had little in common. Yet, there was one thing that brought them together--the Lord Jesus. Jesus Christ eradicated the distance that separated them. This was a beautiful fellowship.

Principle

God breaks down natural barriers between people.

Application

Although people come from radically different backgrounds, they can serve the Lord side by side. Paul mentored Timothy by personal involvement with him. Everything he learned, he learned from Paul. Timothy was both loyal and faithful. Jesus Christ compensates for the differences in culture, education, and financial background. He annihilates the differences that may separate us.

Paul's relationships with Silvanus and Timothy indicate something of his commitment to discipling others, both in Christian living and in service.

To the church of the Thessalonians

The word "church" means called out ones. Paul calls this church by the name of the physical location of the city - "the church of the Thessalonians." The word "church" carries the idea of an assembly. Not every gathering of religious

people is a church. There were a number of "assemblies" in the city of Thessalonica. Cults gathered around the gods of the pantheon.

Ancient labor unions gathered behind the ideology of their craft.

This gospel team of Paul, Silvanus and Timothy traveled over the Roman Empire starting churches. After they started a church, they turned the leadership over to local people to continue indigenously the work in their area. These churches became self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating after he left. The Thessalonians, as we shall see, not only reached their own area but much of the Roman Empire.

The Thessalonian church was born on Paul's second missionary expedition. The second missionary expedition began out of a crisis between two team members at the close of Acts 15. Paul and Barnabas had a full-fledged feud over John Mark joining the team. John had defected from the previous mission and Paul would have no more of him. Paul and Barnabas broke up their team over him, Barnabas taking Mark with him. Silvanus joined Paul's team and they left for Antioch, Paul's home base.

After Antioch, the team moved east to Lystra where they singled out another team member, Timothy. The team of three moved from Lystra going Northwest to the city of Troy, in Northeast Turkey today. In Troy, Paul received a vision to go to Macedonia. They crossed the Aegean Sea into the continent of Europe. This was Europe's first exposure to the gospel. At this point Luke the physician joined the team (Luke changes from "they" to "we" in the book of Acts). Now the gospel team had four members: Paul, Barnabas, Timothy and Luke.

The team landed in the city of Philippi, in the province of Macedonia. There they led Lydia to Christ. They ran into conflict with the city officials and were beaten and cast into prison. With bleeding backs, they fled Philippi and went about a hundred miles to Thessalonica (Acts 17:1,2). The team spent at least three weeks there, maybe much longer. Paul reasoned with them for three Sabbath days out of the Scriptures (Acts 17:3). There was no convert there before he came, but he left many Christians when he departed. They got out of town by night.

The team left Thessalonica and moved into Berea (Acts 17:10). They left there and went to Athens (Acts 17:17). In Athens, Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica because he heard that they were under frightful persecution. Timothy troubleshot the situation and came back to Corinth with a report for Paul. . Timothy told Paul how the Thessalonian believers stood up boldly to abuse.

Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians from Corinth in response to Timothy's report, about a year after he left the city of Thessalonica.

In this book, Paul gives details of the church, the Rapture and future issues. Since some died in persecution, Paul writes of their future resurrection.

Principle

Every church has a history.

Application

The history of local churches is interesting. Why did it start? What drove those who launched the church? We can find the history of the Thessalonian church in Acts 17:1ff. It became an outstanding church of the New Testament. Do you know the history of your local church? Did your church start on biblical principles? Most churches start with a passion to reach those in their community for Christ.

Timothy brought back from Thessalonica both a positive report and a negative report about the state of the church to Paul in Corinth. Some believers sold their businesses and houses because they thought that Jesus was coming almost immediately.

Persecution distorted some of their thinking (1 Thessalonians 3:2-4). Some of them caused trouble in the church because they did not accept the appointed leadership that Paul established when he left (1 Thessalonians 5:15; 2 Thessalonians 3:6,7,11).

The purpose of this epistle is to correct some of these misconceptions. in God the Father

This church not only had a physical address [Thessalonica] but it had a spiritual address as well -- "in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." The church and individual Christians are "in God" (Romans 8:1; 1 Corinthians 8:6; 1 John

4:15). Nothing can happen to us unless God allows it to happen.

The word "in" indicates a sphere. A Christian lives in a sphere, the sphere of God and Christ. We have life in God and Christ, therefore, we are secure in God's providence. The term "Father" centers our thinking on God's sovereign care of the believer.

In the city of Thessalonica was a group of people who believed that Jesus gave them eternal life by His death on the cross (Acts 17:1-7). Although they believed in Him, they did not trust Him fully. They were full of anxiety about the future.

and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Jesus is equally God as the Father is God (Acts 17:3). Paul does not use the title Savior. He uses the term "Lord" in this context because he places emphasis on His deity. "That all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honors not the Son honors not the Father who has sent Him." We live in a day when Christians use the title "God" but not the title "Jesus Christ" because "Jesus Christ" is more offensive than "God." People love to talk about God, but they hate Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus is God and Creator who sustains the universe (John 1:1; 1 Corinthians 1:15f; Hebrews 1:1-2). By calling attention to the "Father" and deity of Jesus Christ, Paul shows that the persecution the Thessalonians endure is completely in the hand of God. Nothing can happen to them that is random. Everything is in God's plan for the universe.

Principle

Christians are invulnerable and immortal in their physical life, until God decides to promote them to glory.

Application

Christians should not fear anything that comes their way, because God manages all that happens to us. In this case, the entire church of Thessalonica was "in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

When God boxes us into His sphere like this, nothing can happen to us that is outside of His will. The Devil tried to get at Job (Job 1), but God put a hedge about him. Even the Devil cannot get

through that hedge without God's permission. God's providence in our life gives us point, purpose, and protection.

Knowledge of God's providence will keep us from a nervous breakdown. We can move through life with a confidence in God's care for us (1 John 4:4;5:4). We are invulnerable until God chooses to allow something to come into our life.

Grace to you

Paul gives his customary greeting of "grace" and "peace" here. Grace always precedes peace in these greetings. That is because God's provisions always precede the impact of peace on our lives.

Grace is God's provision for us because of the death of Christ for our sins. God is the source for all our provisions. We do not earn nor deserve His gifts. We do not deserve anything from God. All we deserve is hell. Nothing undermines self-effort more than the grace of God.

The Bible personifies Jesus as "grace."

"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men..." (Titus 2:11).

Principle

Grace glorifies God because God does the doing.

Application

If people do the doing, they get the glory. If God does the doing, then God gets the glory. Grace glorifies God, because God does the doing.

"Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work" (Romans 11:5-6).

"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Corinthians 15:10).

We have the right to come to the "throne of grace." We have the right to pray, not because of something in ourselves, but because of who Jesus is and what He did for us on the cross.

"Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find

grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Each Christian has peace with God, but not all Christians have the peace of God. We churn inside because we do not see God's sovereign hand upon our lives. We are so anxious and exercised about life that you would think God committed suicide. We do not say, "I am full of anxiety" because we know that that does not sound spiritual. We say, "I am exercised about this...." That sounds more spiritual but it bypasses acceptance of God's sovereign protection of our life.

To gain peace biblically, we must soak our minds with the Word of God and prayer. Biblical peace is the ability to sit down on the inside.

"You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You" (Isaiah 26:3).

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7).

We can tell God about our problems and thus have peace that He will handle them for our good.

The Holy Spirit produces peace in our lives when we allow Him to control our lives.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law" (Galatians 5:22-23).

Principle

Peace is the consequence of appropriating grace to our life.

Application

Peace is the consequence of appropriating grace to our life. We cannot reverse this order. If we bypass grace, we cannot possibly have peace in our life.

We can have neither grace nor peace without accepting the gospel of Jesus Christ. When we have a personal relationship with Him, we have His grace and thus His peace.

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen" (1 Thessalonians 5:28).

Both the Father and Son are the source of grace. Christians must live their life based on grace. We cannot live the supernatural Christian life on our own resources. If we draw upon God's resources, we will possess His peace. Grace and peace are a couplet. We cannot have one without the other.

Before anyone can become a Christian, he or she must believe in an irreducible minimum of the gospel. No unbeliever can have true peace without accepting Jesus as his Savior.

"But the wicked are like the troubled sea, When it cannot rest, Whose waters cast up mire and dirt. 'There is no peace,' Says my God, 'for the wicked'" (Isaiah 57:20-21)

1 Thessalonians 1:2

"We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers..."

Verse two is the beginning of the body of the epistle.

We give thanks to God

We can tell a man's values by what he appreciates. Paul and his team constantly expressed their gratitude for God's operation in their lives.

Most books of the New Testament begin with some form of thanksgiving but Paul could not bring himself thank God for the Galatians because of their serious doctrinal aberration. He even gave thanks for the church at Corinth and that took some doing!

always

The gospel team gave thanks "always." Paul's gospel team constantly gave thanks for God's work through others. This will deliver us from much discouragement. All of us have many discouraging things come our way.

"Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart" (Luke 18:1).

Principle

What we appreciate reveals our values. We need to stay in constant communication with God in prayer.

Application

Some churches are discussion groups. They care little about truth; they care more about everyone giving their viewpoints about truth. Other churches are mere country clubs where socialization takes precedence over edifying one another or sharing the gospel with the world. Still other groups debate political or public issues and give only a squirt of religious perfume to their crowd.

The church at Thessalonica was a true church. You could hear the Word of God there. You saw them strengthen each other in their faith. You watched them share Christ not only with their own city, but also with the whole Mediterranean world. They did not spend much time discussing the dreadful state of affairs in the Roman Empire and there were many abuses in the Empire. They talked about strategy for winning the Roman Empire for Christ. They dealt with important things like sin and salvation, Heaven and Hell.

Do you put priority on God's values?

The gospel team sometimes did not take time to dial; the receiver was off the hook much of the time. They had a good connection to heaven. They were in constant close communication with the throne room.

"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 Samuel 12:23).

"Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, And He shall hear my voice" (Psalm 55:17).

"Seven times a day I praise You, Because of Your righteous judgments" (Psalm 119:164).

"...rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer..." (Romans 12:12).

"...praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints..." (Ephesians 6:18).

"Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving..." (Colossians 4:2).

"Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God" (Colossians 4:12).

"...pray without ceasing..." (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

for you all,

The Gospel team gave thanks not only for the honorable believers at Thessalonica, but for all believers at that church. We do not have to approve of Christians to pray for them. They do not have to answer to us before we can pray for them. God simply calls us to pray for "all" Christians. Thank God that they came to Christ. Thank God for any contribution they make to the cause of Christ.

making mention of you in our prayers

The word "prayers" signifies invocation. This is a more general term than the term "petition." Paul is saying that he makes mention of them in prayer. He calls people by name in prayer. This is the only good - gossip on your knees!

Paul loved God's people enough to pray specifically for them by name. Prayer takes memory. How many fellow Christians do you remember in prayer? Paul says in the next verse - "remembering without ceasing..."

Principle

Thanksgiving is the capacity to appreciate what God is doing in our lives.

Application

God is the author of all that is good. Thanksgiving is the capacity to appreciate God's goodness to us - even the disagreeable things that happen to us. We come to realize that everything that God allows to come into our lives, He does for our good (Romans 8:28).

When we give thanks, we give something to God. We can give money to God, but we owe Him thanks as well.

"...giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ..." (Ephesians 5:20).

"...giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light" (Colossians 1:12).

"And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Colossians 3:17).

Do you daily thank God for your salvation? Your health. Your church and your pastor who feed you the Word of God? Thank God for each believer you know who is a walking representative of the Lord Jesus Christ. Granted, not everyone represents Him well, but there is some semblance of Christ in them. There are so many places where there is divine dearth; there is no witness, no vitality, no evangelism and no momentum. We need every witness we can find.

Thank God for every movement of evangelism in the world. Do you thank God for anyone besides your husband or wife or children? Of course, it is easier to thank God for some than for others, but this passage says to give thanks for "all" Christians. How many people do you pray for? Apart from your family, for whom do you pray? Do you pray for those who are advancing the cause of Christ?

The church at Thessalonica was born out of affliction. Out of the crucible of affliction came strong churches.

Paul had a prayer list - do you?

1 Thessalonians 1:3

"...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..."

Believers at Thessalonica had three features. These distinctives enabled them to have the greatest impact of any church in the New Testament, and were the source of their spiritual vitality. remembering without ceasing

The word "remembering" means to call to mind. Paul calls to mind the circumstance for giving thanks. We need to kindle our memory so that we do not neglect prayer. Here Paul and his team remember three outstanding spiritual virtues of the Thessalonians.

The character and convictions of the Thessalonians brought them regularly to minds of Paul's team when they went to prayer. The entire chapter is born out of the memory of a dynamic church. This is a church that manifested work, labor and patience motivated by faith, love and hope.

Principle

True ministry comes from spiritual qualities.

Application

Faith, love and hope are fruits of the Spirit. It is possible to do God's work in carnality. To work, labor and exercise perseverance without God's power is empty human mechanics.

The church at Ephesus manifested work, labor and perseverance but still received rebuke from the Lord.

"I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place – unless you repent," (Revelation 2:2-5).

If we operate under the power of the Holy Spirit, we will do God's work in God's power. As the root, so the fruit. If we do what we do in the power of the Holy Spirit, we will produce like fruit.

your work of faith,

The first virtue of the Thessalonians is their work produced by their faith.

The Thessalonians' work sprang from their faith. Faith occasions their work. Faith originates one's work. Their work was the achievement of their faith. In the hall of fame chapter [Hebrews 11], we see many believers that did many exploits by faith. Their belief bore fruit. True work always originates in faith.

"But someone will say, 'You have faith, and I have works.' Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.... But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also," (James 2:18-26).

Look at your works, your production in life. Now look at your faith. Is there any connection between the two? The argument of the book of James is that faith works. True faith shows itself in works. Abraham demonstrated his faith by his willingness to sacrifice Isaac so he justified his faith in the eyes of people.

God is not the one who justifies in the book of James. People justify us if we walk by faith. Rahab the whore believed God's promises by faith when Israel crossed the Red Sea but it was not until forty years later that she demonstrated her faith to the Israelites by hiding the spies. Rahab vindicated the reality of her faith to Israel by hiding those spies. We can measure our faith by what we do.

Principle

Our faith motivates our work.

Application

A faith that is dynamic, active and real rather than static and lifeless will produce work.

The essential element to faith is its focus. If the object of our faith is credible, then we can trust that article of belief. Faith claims the promises of God. When we claim the promises of God, God changes our lives. The Thessalonians turned to God from idols.

Faith rests upon the work of God, not our work. When we rest on God's work, God produces His work in us.

"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Corinthians 15:10).

We can work by our own effort or we can work under the power of God. A contractor can carry the bricks of the new house up the scaffold himself or he can get others to do it. The resources of his business allow him to hire others to do the work. Every Christian has the capital of God's resources. The difference between believers is not that some have capital and others do not. The difference lies in the fact that some use their resources and others do not. When we utilize our assets from God, we will produce divine results. We use our assets by faith.

Why do people do what they do? The motivation of some is for very selfish reasons. They do what they do for adulation, fame, for prestige and distinction or for making an impact of some kind on life. This verse says that our motivation should come from our faith. Later in the chapter, Paul says that the believers at Thessalonica carried their faith to the entire Roman world.

Many people have little faith in what God can do by Christian leadership. What dynamic Christian would want to attend a church or become involved in an organization that does not operate by faith? I would not.

"But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

There are two ways to attempt to work for God: our way or God's way. If we produce work without God, then it is hollow human work. If we do not serve the Lord by faith, we serve in the flesh. We do it "our way," not God's way.

Doing God's work my way and doing His work His way, may appear to be the same but it is not. God will not reward works motivated by selfish interests. God's work done in God's way will receive God's blessing. If we serve the Lord out of motivation to please Him and do it His way, then He will bless it. Faith always produces genuine

work for God. It is a work produces by faith (1 Corinthians 13:11f).

labor of love,

The second virtue of the Thessalonians is their love. The Greek says, "your labor, the one out of love." Love impelled their labor. Biblical love is more than sentiment. Love is not sweetness. We confuse cultural love with true biblical love.

Agape love is willing to sacrifice for others. It is others oriented. To love sacrificially is to labor until it hurts.

The word "labor" means labor to the point of exhaustion. It is a love of blood, sweat and tears. Self-sacrificial love moves us to labor. This love is willing to toil and to pay a price. Love activates arduous labor. Love prompts this tough grind.

"But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner. For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises," (Hebrews 6:9-12).

Principle

Love reaches to the extent of self-denial.

Application

Everything we receive as Christians, we receive by grace. We do not work for either our salvation or for blessings within the Christian life. Unless we are ungrateful, we appreciate and love the Lord Jesus for all that He provides for us. We want to show our gratitude for all that He has done. We will give ourselves till it hurts. We will endure a lot of pain to tell others about Him and His provisions. Our labor for the Lord only dims when Calvary dims to us and we forget the cost of our salvation.

What is your labor of love? Do you engage in some challenging labor for the Lord? Do you lead a small group because of your appreciation for the

Lord? Will you allow the Lord to put a harness of service on you?

Many of us serve the Lord nine to five. We do not go out of our way to serve Him. If it is convenient, we will serve Him. This may indicate that we do not truly love Him.

Are you willing to hurt for others? Are you open to give sweat for the Lord Jesus? People who truly love Him labor to the point of utter exhaustion. We say, "Well, I have a husband, a wife or children. I do not have time to give to God." Do you have a Lord? Marriage relationships and parental relationship are important in God's economy. We must put high priority on them, but some of us use relationships as reasons for not putting sweat into the cause of Christ. Relationships primarily have to do with communication. If our communication breaks down then we will not have proper relationships. The real issue is communication, not time. Time is an illusion for the real problem. The real issue is cherishing your wife or respecting your husband. Those are the true issues.

How would you score yourself on the first two motivations for ministry? Very few people truly give themselves for the cause of Christ. Are you willing to put your all into serving the Lord?

Those who avoid trouble, love little.

"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love" (Galatians 5:6).

and patience of hope

The third and final virtue of the Thessalonians is hope. Hope has to do with the future. The Thessalonians endurance came from their confidence in God's provisions for eternity.

People who exercise hope do not operate on baseless optimism or wishful thinking. The idea of hope in the Bible is the idea of confidence, assurance and certainty. This person has confidence that God will keep all His promises despite every appearance to the contrary. This kind of hope produces steadfast endurance through trouble. This hope helps the believer bear up under any trial that may come his way.

"For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?" (Romans 8:24).

"Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Savior and the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope..." (1 Timothy 1:1).

"...looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ..." (Titus 2:13).

Biblical hope is not wishful thinking. "Hope" is a very difficult word to translate into English because it carries the idea of confidence. The English word transmits the idea of wishful thinking. We say, "I hope it does not rain tomorrow." We mean by that, "I wish it does not rain tomorrow." Biblical hope is no wish. It does not produce the idea of "I have these wonderful plans that people all over the world will come to Christ. I hope it works out." No, hope has the idea that we have assurance in the future because of who God is.

The word "patience" comes from two Greek words: under and to remain. A person who has patience is one who remains under, continues under the pressure. This person does not give up no matter what may come his way. This is the quality of perseverance. However, this term does not simply convey unadulterated perseverance but a perseverance that goes beyond resignation to problems. It endures with a quality of life.

Our English word "patience" carries the idea of passiveness or lack of activity. The Greek word for "patience" means fortitude, steadfastness and tenacity. Hope produces tenacity. A person who carries great hope hangs in there. He carries the character of steadfastness.

Hope helps us claim the promises of God. The problems we currently face do not daunt us because we see beyond the moment. People who want to advance the cause of Christ in the world cannot give up. They must possess bulldog stick-to-it-iveness. They must grab hold of what God wants in the world and hold onto it. These people never give up although they may fail many times. They get up and try again. They hang in there. Few people possess this kind of vision.

Principle

Perseverance flows from hope.

Application

The quality of life that produces perseverance is confidence in God's plan for our lives. God's providence in the present and His prospect for our future, give Christians an edge on others.

"And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, 'I believed and therefore I spoke,' we also believe and therefore speak, knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God. Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:13-18).

Is this operation bootstraps? Is this unadulterated self effort?

"And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Romans 5:3-5).

Are we talking about operation bootstraps when people exercise tenacity? Biblical hope is no sheer human determination based on blind fate. This is hope based on confidence in God and His promises. This is tenacity inspired by hope.

A commodity that Christians have that the vast majority of other people in the world do not have is confidence in the future. Man hates confidence because it gives lie to relativism. Relativism, the idea that nothing is true for sure, is the great hope of the non-believing. The more is the pity. Jesus is

the only hope for man. That is fighting words to most people today but it is the truth.

People who carry confidence intimidate many people. They presume that confident people are arrogant. Most people doubt themselves so confident people intimidate them. They fear risks.

On the human level, confidence is a basis for success. Confident people know what they are doing and where they are going. They do not demonstrate sheer superficial confidence based on some vacuous air, "I am a confident person, I will do so and so." No, they base their confidence on competence, research, and understanding. At the Christian level, we base our confidence on very deep convictions about God's promises.

"For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4).

How many times have people said that something would not work when confident people go out and do it anyway? Confident people generally are not more competent but they believe more. Others around may make them feel inept and incompetent.

Confident people can unknowingly intimidate other people. The problem with people who allow others to intimidate them is pride. Rather than launch out on their own they would rather swim in self-pity. They would rather fight those who are confident rather than initiate their own sphere of influence.

Paul now points to the persons that produce the three sets of character in verse three.

in our Lord Jesus Christ

Our hope rests in the future coming of Christ (v.10). This hope looks beyond present problems. It looks to the permanent solution Christ will bring.

The three prime virtues of this verse are found in two spheres: 1) "in our Lord Jesus Christ" and 2) "in the sight of our God and Father." The reason Christians do what they do is because of Jesus Christ and because God the Father watches them. These two dynamics motivated church at Thessalonica and Christians in our day.

"Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Savior and the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope..." (1 Timothy 1:1)

There is no true hope apart from the Lord Jesus Christ. People try to be optimistic without anything to base their optimism on. Leaders hope against hope. Christians rest our hope on the veracity of God's promises.

Note the word "our." This personalizes our hope. The Lord Jesus Christ is mine so I have hope. Jesus is an historical figure to many people but to those who come to trust Him personally for salvation, they place confidence in him experientially. You must be His and He must be yours.

Our passage says that that confidence comes from a person – "in the Lord Jesus Christ." The word "in" means sphere. The sphere of our confidence is in the Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father.

Principle

Our confidence rests in our personal relationship to Jesus Christ.

Application

One day we will stand before God the Father with confidence. That confidence will be because of Jesus Christ. When we stand in His sphere, therefore, God will accept us because of Him. Our confidence is not going to be in who we are or what we have done. We will not look back over our lives and say, "Oh, I blew it. I failed terribly there." No, we base our confidence on who Jesus is and what He did for our sins on the cross. That is liberating!

People who constantly rue the past and think about their failures cannot think about the future. They are more consumed with their failure than they are with giving to others. They allow subjective guilt to destroy the potential of how God would use them. Guilt blunts the momentum of Christianity. These people stand in who and what they are. No wonder they lack confidence! They need to confess their sin and move to greater heights in serving the Lord.

Personal momentum produces intrinsic momentum. Personal confidence produces ministry confidence. We need to get out of self, out

of our problems. We need to get out of subjectivity and into the objectivity of God's promises.

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek" (Romans 1:16).

"Oh, you mean that the power does not reside in me?" For sure! The concern is that we do not have confidence in what the gospel can do. We do not believe in the power of the gospel. When a non-Christian is intransigent, implacable and immovable toward the gospel, what do we do? Give up? The believer who has confidence in the power of the gospel trusts God to use His Word to change stubborn hearts. The power is in the gospel, not in the one who delivers the gospel.

Many of us try to justify the gospel or excuse the gospel. That is as if when a thief comes to our house and we meet him with a .45-calibre handgun and we say, "I just want you to understand the power of his gun. It can blow a hole right through you." We do not have to justify the gun; all we have to do is pull the trigger. All we have to do is present the gospel message. God will do the rest.

Confidence in the power of the gospel has to do with perspective. If we give excuses for the gospel, we do not have confidence in the gospel. Confident people will introduce people to Christ. They will not avoid asking people to make a decision for Christ.

Most people are hung up on themselves. They drag the past around with them. If we drag all our failures and foibles and inconsistencies around with us, how effective are we going to be? We will not be very effective. Our confidence is not in ourselves; it is in Christ.

Momentum comes from a faith that inspires, from a love that motivates and from a confidence that rouses us to action. Momentum comes from people of inspiration.

in the sight of our God and Father

Christians should do what we do under God's eye. God has sight. He is not blind. He sees everything we do for Him.

"Then she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, **You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees**; for she said, "Have I also here seen Him who sees me?" (Genesis 16:13).

"For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him" (2 Chronicles 16:9).

"Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20).

"But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for 'the just shall live by faith'" (Galatians 3:11).

"For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ" (2 Corinthians 2:17).

"And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:13).

Most people do not have the slightest idea that God sees them. They could care less. Those who love Him want to please Him because they know that He sees everything they do. God knows our sorrow and disappointment. He sees our need. He knows our desires.

Again, as with the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul calls God "our" Father. This is also a term of relationship. God is more than our Maker or Creator. A Father cares for His children (Galatians 3:26).

Each of the triad of virtues revolves around a personal relationship with the Son and the Father.

Principle

Christians should not live for the appearances of men but under the eye of God.

Application

Christians exercise faith, hope and love not for men but for God. Ultimately, God will search our hearts. Before men, we operate for the most part on appearances. Before God, things will be what they truly are.

1 Thessalonians 1:4

"...knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God"

Paul's thanksgiving not only involves recalling their spiritual virtues but it also embraces knowledge of their election. The Thessalonians have every earmark of the elect.

knowing,

The response of the Thessalonians to the gospel is clear evidence of their salvation. The three graces of the previous verse of faith, love and hope flow from the underpinning of election.

Christians must know some things (Romans 6:6; James 1:3; 2 Peter 1:20; 2 Peter 3:3; 1 John 2:3) before they can live out God's truth. We are what we eat physically; we are what we believe spiritually. God's truth will never reach our heart if it does not first get into our head. Christian truth begins in the head and then moves to the heart.

Every Christian has a built-in Bible teacher, the Holy Spirit. He will enable us to understand God's Word. How can we go awry? The Devil will attempt to get us off on doctrinal tangents. He will help us maintain our biblical equilibrium.

beloved brethren,

Paul used the term "brethren" fifteen times in this epistle (1:4; 2:1, 9, 17; 3:7; 4:1, 10, 13; 5:1, 4, 12, 14, 25-27) and seven times in

2 Thessalonians (1:3; 2:1, 13, 15; 3:1, 6, 13).

"Brethren" means out of the same womb. They were clearly his peers in Christ.

In addition, Paul calls the Thessalonians "beloved." The Greek renders this phrase "beloved by God." "Beloved" is a favorite name for those who are God's own (2 Thessalonians 2:13). He never calls those without Christ by this term. Our relationship to one another in Christ comes from our common election by God.

The Greek indicates that God began loving us in the past with the result that He established a precedent of loving us. You may feel that few people love you. You may even feel sorry for yourself. However, God loves us with unadulterated, unconditional and undying love. This love will never let us go. He loved us so much that He personally sent His only Son to die on the cross for us.

You are the personal object of His love. He loves us with the same love that He loves the Lord Jesus.

Principle

God loves us with an undaunted, undying, unadulterated and unconditional love.

Application

Everything begins by God's love for us (John 3:16). When we learn the incredible truth that God loves us by sending His only Son to die on the cross for us, we can only marvel (Romans 5:6,8). God has a different love for His own than those who do not believe in Him.

your election by God

God selected some Thessalonians for salvation. The word "election" means that God chose to select some to eternal life (Ephesians 1:4-6,11; Colossians 3:12; 2 Thessalonians 2:13). It is also true that God expects individuals to make a decision to rely on Christ's death on the cross for their salvation.

Scripture teaches both God's responsibility and man's response. That God decided to choose some Thessalonians for salvation is clear from the accomplishment of Paul's team preaching among them. The gospel is no invention of man; it is a divine action coming with God's power (Romans 1:16). God calls many but He only elects a few.

"But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14).

"Paul, a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect and the acknowledgment of the truth which accords with godliness..." (Titus 1:1).

We have the haughty idea that we chose God when in reality He took the initiative to save us.

"For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He

called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies" (Romans 8:29-33).

Only God has the prerogative of election. Why would He select you or me? Only He knows. He could have done better. He could have chosen someone better looking, more brilliant or beautiful than us, but He did not. He chose us. That, we cannot understand. We may never understand it, even in eternity.

God, in His omniscience, chose you and me to be with Him for eternity. He tracked us down and brought the gospel to us. If we have nothing else for which we can thank God, we should thank Him for this. You are one of the few. Most go the broad way to destruction.

"For many are called, but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14).

God also calls us. "Calls" is term of election. God calls us through the gospel. God draws us to Himself by the gospel. God uses His servants to bring His election to us.

"Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (2 Timothy 2:10).

We see both the divine and the human side of salvation – God elects; human beings "obtain." That is why we must get the gospel to people so they can respond to the ministry of the Holy Spirit to receive the gospel. Neither ministry infringes on the other. It is wrong to emphasize one without the other. We hold to both truths simultaneously. We leave it to God to resolve the difference in eternity. He will synchronize His sovereignty with our responsibility.

"...just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love..." (Ephesians 1:4).

"...who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4).

"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

Principle

Election is not a cold, impersonal doctrine.

Application

Everyone who receives salvation is elected. We can see our election by the fruit in our lives. God is the source for anything that comes of our salvation. Election is not a cold, impersonal doctrine.

We know God elected us when we sense His drawing us to Himself. The Holy Spirit awakens a desire within us. When we come to the realization that we cannot change ourselves on our own, our hearts draw near to God. "No one can come to me except my Father draw him."

1 Thessalonians 1:5

"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"

Another basis for Paul's thanksgiving for the Thessalonians is the way the gospel came to them in supernatural power. Their ready reception of God's message shows the reality of God in their midst.

For

The word "for" means because. Paul now expresses the basis for his assurance of the salvation of the Thessalonians.

our gospel

The word "gospel" is emphatic in the Greek. It is the message itself and not the act of preaching that changes lives. The word "gospel" means good news. It is the good news of eternal salvation.

The first token of the election of the Thessalonians is not in the way the Thessalonians received the gospel but in the mode the evangelists presented

it. God's election of them was sovereign, not arbitrary. God uses human agents to impart His gospel. God uses a special sort of courier to communicate His message – those who exercise His power. These communicators come with certain qualifications presented later in this verse.

Principle

The power of our message is in the message, not the messenger.

Application

The nature of the gospel is one of the greatest treasures God ever gave His creatures. It is a gospel of unadulterated grace (Acts 20:24). God did everything necessary so that we can live with Him in eternity. The Devil specializes in starting his own religions. All religions carry the same message: "Man is good; man must lift himself by his own bootstraps; he must improve himself; he should find himself; he should chose any religion for they all lead to Heaven."

Religions impart noble ideas that appeal to something within man but they are fatal when it comes to a relationship with God. Only the gospel can establish an eternal relationship with God. A pluralistic society tunes this out because it is foreign to their ears. That is the very hurdle each person must reach, if they want eternal life (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

did not come to you

The word "not" in the Greek implies that this is a downright fact. The following statements about how the gospel came into Thessalonica are facts.

in word only,

The word "in" in the phrase "in word only" expresses sphere. The message of the gospel team is more than oratory and orthodoxy; it is a living, transforming message. The gospel team came, communicating in the sphere of speaking the content of the gospel message.

The gospel came to the Thessalonians first through verbal communication. Verbal communication is an essential element in gospel presentation. Saying "I am living the life before them" is not enough.

We can live the life from now to doomsday, but that would not be enough to win people to Christ. We must declare the facts of the gospel.

"...who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved" (Acts 11:14).

Any further content to the gospel message is irrelevant, secondary and inconsequential. We spend so much time approaching people with the gospel that we never get to the gospel message. We spend too much time on means, rather than on ends. Consequently, people do not catch the opportunity to make a decision for Christ. The means is not the end!

Principle

We must communicate the gospel with more than Christian life; we must do it with our lips as well, if we are going to significantly advance the cause of Christ.

Application

We need words to communicate the gospel. Today, many Christians never get down to the message. They live the life, but they do not speak the words of the gospel.

"How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?... "..."So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:14, 17).

If we are going to get serious about spreading the gospel effectively, we must first give people content to believe. We must set forth the gospel in clear terms. The only way to do this is with words. Everything is secondary to the proclamation of God's saving message. If we spend all of our time on the means and never come to the end, then we will never reach the world for Christ. We can contextualize the gospel into oblivion, but if people never hear the message, they will never embrace the Savior.

only

Note the word "only." We must speak the gospel verbally but not in words only. The book of Acts makes this abundantly clear.

However, the gospel involves more than communication of its content. The spoken word is necessary, but it is not enough if it stands alone. It

might be possible to teach a parrot to speak the words of the gospel. Anyone can mechanically give out the facts of the gospel. There is more to the gospel than presenting unadulterated facts.

Verse five sets forth four indispensable factors that make the gospel a tour de force. Each of these four factors is crucial for effective evangelism. Each feature begins by the word "in." The four uses of "in" in this verse show what makes the gospel effective.

but also

The word "but" is emphatic in the Greek. The Holy Spirit wants us to see that the gospel is more than careful clarification of its facts. The presentation of the gospel requires three more divine features: "power," "the Holy Spirit" and "much assurance." There is a spiritual vibrancy to the gospel.

The word "also" indicates that there is something more than just explaining the gospel when we share our faith. The impact of gospel presentation is not solely in words. There are three further spiritual dynamics to the gospel. God uses certain spiritual forces to shape us.

Principle

When all four divine factors in this verse are in operation, the gospel moves out with great power.

Application

A gospel presentation will not be effective unless all four spheres are integrated: articulating the gospel in words, relying on its power, depending on the Holy Spirit to convict people, and delivering it with great confidence. We restrict the dynamics of the gospel if we employ only two of these spheres. Three are better but we need all four dynamic spheres if we want to make a full impact.

If we dial only three numbers on a safe whose combination has four, it will not open. We need to dial all four numbers to open the safe. Similarly we need to execute all four spheres mentioned in this verse to make the greatest impact with the gospel. We do not need to blast open the safe when we use the combination. We gently pull open the door.

The Word without the Spirit is dead orthodoxy. The Spirit without the Word is fanaticism.

in power,

We have the word "in" a second of four times in this verse. Each mention is an advance on the previous "in."

The manner in which the Thessalonians received the gospel was in the sphere of "power." The gospel team delivered their message in a powerful manner – in the sphere of the power of God.

The word "power" is the word for inherent power. The gospel message came in God's inherent power, power that is inherent to God. Power latent in God is real and compelling. This power goes beyond human capacity because it influences men.

The message the gospel team preached was more than human oratory, for it came in the power of God (Romans 1:16). Mere accuracy in communicating the gospel is not enough. The Thessalonians not only heard the message from human lips but the power of the gospel message impacted them.

When we present the gospel in power, it compels and grips those without Christ. The reason the gospel compels the lost is because it is real. It transforms hundreds of thousands of lives. Jesus lives today in Heaven and He lives in the hearts of people today. The gospel changed the Thessalonians too. They were different for having exposed themselves to the gospel.

Principle

The gospel carries the inherent power of God with it.

Application

The gospel is not drab, dull or ineffective if we engage its inherent power. God will use the inherent power of the gospel to cause those without Christ to embrace the Son of God.

"Jesus answered and said to them, 'You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God'" (Matthew 22:29).

"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation

for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek" (Romans 1:16).

and in the Holy Spirit

The third occurrence of the word "in" is "in the Holy Spirit." The gospel team came in the sphere of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit filled the gospel communicators, who operated under His influence. They clothed themselves with the Holy Spirit when they communicated the gospel.

The gospel coming to Thessalonica was a supernatural work by God the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit convicts of sin (John 16:8). We attribute salvation ultimately to the Holy Spirit. The dynamic impact of the ministry of the Holy Spirit is necessary to win people to Christ. We cannot engage His dynamic power with allowing Him to fill or control us.

Not only did the gospel come in the power of its message but also it came in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit can reach into the hearts of people where the mere dead words of man cannot reach. He touches the need of man and links that need to the gospel. The evangelist cannot manipulate this domain. This goes beyond human ability, human gimmick, or human manipulation.

The Holy Spirit can touch the human spirit when no human can do it. He is in charge of operations in the soul. We speak to the ears; the Holy Spirit speaks to the heart. He carries the message to the will.

"And when He [the Holy Spirit] has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: "of sin, because they do not believe in Me; "of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; "of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged" (John 16:8-11).

Principle

The Holy Spirit performs His supernatural work in the heart of those without Christ where the mere dead words of evangelists cannot touch.

Application

The Holy Spirit is in charge of all operations of the gospel. We speak to the ears of people but the Holy Spirit takes what we speak to the heart.

"And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (1 Corinthians 2:1-5).

and in much assurance,

We have the word "in" for the fourth time in this verse [the "in" is implied here]. The gospel communicators came with conviction when they came to Thessalonica.

The Thessalonians came to full conviction, certain that the gospel was truly from God, because the communicators were true to the Word, came in the power of the message and in the dynamic of the Holy Spirit. They did not waver with doubt. They came with clear convictions. They willingly committed their eternal future to this message.

The gospel moved the will of the Thessalonians and it can move the will of the lost in our day. Not only will it touch the choice but also it will move the person to a point of "much assurance," or full conviction. The gospel will put solid conviction into the souls of those who believe it. Since the Thessalonians knew the power of the gospel by what it had done for them, they had full confidence in it. They were sold on their product. They shared the gospel with authority.

Principle

People who powerfully advance the gospel in the world are people of strong conviction.

Application

Do you know what the gospel did for you, to you and in you? Are you sold on what you believe? Sales people who believe in their product make great communicators. Christians who believe in their message become very effective at advancing the cause of Christ in the world.

Confidence comes from the Holy Spirit. We know He is working through us. Because of this, doubt does not paralyze a person who has faith in the

Christian message. We carry unfaltering confidence and personal conviction in the power of the Holy Spirit to do His work through us.

Even shy wallflowers and timid mice can be confident in witnessing because of their confidence in the gospel. Once a person meets Jesus Christ, he or she is no longer Mr. or Ms. Ordinary Person. A believer is an ambassador who represents the Lord Jesus Christ and should never share Christ with an apologetic attitude.

How is it possible to apologize for the Son of God? We can communicate with utmost confidence because of what we know about the gospel and its power.

If we are uncertain about what we believe, we will not convince others of our message. If we change our position with every fad or opinion poll, we do not have any message but the message of uncertainty. It is crucial to clarify our personal convictions. If people are unsure about what we believe, they will not accept our message.

as you know

Paul appeals to their personal knowledge of his gospel team. They knew that the gospel team came to them in "word," "power," "the Holy Spirit" and "much assurance."

what kind of men we were among you

Paul's team lived in harmony with the message of the gospel. This is an appeal to the Thessalonians and to us today. People whose lives are consistent with their beliefs are appealing.

The word "kind" in the phrase "kind of men" means sort. The gospel team lived their lives with integrity. They were more than show. God transformed the lives of the communicators of the gospel as well as the Thessalonians. Not only did the gospel team convey a convincing message but they also lived consistent with that message when they were at Thessalonica. The Thessalonians saw clearly their manner of life. What you are speaks so loud that I cannot hear what you say.

The word "were" means became. The transforming power of the way the gospel team came with their message revolutionized the messengers themselves. God enabled them to be what they were not before they came to Thessalonica. God changed them as they shared the gospel.

General Eisenhower illustrated leadership by putting a string on table and saying, "Pull it and it will follow wherever you wish. Push it and will go nowhere at all." We lead people by example.

Credibility comes from the word "credo" meaning "I believe." Credibility means people believe your message because of your integrity. If you do not believe the messenger, you will not believe the message. People expect those who proclaim a message to stand for something and have the courage of their convictions. If we are not clear and convinced about what we believe, others will not believe us either.

Principle

What we are speaks so loud that people cannot hear what we say.

Application

God expects us to live lives of high caliber. What caliber of Christian are you? Are you a shallow soul? Christians are transformed people. There is attraction in that.

"So the men marveled, saying, 'Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?'" (Matthew 8:27).

Paul's gospel team was of high quality. They wore well. Against insurmountable opposition, they persisted in living lives of excellence before others. The team was quality merchandise.

Many people use quality as an excuse for not going aggressively after as many people as they can for Christ. There is no choice between quality and quantity in ministry. Quality refers to the kind of product we are and the kind of end product what we want to produce. Quantity is the extent we want our ministry to reach. We do not have to choose between quality and quantity. When we go fishing, we do not ask, "Do I want quality or quantity?!" We want to catch the biggest and as many fish as we can! Christians want to win as many people as they can to Christ and we want them to become as much like Christ as possible.

Quality produces quantity. A ministry full of genuinely changed people will attract many others to the ministry. People who possess transformed lives and manifest maturity will draw those without Christ. If we do not draw the lost to our group, or to us personally, is it because we do not

demonstrate a good quality of life to them? If our lives do not match the gospel, we will not draw people to us.

"Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel..." (Philippians 1:27).

If the quality of our lives do not match the gospel, it will be like switching positive and negative cables on our car battery -- the sparks will fly.

for your sake

God's work done in God's way is always for the sake of the lost. When we do it God's way, it always influences the lost. The gospel team was not in the ministry for themselves. They had no mercenary motive in presenting the gospel. The gospel was for the sake of the Thessalonians.

The gospel team concerned themselves with the kind of product they wanted to produce.

Principle

True communicators of the gospel present the gospel for the sake of the lost, not for their own prestige or recognition.

Application

True communicators of the gospel present the gospel for the sake of the lost, not for their own prestige or recognition. Much ministry today is to advance one's career. We care more about how we deliver ministry than the impact our ministry has on people.

"For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:5-6).

1 Thessalonians 1:6

"And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit..."

Paul first shows God's work among the Thessalonians by describing the integrity with which the gospel team came to Thessalonica.

Now he turns to verifying God's work among the Thessalonians themselves.

And you became followers of us

The first evidence of God's work among the Thessalonians as new believers is that they imitated their spiritual fathers. They even went beyond that in imitating the Lord (1 Peter 2:21).

The word "followers" means imitators, emulators. This emulation goes beyond mechanically imitating the gospel team. These new Christians saw the essence of this gospel team in how they lived under the power of God and the dynamics of the Holy Spirit (v.5). The Thessalonians followed the character and commitment of the gospel team, not their personalities or charisma.

The example of the gospel team made a powerful impression on the church at Thessalonica. This new church watched the team as they confronted opposition under the power of the Holy Spirit.

"For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me. For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church" (1 Corinthians 4:15-17).

Paul did not want the Thessalonians or any other group he started to imitate him without qualification. He wanted them to imitate him to the extent that he followed Christ.

"Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1).

"And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Hebrews 6:11-12).

Principle

There is great power in imitating godly and great leaders.

Application

There are outstanding leaders among evangelicals today who have great track records of evangelism. Do we follow those who are successful in evangelism or do we follow those who merely know how to talk about evangelism?

Examples produce paradigms to follow. Followers can become leaders. They can become leaders by following examples that produce paradigms for ministry. They can do what they see modeled and by that become models themselves.

Churches seeking to make greater impact evangelistically should also imitate churches with successful records of evangelism.

"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, 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, 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" (1 Thessalonians 2:14-16).

There is a qualification to imitating other churches. Churches often make the mistake of following the raw program of another church. Churches that commit this fault do not take into consideration their own situation, the mores of their community, the history of their own church and other important issues. Each church has its own personality; the leadership must work with that personality when it launches new ministries.

That said, however, there are important lessons we can learn from churches that fruitfully reach the lost.

and of the Lord,

After leadership first wins credibility with their people, then they can shift that credibility to Christ. Great Christian leaders do not point people ultimately to themselves.

"Again, the next day, John stood with two of his disciples. And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, 'Behold the Lamb of God!' The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus" (John 1:35-37).

Note the result of following godly Christian leaders and the Lord -- "so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe (v.7)."

Principle

God will extend our ministry way beyond ourselves, when we follow the Lord.

Application

When Christians follow the Lord, they do what they could not otherwise do. God will extend our ministry way beyond ourselves, when we follow the Lord.

"Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma" (Ephesians 5:1-2).

having received the word

The word "received" means welcomed. In the face of maltreatment, they welcomed the word of the gospel.

"And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. 'He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him – the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day" (John 12:47-48).

"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).

Principle

Life is in the seed, not in the sower.

Application

Life is in the seed, not the sower (Luke 8:11). Whenever we make ourselves susceptible to the gospel, God does a mighty work in our souls.

Harvesting the seeds of the gospel sown depends on 1) the integrity of the sower, 2) the amount of seed we sow and 3) where we sow the seed (Matthew 13). If Christians today want a great harvest, these essentials must exist in our ministries.

in much affliction,

After the Thessalonians followed the gospel team in sharing the gospel, they encountered "much affliction." The word "affliction" carries the idea of oppression or tribulation. They bore witness to the gospel knowing full well that wrath would rain upon them if they did so. Note that they did not simply receive some suffering, they received "much" affliction.

At the founding of the church in Thessalonica, Jason opened his home to the gospel team. He absorbed "much affliction" because he did. The Jews "dragged" Jason to the city authorities. Imagine the indignity of that!

"But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, 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. 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. 'Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king – Jesus.' And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things. So when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go" (Acts 17:5-9).

The city officials took "security" from Jason and those with him. These believers paid a financial price for serving the Lord.

Principle

If we are going to advance the cause of Christ throughout the world, we will pay a price for it.

Application

It will cost us something to witness to the gospel (3:3).

"Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone, 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, that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know. 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" (1 Thessalonians 3:1-5).

The word "appointed" indicates that God ordains afflictions to those who share their faith. It is amazing that some people believe that when they share their faith they will never have problems again. The opposite is the case. They will collect more problems the more effective they become in their witness. Becoming dynamic Christians will cost us something.

Has your Christianity cost you anything? Did it affect your job? Have you lost some business because of it? Did you lose some friends? We pay a price for witnessing to the gospel. Becoming dynamic Christians may cause some problems in our family.

"And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Romans 5: 3-5).

"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience" (James 1: 2-3).

with joy of the Holy Spirit

The Thessalonians witnessed to the gospel under persecution "with the joy of the Holy Spirit." The word "of" indicates that the origin, source or power of this joy is the Holy Spirit. Their joy came from the Holy Spirit.

In the face of extensive affliction and tribulation, they believed in their message and those who delivered the message. Not only did they carry their message with conviction in the face of tribulation, but they also had something more – "joy of the Holy Spirit." Joy in tribulation goes against human nature because God gives us capacity to face trial in the joy of the Holy Spirit.

"So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ" (Acts 5:41-42).

Principle

Joy transcends persecution and trial in sharing our faith.

Application

Some Christians do not share their faith with their friends because they fear that their friends will ostracize them. Other Christians know something of the "joy of the Holy Spirit" in witnessing. They know something of God's sovereignty and control of any situation they might face. This gives them confidence to transcend human pressures or self-identity issues. People who can transcend their situations do not constantly complain about their problems.

Affliction in witnessing can show us how God sustains us under duress. The Christian possesses a special caliber of soul due to the joy of the Holy Spirit.

"...for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14: 17).

Suffering and joy are not mutually exclusive. To the Christian, both can exist simultaneously.

"Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality" (2 Corinthians 8: 1-2).

"In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the

genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 1: 6-9).

"Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy" (1 Peter 4:12-13).

1 Thessalonians 1:7

"...so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe"

The two most outstanding churches in the New Testament were the churches at Philippi and Thessalonica. These churches were not perfect but they were exemplary. They were what churches should be. These churches were not the largest or the most gifted churches in the New Testament. The church at Corinth was the most gifted but not the most godly.

so that

The words "so that" point to an actual consequence. Paul is not talking in possibilities or probabilities. These churches actually became examples to other churches in Greece.

you became

The word "became" means to become something they were not previously. This is the transforming power of the gospel. Raw Gentiles in Thessalonica embraced Jesus as their Savior and their He changed their lives completely. Not only did they become Christians but they also became shining examples of those who penetrated their world with the gospel.

examples

The word "examples" is the Greek word tupos, from which we get our English word "type." Originally, this word meant "to strike." It was a visible impression of a stroke or pressure, mark,

trace. Then it came to mean an impression after a blow. When the church becomes an example, it leaves a mark or impression.

"Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern" (Philippians 3: 17).

"...not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us" (2 Thessalonians 3: 9).

The word "examples" in the Greek is in the singular which indicates that the church as a whole was the example. Paul singles out no other local church as a standard for other churches to follow as he did this church. The standard against which other churches can measure themselves is the church at Thessalonica. What was so unique about their ministry? They shared the gospel "every place" (v.8).

The Thessalonian church was a model for others to follow. This church was not an ideal church, but a model church. It was effective in sharing the faith. The Thessalonian church was the only church Paul called an example. They were the pace-setter churches for other churches--the model church, noted for its aggressive evangelism.

God's design for Christians is that they become instruments of impact. God wants each believer to leave a stamp on his sphere of influence. This implies that the believer has something that other people want.

Principle

Some churches are pace-setters for other churches to follow.

Application

Churches today can make a mark for Christ in evangelism. There is a tendency for churches to depend on para-church organizations or evangelistic crusades to do their evangelism for them. The Thessalonian church is the standard for your church.

Most churches do evangelism through their internal networks. Are you in a network whereby you can share your faith? Are you in a small group that is open to reach those without Christ?

Does the gospel reach a dead-end street with your church? Does the gospel come to you as an

individual and stop? Pass it on? The gospel is the best-kept secret in many churches.

"We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For He says: 'In an acceptable time I have heard you, And in the day of salvation I have helped you.' Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6: 1-2).

Many churches simply maintain the fish in the aquarium rather than travel to the home of uncaught fish.

When it comes to evangelism, most of us fish with a rod rather than a net.

This passage sets forth what an ideal [not a perfect church] should be. It is amazing how simple it is. We have a knack for complexity. We try to make everything complex. If we know the core ingredients of what makes a biblically successful church, we can trim off the unnecessary bureaucratic fat. We can build muscle using the right spiritual nourishment and exercise.

to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe

The Thessalonian church became the outstanding church to churches in Macedonia, the province of northern Greece and Achaia, the southern half of Greece. The cities of Athens and Corinth were in southern Greece. In other words, this one church reached all of Greece with the gospel by their influence on believers in other places. Not only did they reach Greece with the gospel but they extended the gospel to all of the Roman Empire – "in every place" (v.8). They did this within one year!

The Thessalonian church made a mark on their world. They made an impact because Christ made an impact on them. They influenced other Christians and so reached those without Christ in places they could not have gone themselves. Churches throughout Greece looked to the church at Thessalonica as their model for evangelism.

The city officials of Thessalonica described the extent of the ministry in this way,

"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).

Principle

Churches can extend the influence of their churches by modeling evangelism for other churches.

Application

Churches can extend their influence of evangelism by influencing other churches. Clearly some churches are far more effective in evangelism than other churches. Is it pride that keeps churches from investigating successful evangelism in other churches?

Although we need to investigate successful evangelistic churches, this does not mean that we copy them in every respect. Each church has its own strengths. Ultimately, each church must find what God would have for them. Churches that make an impact for Christ do not dance to the tune of someone else's music. They set their own tune. They may follow the example of another church, but they do not do so exclusively. Their leaders must find the unique vision God has for them.

1 Thessalonians 1:8

"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"

Verse eight develops the reason the Thessalonian church became an example to all the churches in Greece (v.7). This was a church of faith.

For from you

The gospel went out from the Thessalonians.

Principle

The gospel needs to go out from us as well as come to us.

Application

The gospel often comes to Christians but never goes out again. The gospel ends in them like a dead-end street. People carry the gospel to us, but we do not carry the gospel to others.

The gospel needs to go through us to others. As far as some of us are concerned, the gospel is the best-kept secret. No one will hear it from us if we can help it. We never share it or pass it on. Many churches are that way. Few ever hear the gospel in these churches. They make apologies for the gospel.

The gospel carries both a negative and a positive message. People do not like to hear that they have violated a holy God. They do not want to know that they have sinned and need a Savior. There is no easy way to declare this message. We must hear the bad news before we hear the good news. We must have a diagnosis before we can have a cure.

the word of the Lord has sounded forth,

The words "sounded forth" come from two words out and to hold meaning to cause to sound out, ring out or resound. "Sounded forth" then has the implication of to sound out a trumpet or thunder, to reverberate like an echo. When the gospel gains momentum then its impact increases.

The idea of resounding gives the impression that the gospel went out and then reverberated repeatedly throughout the Roman Empire. We often get reverberations in our church auditoriums. The same sound echoes in the room a number of times. God's Word reverberated everywhere like rolling thunder.

Principle

Momentum will increase the impact of the gospel throughout the world.

Application

We need to thunder out or trumpet out the gospel so that it reverberates throughout our community and world. It is not enough to be an evangelical church; our church must be an evangelistic church as well.

Is your church geared up to win people to Christ? Is this a fundamental purpose of your church? Many churches have lost this passion. Getting the gospel out is no longer a central value to them. They have lost their sense of heaven and hell, and the wonder of what Jesus did about sin. It is very easy to take our eyes off the target and focus on things of lesser value. Many good things out there are not the best.

"Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain" (Philippians 2:14-16).

"Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you..." (2 Thessalonians 3:1)

not only in Macedonia and Achaia,

The gospel from the church at Thessalonica reverberated throughout both northern and southern Greece.

but also in every place.

The gospel reverberated throughout the Roman Empire. The gospel rang out to the then known world. Thessalonica was a great seaport. Christians from this city went preaching the gospel throughout the world. As Paul writes First Thessalonians one year after he left the city, he hears reports from all over the world about their faith.

Your faith toward God has gone out,

The Thessalonians directed their faith toward God, not toward idols. They exercised a vital faith in Him. It was a vital faith because they expressed their trust in God using their testimony.

so that we do not need to say anything

The faith of the Thessalonians went out to such an extent that Paul did not have to say anything. Wherever Paul went, the faith of the Thessalonians preceded him. They prepared the way for his witness.

Principle

A church can be famous for its faith.

Application

Churches can be famous for many things but are they famous for their faith? The Roman church was famous for its faith throughout the world. Are you?

"First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world" (Romans 1: 8).

1 Thessalonians 1:9

"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..."

For they themselves declare concerning us

Third parties from other places told Paul of the effects of the gospel team in Thessalonica. The story spread throughout the Roman Empire by the grapevine.

what manner of entry we had to you,

Paul's gospel team moved into Thessalonica with a marvelous Spirit-empowered entrance. They did not come with a mediocre mechanical gospel preaching that lacked any semblance of vital faith. No, they came with a burning conviction about Jesus Christ that the Thessalonians in turn caught. It matters how a church begins for that establishes a precedent for its future ministry. "What manner" is important as well as what content.

"And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (1 Corinthians 2:1-5).

Thessalonians came to God supernaturally, not naturally. Their conversion did not come from some dynamically discoursed address. It came from people empowered by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit supernaturally brings the gospel message home to hearts.

"And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: "of sin, because they do not believe in Me; "of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; "of judgment, because the ruler of this world is

judged. "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now" (John 16:8-12).

Principle

Integrity determines how we live out our core values.

Application

What we are speaks so loudly that people hear our lives more than our words. Nothing is more fashionable than announcing our core values and mission statement and then setting goals to reach our end. Ministry has many similarities to business but there are massive differences as well. We measure everything by the bottom line in business for business revolves around the market. In ministry, however, everything revolves around a person and that person's integrity.

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23-24).

Successful Christian leaders pivot their goals around integrity. Our integrity determines how we live out our core values. We shape our character, not solely by how much information we know, but by how we apply that information to our experience. Is God transforming our lives by His Word? Are we becoming more like our Lord every day? Momentum in ministry comes from both the character of the message and the character of the messenger.

and how you turned to God

The "what manner" is important but so is the "how" of the gospel coming into a community. The Thessalonians demonstrated the power of the gospel by their conversion to serve the "living and true God" and their willingness to "wait for His Son from Heaven."

The word "turned" is a term of conversion, a complete change of course. This was a revolutionary change in viewpoint and attitudes of the Thessalonians. Others saw their theology as living vitality. The only theology that non-Christians know about is what they see in the lives of believers. When they see an about face in values and life, it brings them up short. They take notice:

"Why does my friend direct his whole life toward God now?"

Note the order of words here. We would normally think in terms of turning from idols to God but here Paul's argument is that they first turned to God and then away from idols. The Thessalonians did not leave their idols and then go out to find God. They turned to God and then left their idols. When people see the glory of God they willingly and immediately turn from idols. Conversion is no convenient fire escape from hell; it is not only turning from something but it is a turning to something.

from idols

An idol is anything that we worship, anything that takes the place of God in our lives. Many people worship money. Others devote themselves to self-adulation. Some place self-indulgence and pleasure as the centerpiece of their life. A great segment of our society lives in sexual lust and worship in a pattern similar to those who worshiped Aphrodite centuries ago.

An idol is an expression of rebellion against God (Romans 1:18ff). However, to embrace the gospel message is an expression of trust in God's authority as the only way of salvation.

Conversion is not only a turning to something but it is a turning from something. When we turn to God, that automatically turns our back to anything that gainsays who He is. There is a difference between God and Satan, heaven and hell. When we turn our face to one we turn our back on the other.

Principle

The gospel is mutually exclusively true.

Application

True conversion involves coming to understand the gospel in mutually exclusive terms. The Thessalonians turned to God from idols. Syncretism of any kind distorts the gospel message. We cannot mingle any other message with the gospel. No one can worship two masters at the same time (Matthew 5:24) because the dynamic of a master is absolute. To misunderstand this is to miss the essence of the gospel message.

It is not enough to believe that Jesus is our Savior, we must renounce any other way of salvation. As

the Thessalonians turned away from idols, so those who truly believe must turn their back on any belief that stands in contradistinction to the essence of the gospel.

We cannot truly turn to God without turning away from something. True conversion involves turning our back on any worship other than that of "the living and true God." This will cost us something. No doubt, we will lose friends and probably some business. People in our day turn to God without turning away from their primary devotion. No wonder many conversions do not take! Very few leaders will take a stand on a mutually exclusive gospel because they do not want to fly in the face of "tolerance" in local churches and parachurch organizations.

The Lord Jesus Christ will not play second fiddle to anyone or anything.

"Seeing they may see and not perceive, And hearing they may hear and not understand; Lest they should turn, And their sins be forgiven them" (Mark 4:12).

"And the Lord said, 'Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. 'But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren'" (Luke 22:31-32).

"... 'to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me'" (Acts 26:18).

"Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins" (James 5:19-20).

"For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls" (1 Peter 2:25).

to serve the living and true God

Two results came of the Thessalonian conversions. First, they served the living and true God (instead of idols). The word "serve" is in the present tense. Even as Paul speaks, the Thessalonians serve God.

The word "serve" means to serve as a bond slave. The sham and shame of paganism did not fulfil them. They turned to a fruitful life of service.

We cannot become Christians without some impact upon our lives (Ephesians 2:10). Lip and life go together.

"But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:20-24).

Service here has to do with worshipful adherence to the true God. Christian service is vital because it relates to a "living and true God." The word "living" stands in contrast to dead idols of paganism. The impotent, dead gods of paganism cannot change lives. The essence of Christian service is personal service. We serve a person, not a religion.

"...how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Hebrews 9:14)

The word "true" means real. Christians worship a genuine God. There is nothing false or counterfeit about the God of the Bible.

Principle

We worship a living and genuine God.

Application

If Christians seek fulfillment in anything other than the "living and true God" then they will end with some void in their lives. If we serve the living and genuine God, we will live a fruitful life of service.

God transforms us not to make us ornamental but to be functional. He saves us to serve, not sit. Churches are full of religious spectators who do not involve themselves with eternal issues.

"And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you

will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Joshua 24:15).

"Only fear the LORD, and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you" (1 Samuel 12:24).

"And when he came to the den, he cried out with a lamenting voice to Daniel. The king spoke, saying to Daniel, 'Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?'" (Daniel 6:20).

"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24).

"...serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews..." (Acts 20:19).

"For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers..." (Romans 1:9).

"But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter" (Romans 7:6).

"...not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord..." (Romans 12:11).

"For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men" (Romans 14:18).

"...not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men..." (Ephesians 6:6-7).

1 Thessalonians 1:10

"...and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come"

and to wait

The word "wait" means literally to wait up. The Thessalonians were waiting up for the Lord's return. They waited with anticipation, to wait for, expect someone or something. We order a new car and wait with anticipation for its delivery date. The Thessalonians remained expectant concerning the future event of Christ's coming.

There is a connection between those who effectively share their faith and those who wait for Jesus' coming. Their orientation is different from those who live for the now. We do not wait up all night for someone we expect to arrive at 9:00 the next morning. They expected Jesus to return at any time.

The Thessalonians suffered persecution (2:14). Some experienced excessive sorrow because they lost loved ones in death. They did not know about the rapture, so they carried unwarranted sorrow (4:13-18).

The Thessalonians did two things: they served and they waited. It is the believer's responsibility to do both.

Principle

The purpose of the rapture is to keep us on our toes spiritually.

Application

Jesus gives no signal for His coming. He might come at any moment. It might happen today.

"Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God" (1 Corinthians 4: 5).

"For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Corinthians 11: 26).

"And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation" (Hebrews 9: 27-28).

"For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry" (Hebrews 10: 37).

Jesus will not loiter. He will not tarry. When it is time for His coming, He will execute it efficiently. When the last person comes to Christ, when Jesus completes His church, then He will come back.

"You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!" (James 5: 8-9).

"...and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away" (1 Peter 5:4).

"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).

Some people will be ashamed when Christ comes. Jesus will catch them in some situation that does not honor Him.

"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 John 3: 1-3).

When we anticipate the rapture, this purifies our souls. Hope of Christ's coming purifies us. Each generation of believers has the right to expect the Lord to come in their lifetime. Generations past were disappointed but not mistaken.

We anticipate that it might be in our generation, but no one knows for sure. One thing we do know is that it is imminent. Each day we should affirm that "Perhaps Jesus will come today." This will enable us to keep short accounts with the Lord. We will not put off till tomorrow what we ought to deal with today.

"And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work" (Revelation 22:12).

for His Son

The Thessalonians waited for the return of the person of the Lord Jesus, the Son of God. To them, He is the matchless person who saved them from their sin and provided many assets both for time and for eternity. In addition, He will deliver them from their present problems by rapture.

The factor that impressed the new Christians at Thessalonica was not the coming of Christ as much as the person who was to come. He was the object of their hope. May Jesus, rather than the things that accompany Him, be the center of our interest.

"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know" (John 14: 1-4).

Principle

We must both serve the Lord and wait for Him at the same time.

Application

The Christian must both serve and wait. Doing one and not the other is not an option. Some Christians serve but do not wait. Others wait but do not serve. We should serve as if Jesus was never coming and we wait in anticipation as if He were to come at any moment. This is not a paradox. The Christian must hold both of these truths in tension.

To live the full Christian life, we must expect the Savior's coming. No prophecy needs to be fulfilled before He comes back. They wait for an imminent and looming rapture of the church to Heaven. Above all, Jesus is coming. We will personally meet Him at last.

"Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one

still hope for what he sees?" (Romans 8:23-24).

"...so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ..." (1 Corinthians 1:7).

from heaven,

The Thessalonians were waiting for Jesus to come literally through the clouds. This is the great climax, consummation and coronation of the Christian life. This is the time when Jesus comes to take us physically into Heaven.

Principle

Jesus will come from Heaven to take our physical bodies to be with Him.

Application

When a Christian dies, he goes to Heaven. God does not leave our loved ones in the grave. God translates their souls into His presence. He does not bury souls in cemeteries. He will resurrect even the body at the rapture (4:13f).

"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself" (Philippians 3:20-21).

This is great news for those with physical problems. Those who are handicapped or have bodies racked with paralysis will one day have a perfect body. Our present body is a body that humiliates us. Our future body is a body that will be like the resurrected body of our Lord Jesus Christ. This gives optimism to people with mental problems. The best is yet ahead. That is why we anticipate His coming.

whom He raised from the dead,

We establish our confidence in the rapture (v.10) by the resurrection of Christ. Jesus defeated death by His resurrection. We will defeat death in the rapture. Jesus said, "Because I live, you shall live also."

"Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, "because He has

appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17: 30-31).

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead puts Christianity into a different league from all other religions of the world. Every other architect of religion is dead. Buddha is dead, buried and gone. Confucius is dead. Mohammed is dead. Jesus did not die as a mere martyr. He died deliberately for those who violate God's righteousness. Now Jesus is alive and well by resurrection. He lives in Heaven. Christianity is exclusively true because Jesus lives in Heaven.

Principle

The genius and glory of Christianity is the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

Application

God bases everything on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. By His resurrection, God delivered us from sin, the Tribulation, Hell and the power of sin in the believer's life. Jesus can set us free from any sin.

If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then Christianity is a farce. There is no hope or Heaven. An eternally dead Jesus would give no one hope. He would have nothing to offer us. However, He rose from the dead giving hope to the hopeless.

"Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it" (Acts 2:23-24).

"But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses" (Acts 3:14-15).

"If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead,

by Him this man stands here before you whole" (Acts 4:9-10).

"Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come – that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26:22-23).

"It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification" (Romans 4:24-25).

"Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4).

"Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another – to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God" (Romans 7:4).

"But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you" (Romans 8:11).

"Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us" (Romans 8:34).

"...that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9).

"For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living" (Romans 14:9).

"Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead)..." (Galatians 1:1).

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant

mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead..." (1 Peter 1:3).

"He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God" (1 Peter 1:20-21).

"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit..." (1 Peter 3:18).

The resurrection of Jesus is the receipt that Jesus paid the price for our sins. We cannot add anything to this. We cannot improve perfection.

even Jesus

The object of our anticipation is the person of Jesus. Note the name used here is "Jesus" which is His human name. They waited for the incarnate Christ. He is the center and circumference of our lives. We wait patiently for that wonderful day when we will meet the center of our expectation.

Principle

Jesus is the center and circumference of our lives.

Application

My wife loves to compare costs when she shops. Sometimes I take her to the store and wait in the car. At times, I wait patiently and sometimes I do not! There is a difference between waiting patiently and just waiting. God wants us to wait patiently for the Lord. Some of us will wait for 60, 70, 80 years. One day we will finally meet Him face to face. Oh, what a day that will be!

"Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ" (2 Thessalonians 3:5).

who delivers us from the wrath to come

Jesus will deliver Christians "from the wrath to come." Thessalonian Christians do not have to be delivered from Hell sometime in the future. For them the deliverance is past (John 5:24). This "wrath" is the wrath of the Tribulation just before the Millennium (Revelation 6:17). Jesus delivers believers from this period of Tribulation.

The word "from" indicates that God keeps the church from "wrath." The word "from" means away from. This means that the church will not go through the future Tribulation period. The tribulation period deals with Israel, with the evangelization of the nation Israel in order to establish the promised Millennial Kingdom for Israel.

It is apparent that Paul deals with the Tribulation as the "wrath" in this verse because his reference is to the rapture. The Thessalonians did not need to prepare for the Tribulation because Jesus would deliver them from it. Just think of those left behind after the rapture. The church will not be a conscience to society any longer.

First Thessalonians deals with the coming of Christ in every chapter (1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:23). Each chapter ends with a reference to this event.

Principle

A role of the believer is to anticipate the rapture.

Application

Jesus came to pay for our salvation in His first coming. In the rapture and Second Coming, He will bring full and final liberation from sin, death and Hell. An important function of every believer is to anticipate the rapture. We rejoice in it. We celebrate it. We place our hope in it. It becomes an ever-present blessing to our souls.

Looking for the Lord to return at any moment will change our lives. It will transform our way of doing things. It will change the way we deal with temptations. If you knew you were going to die in two years, would you change your priorities? Would you do something about broken relationships?

Many of us carry a great amount of spiritual flab. To deal with this, we must admit that we are out of spiritual shape. "There are a few people to whom I take exception. I am out of phase with them. I don't talk to them any more. I resent them. I envy others. Deal with me, Lord."

Do you have animosity, resentment or anger toward some other Christian? Have you come to grips with this? You should not allow it to go on and on. If we expect that the Lord may come at any time, we must not allow ourselves to cherish

these sins. We must bury the hatchet. We must shake hands with them. We must forget the past.

1 Thessalonians 2:1

"For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain"

Evidently, Judaizers outside the church of Thessalonica leveled charges against the legitimacy of Paul and his gospel team. They tried to discredit them. They said that they were in ministry for personal profit. Paul reminds Thessalonians that the gospel team came to them with the integrity one year previously (verses 1-12). In the first six verses, He makes his motives clear.

The gospel team managed ministry as stewards of God's will (verses 1-6). In this chapter, we find a great model for ministry, an ideal minister of the gospel.

For you yourselves know, brethren,

The word "you" is emphatic in the Greek. The Thessalonians knew personally how Paul's team came into Thessalonica with the gospel (1 Thessalonians 1:5; 2:1, 2, 5, 11; 4:2). The word "know" occurs repeatedly throughout this chapter. The Thessalonians knew this gospel team intimately.

that our coming to you

The Thessalonian Christians knew of the "coming" of the gospel team. When the gospel team moved into Thessalonica, no one knew anything of the gospel. They never heard the life-transforming gospel message. Paul and his team went where the fish were. They took the initiative in evangelism.

Principle

If we are going to advance the cause of Christ, we must go where the fish are.

Application

Most of us find it fruitless to fish in our own bathtubs. We have to go to the fish; they do not come to us. As a rule, few fish come to church; few non-Christians move outside their element. God expects us to take the gospel wherever He places us, in life, school, work or neighborhood. We must take the initiative and make the contact.

Many times our contacts with non-believers are unproductive. We go away and they say, "What a nice person." We receive their personal praise, but it is without eternal benefit. If they reject Christ, they go into a Christless eternity. Contact with the lost can only be effective if we declare the gospel to them.

Many Christians never share their faith. Their Christian community is simply a country club for them. They love to fellowship with believers, but do not like to connect to non-believers, because that is too uncomfortable for them. They find comfort in the presence of Christians.

What do you do of your contacts with unbelievers? Do you express the gospel with your integrity and personality? Do it with your vocabulary and your style? That is many times more effective than taking them to an evangelistic meeting. God entrusts us with the gospel. We need to bring our conversations around to the fact that Christ died for our sins. That is a wonderful product to sell. Are you concerned about the message?

We are witnesses for Christ whether we know it or not, for better or for worse.

was not in vain

The word "vain" means empty or without purpose. The ministry at Thessalonica was not empty or without fruit. The gospel team's ministry came with power. The gospel did not move into Thessalonica through empty motives and methods. Ministry cannot be some empty, shallow, flesh generated thrust. The gospel team's ministry was short, abrupt, forceful, but fruitful. It was fruitful because the Thessalonians embraced the gospel.

"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Corinthians 15:10).

The gospel's team had success in Thessalonica. People came to Christ and their lives changed dramatically. The gospel team did not come with speculations about philosophy. They came with the Word of God. Therefore, their ministry had lasting effects.

Principle

Personal integrity will prevent a vain ministry.

Application

Our personal integrity speaks to the character of our ministry. Our character authenticates the genuineness of our ministry. True effectiveness in ministry has integrity at its root. Godly character and conduct is the ultimate valid evidence of God's working and approval.

Christians minister for eternity. Therefore, their ministry is not in vain. The Devil will attempt to discourage them to the place where they will no longer be a force in ministry.

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58).

1 Thessalonians 2:2

"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"

But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi,

The Thessalonians knew only too well the hassle the gospel team had endured just before they came to Thessalonica. The city officials at Philippi stripped and beat them with rods and cast them into the inner recesses of a dark, dank prison (Acts 16:22-23). They came to Thessalonica with sore feet, and backs to match.

Not only did they endure suffering, but the Philippian officials dished out punishment in a shameful way. They were "spitefully treated" at Philippi. The Greek means that the Philippians abused them publicly. Their intent was to humiliate them and make them a public spectacle.

This was far more than teasing. They beat them publicly although they were Roman citizens. When the public authorities found out they were Roman citizens, they wanted the team to sneak out of town without a peep. The gospel team refused to go until the authorities came in person.

Principle

True ministry withstands the blast of criticism and persecution.

Application

Out of the crucible of Philippi came the pure gold of Thessalonica. The gospel team was clearly not in ministry for selfish purposes.

"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:1-2).

The Devil tried to cut Paul's ministry off, but Paul did not stop communicating the gospel. His trials only became a platform for further ministry.

as you know, we were bold

The word "bold" means to speak freely, openly, fearlessly, express oneself freely. The Greeks used this word for speaking in a democratic assembly.

The gospel team had such confidence in God that they proclaimed the gospel without fear (Acts 4:13). The New Testament always uses this word in relation to proclaiming the gospel (Acts 9:27, 29; 13:46; 14:3). Fear is why most people do not share their faith. They fear ridicule and rejection.

However, courage is necessary to move beyond the status quo. It takes courage to fly in the face of what people do not want to talk about. People are hypersensitive about certain subjects, and the gospel is one of them.

"...and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear" (Philippians 1:14).

Paul was no coward. He never trimmed his sails to make the gospel more pleasing. The gospel by its very essence stings and smarts those who hear it. It offends people, because it strips them of their religious defenses. The gospel shows people for what they are. No one likes that.

No one likes to communicate that, but this is part of the gospel message. That is why most Christians, including preachers want to remain in the safe cloister of the church. Everyone likes to be liked. If we love the Lord, we must set forth the unvarnished facts of the gospel. That means we have to reveal human nature in its stark reality.

"Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13).

"Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word..." (Acts 4:29).

"And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints – and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak" (Ephesians 6:17-20).

Fainter hearts would have quailed before such outrageous indignities heaped on them. The gospel team was not only innocent, but they were also Roman citizens. Stripes, stocks and satanic malice brought no white flag from Paul or his team. Instead of giving up at Philippi, he pressed on to Thessalonica. Rather than giving up, he advanced the gospel further. Rather than caving into terror and persecutions, the pressure he faced made him bolder to advance the cause of Christ. Persecution did not paralyze him.

Principle

Suffering for the gospel sharpens our boldness, if all things are spiritually equal.

Application

No one can daunt people in ministry who have confidence in God. Nothing can drive them from telling about Christ and His gospel. They are far from the current consumer Christianity that seeks self-interest above all else. As the saying goes, "No pain, no gain."

"For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me" (Philippians 1:29-30).

Most of us concern ourselves with self-protection, but the successful Christian life is no rosy bed of ease. Do you declare the gospel in spite of opposition, or do you fold up and silently steal away?

in our God

We cannot expose ourselves to the life and ministry of Paul and fail to notice his great courage in the face of difficulty. Did he generate courage through operation bootstraps? Not at all. He got his courage from God. Paul's power was no natural boldness. He was like most of us – a great coward.

"I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (1 Corinthians 2: 3-5).

"For indeed, when we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears" (2 Corinthians 7: 5).

The phrase "in our God" qualifies "we were bold." Boldness did not come from the gospel team; it came from God. The word "in" signifies that their God gave them the sphere of courage to press forward with the gospel. Understanding something of His sovereignty and sustaining grace gives us the environment needed for aggressive evangelism.

They knew He providentially moves on the hearts of people. They did not move recklessly into Thessalonica. They operated under the umbrella of the five principles of 1 Thessalonians 1:5.

They also used wisdom in their evangelism thrusts. They met people on their approachable side. It is one thing to get opposition for communicating the gospel; it is another thing to create opposition of our own making.

"Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech

always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one" (Colossians 4:5-6).

"For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you" (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

"Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved" (1 Corinthians 10:32-33).

Paul obtained courage from his relationship with God. He was not unaffected by fear. In his natural person, he would not be as bold as he would if he moved in the confidence of God providentially working in his life.

Principle

Courage comes from God, not from self.

Application

People who trust the providence of God are much bolder in sharing their faith. The more we love and trust God in His sovereign care, the more boldness we have in our faith.

to speak to you the gospel of God

The gospel is not only "our gospel" (1 Thessalonians 1:5) but it is also the "the gospel of God." The sole author and authority of the gospel is God. In the face of the persecution the gospel team faced in Philippi, they moved into Thessalonica with a bold message. They did not say, "We had better pull back on our message unless it disturbs some people."

in much conflict

When the gospel team came to Thessalonica, they did so amid much conflict. The impact of the shameful situation at Philippi was still much on their minds. We get the English word "agony" from the Greek word for "conflict." This is an athletic term used for demanding physical exertion. Advancing the cause of Christ is not an easy task. It is a demanding mission. A halfway effort will make no significant difference in reaching the maximum number of people for Christ.

Note the word "much." The gospel team communicated the gospel in "much agony." That speaks of their burden for getting the message out. Their consuming passion for those without Christ carried them through much personal suffering. Paul and his team were dead earnest. It is impossible to manufacture this kind of boldness.

Principle

Intensity is necessary for the serious advance of the gospel in the world.

Application

Are you dead earnest in your witness for Christ? Are you willing to take some "guff" in order to get the message to those without Christ?

"Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily. For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 1:28-2:3).

1 Thessalonians 2:3

"For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit"

In this verse, Paul denies three allegations against his team about their message, morals and manner of communication.

Fierce antagonism did not discourage Paul and his team. He was in the business of pleasing God, not people. God entrusted him with the gospel. Accordingly, certain questionable practices common among unsound religious leaders found no place in his evangelistic labors.

It is amazing how much we can learn from negatives. Verse three begins a series of negatives that deal with the quality of ministry. For our exhortation

The word "for" indicates Paul's basis for boldness. When Paul and his team came to Thessalonica, they did not employ error, uncleanness or deceit.

did not come from error

First, Paul says that his gospel team's message was not "from error." The word "error" means wandering, roaming. This is error as opposed to deceit. Paul's gospel team did not wander from the path of truth. They were under no delusions or deceptions when it came to truth. Never did they cause someone to hold a wrong view of God or mislead them about God's Word.

"Error" has the idea of roaming off the right path in doctrine (James 5:20; 2 Peter 3:17; 1 John 4:6) or morals (Romans 1:27; 2 Peter 2:18; Jude 11). The Bible never divides doctrine and morals by a sharp line.

Concerning his message, Paul's exhortations to those without Christ did not spring from a creed of error. His appeals did not reveal the ranting of a deluded fanatic. He did not peddle private revelation. A plethora of people peddle their own viewpoints in the church today. Paul did not come with his own viewpoint; he came with the Word of God.

Paul's preaching was accurate. He set forth truth as it was rather than what he wanted it to be.

Principle

We must set forth truth as it is rather than the way we want it to be.

Application

We should not manipulate Scripture for the sake of elegance in preaching. We simply set forth truth

as it is. Our preaching should be as accurate as the multiplication table.

"Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins" (James 5:19-20).

We must never alter or water down the Word or the gospel. Inaccurately stating of God's Word will ruin its message.

or uncleanness,

The second negative of this verse states that Paul says that his gospel team did not come with "uncleanness" in morals. "Uncleanness" means impurity, dirt. Literally, "uncleanness" means refuse. It came to mean a state of moral impurity (Romans 1:24; 6:19; 2 Corinthians 12:21; Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 4:19; 5:3; Colossians 3:5; 1 Thessalonians 2:3). The gospel team did not come to Thessalonica seeking fame or greed.

Concerning his morals, Paul demanded a holy conduct devoid of all uncleanness. This was in contrast to many of the religions of Paul's day, which not only permitted immorality but also prescribed it in their core rituals by worshipping with sex. Religions that cater to the natural and physical at the expense of divine holiness are always popular.

Principle

The life of the messenger must be consistent with the message.

Application

People who communicate God's Word must live lives consistent with the message they speak. This requires the filling of the Holy Spirit. We cannot live the supernatural Christian life in natural power.

"Depart! Depart! Go out from there, Touch no unclean thing; Go out from the midst of her, Be clean, You who bear the vessels of the Lord" (Isaiah 52:11).

"For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness" (1 Thessalonians 4:7).

God will bless His Word even if a jackass preaches it. Yet, we can measure the impact of the Word of

God upon any group of people by the spiritual caliber of the spokesman. Water flows through pipes. If the pipe is rusty, the water may flow but there will be discoloration and sediment in the water. The water may not flow freely. It will taste of the pipe. The Word of God will not taste right to those without Christ if the messenger is unclean.

"Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks" (Ephesians 5:1-4).

nor was it in deceit

The third negative in this verse is "deceit." "Deceit" originally meant bait for fish. We use guile when we fish by using bait that appears like food to the fish. It is not food but a decoy. "Deceit" came to mean cunning, treachery, and any cunning contrivance for deceiving or catching, such as the Trojan horse. It refers to any trick or stratagem, wiles, guile, craft, cunning, treachery.

The gospel team came to Thessalonica in a straightforward manner. No trickery was used in the preaching itself (2 Corinthians 4:2; 2:17; cf. John 1:47). Paul never used guile (2 Corinthians 12:16).

Secular literature used "deceit" for a huckster. They used this word for a tavern keeper of the ancient world who would water down the wine of an inebriated person. There are those who also water down the Word. They use guile and tricks with the message of Christ. These are spiritual hucksters.

Paul did not peddle sexual license by encouraging people to indulge themselves in pleasure. Such doctrine attracted a big following in that day. Others promised prosperity. He did not appeal to their greed. Paul was above reproach in his methods. He never used the end to justify the means. God's approval was the ultimate test for the way Paul did ministry.

Principle

Authenticity in content and delivery are the essence of the gospel.

Application

Part and parcel of ministry is its environment of integrity. Those who minister should never do it for self-centered reasons. Both authentic content and delivery are at the heart of delivering the gospel message. We live it and state it straight. True ministry is the ability to communicate from truth and integrity (2 Corinthians 4:2).

"But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Corinthians 4:2).

When communicators of the gospel use guile, deceit and delusion, this is duplicity, two-facedness and hypocrisy. Non-Christians can see the phoniness of it all. They should see that we set forth truth in an unadulterated fashion.

1 Thessalonians 2:4

"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"

But as we have been approved by God

The word "approved" means to test with a view to approving, to assay. The Greeks used this term for testing metals to see if they meet the standards. Paul uses the word for approving after distinguishing and discerning.

"...that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ..." (Philippians 1:10).

Principle

God tests believers to approve their handling of the gospel.

Application

God tests us to see if He can trust us with the gospel. He scrutinizes what we do with the gospel to find out whether we are genuine. He uses

people who are credible with the gospel. What a high honor for God to trust us with the gospel.

to be entrusted with the gospel,

"To be entrusted" is a banker's term for making a deposit. The intent of making a deposit is to make money; we invest capital for making money. God has made a deposit in believers and He expects compound interest. He expects dividends.

"Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18-19).

"But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter..." (Galatians 2: 7).

"...according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust" (1 Timothy 1: 11).

"O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babbling and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge – ..." (1 Timothy 6: 20).

"Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us" (2 Timothy 1:13-14).

"...but has in due time manifested His word through preaching, which was committed to me according to the commandment of God our Savior..." (Titus. 1: 3).

It is a wonderful thing to have God believe in us, to trust us with the gospel. To have Him place His confidence in us is a mark of honor.

Principle

God entrusts some people with the gospel message.

Application

How many people carried the gospel to you? They were faithful to their trust. You were the beneficiary of their faithfulness. Are you faithful in carrying the gospel to someone else? Are you bearing compound interest in winning people to God?

Some people are passionate about football. They will sit in minus-twenty-degree weather to watch a game. They almost die of exposure but they are there to root for their team. Many Christians are not passionate about the gospel at all. They would not go out of their way or bear any inconvenience to share the gospel.

"For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel! For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship" (1 Corinthians 9: 16-17).

even so we speak, not as pleasing men,

Our purpose in speaking the gospel is to please God, not men. The gospel team never changed the message to accommodate the fancies of men. They never compromised or watered down the gospel.

A great issue in life is whom are we trying to please. Do we please people or God? Some of us accommodate men and others of us accommodate God. Paul's gospel team was not out to win a popularity contest in Thessalonica.

If we live our lives pleasing people, we have had it. If we give over any part of our lives to gain the approbation or attention of other Christians, we step out of the will of God.

"For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ" (Galatians 1:10).

"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..." (1 Thessalonians 4:1).

Not pleasing mean does not mean that we deliberately antagonize people. The implication is not that we should go out of our way to offend

people. There is enough offense in the gospel without us adding our own personal affront.

but God who tests our hearts

God constantly scrutinizes our hearts. He seeks to find whether the master motive of ministry is to please God.

"The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it? I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings" (Jeremiah 17:9-10).

Principle

God tests to approve those He entrusts with the gospel.

Application

We need to learn to witness as unto the Lord, not people. Some Christians witness for the primary purpose of impressing other Christians. This is a way to get attention from the Christian herd.

There are certain occupational hazards in preaching the gospel. One of these hazards is criticism. If you have a thin skin, you do not enter politics. If you have a thin skin, don't engage in ministry.

"...according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust" (1 Timothy 1:11).

1 Thessalonians 2:5

"For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness—God is witness"

For neither at any time did we use flattering words,

The word flattering means fawning. Flattery praises as a means of gratifying someone's vanity. Under no occasion or point in time did the gospel team use manipulation to reach their ends.

"For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple" (Romans 16:18).

"For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ" (2 Corinthians 2:17).

as you know,

The Thessalonians were eyewitnesses to the gospel team's ministry. They set forth the gospel without charade. They were not there to win a popularity contest. The church at Thessalonica could verify this.

Principle

Flattery is the sin of smooth words.

Application

Flattery operates under ulterior motives. Flattery misleads people by making them think you believe in them more than you do. This is the sin of smooth words. Putting people off-guard by smooth words is lying.

To assume a false face for the purpose of taking advantage of other people is an offense against God. This base egoism seeks to turn everything to one's own advantage. This is a base ulterior motive. Feathering one's nest at the expense of others is covetousness.

Christian leaders must refuse to prostitute their gifts to achieve selfish ends. The insatiable desire to have more is no excuse for using people.

nor a cloak for covetousness—

A cloak is something alleged as the cause that is not the real cause. A cloak is both a pretext and pretense.

When the gospel team came to Thessalonica, they did not justify the gospel based on misleading suggestions. They did not pretend to be something they were not. Nor did they present themselves as ostensibly something they did not live up to. They did not put on appearances by operating under assumed pretexts. They did not butter up people or use crowd psychology. A "cloak" is a gimmick for enriching oneself.

"And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the

wisdom of men but in the power of God" (1 Corinthians 2:4-5).

Covetousness uses a cloak for its own ends. Covetousness is the desire to have more. The New Testament always uses this term in a bad sense (Luke 12:15; Romans 1:29; Ephesians 4:19; 5:3; Colossians 3:52; Colossians 9:5; 2 Peter 2:3, 14). Fundamentally, covetousness is a desire for advantage.

Sometimes the New Testament renders "covetousness" extortion (2 Corinthians 9:5). This person is greedy for gain. Covetous people have insatiable desire and avarice. A person with a strong desire to acquire more and more material possessions irrespective of need is a covetous person.

"And He said to them, 'Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses'" (Luke 12: 15).

"So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. 'I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel' (Acts 20: 32-33).

The gospel team did not come with false pretense to flatter and manipulate their hearers to make money.

"By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber" (2 Peter. 2: 3).

God is witness

Paul calls upon God to witness the gospel team's motives (Romans 1:9; 9:1; 2 Corinthians 1:23). God can detect human heart's secret coveting.

Principle

The desire to have more in spite of need violates a holy God.

Application

The antithesis of covetousness is contentment. A person with a contented heart is satisfied with her lot. She accepts the will of God for her life.

"Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you'" (Hebrews 13:5).

Covetousness is idolatry.

"Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry" (Colossians 3:5).

Any time Christians cross the threshold into desire for more and more irrespective of need, they enter idolatry. What they covet becomes their god. God is no longer their ultimate priority but something else takes His place.

People who join in the idolatry of covetousness also employ phony pretexts to take advantage of others. They use gimmicks as rationalizations for their idolatry.

1 Thessalonians 2:6

"Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ"

The three negatives in this verse all relate to the same idea: Christian workers seeking glory, credit and recognition by men.

Nor did we seek glory from men,

The word "glory" here carries the idea of honor, praise. The gospel team did not seek praise from the Thessalonians.

The gospel team was not in the business of seeking glory. Neither power lust nor personal approbation were the motives for their ministry.

"I do not receive honor [glory] from men. 'But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in you. 'I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive. 'How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God?' (John 5:41-44).

The gospel team sought the glory that comes from God. They told the truth regardless of whether it was popular or not.

Principle

True ministry seeks praise from God, not people.

Application

None of us should drive our ministry by praise. To use ministry as a platform for getting one's name in the lights or becoming a famous "evangelical," is to turn the focus of ministry to oneself rather than to serve God and others. Leaders who lust for power, position, praise or applause turn ministry into a carnal base for self-advancement.

either from you

The team did not come to Thessalonica to get the Thessalonians to gush and fawn all over their ministries. They did not look for recognition from others. Ministry can become an end in itself. We can seek credit, plaudits and adulation from people as our main end.

Leaders who do not care whether they receive the applause or compliments of men are independent and free to lead as God wills. They will receive their reward in heaven.

"And do you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them; for behold, I will bring adversity on all flesh,' says the LORD. 'But I will give your life to you as a prize in all places, wherever you go'" (Jeremiah 45: 5).

"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

Principle

Our central purpose is to live to glorify God, not self.

Application

Leadership that constantly looks to please people will never lead properly. If we live with a view to gaining the approbation of others and not God, we will live our lives in vain.

Seeking the glory of men is a very subtle temptation in leadership. Living to the glory of God is the central purpose of our existence. If we swerve from that purpose, things will go haywire in our ministries.

"Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, But to Your name give glory, Because of Your mercy, Because of Your truth" (Psalm 115:1).

Most of us feel that it is our responsibility to establish a reputation. There is a great difference between reputation and character. Reputation is what people think we are and character is what we actually are. Why should we seek to establish our reputation when we all march under the same flag, the flag of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no place for competition among Christian leaders or Christian churches. We are all in the same army and we all have the same general, Jesus. We may not all have the same rank but we all march under the same flag. We are all in the service of General Jesus.

"Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other" (1 Corinthians 4:6).

or from others,

The desire to be well-known in order to gain prestige among people moves many Christian leaders today. "Give me top billing. I need my place in history." This is the kind of motivation that moves some politicians and athletes.

Some people will not cooperate if they are not the top banana. They value their reputation much higher than their integrity. They want people to think well of them. We love to have people have an exaggerated estimation of us. Somehow, we never sell ourselves short. We downgrade others and upgrade ourselves. The root of the whole thing is pride.

Principle

True ministry goes against our natural tendency to advance ourselves.

Application

By nature, we like to be noticed. Many people in ministry seek this as their central motive for ministry. It is difficult to separate these things from our ministry so that we operate on pure motives. When we get to the place where we

minister whether people notice us or not, we are at the place where we honor God.

We serve the Lord when people disrespect us, neglect us or even take advantage of us. We are not serving people in this case but the Lord. Some people constantly feel sorry for themselves because others do not take notice of them. The heart of this attitude is a ministry designed to get recognition from people.

"Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up..." (1 Corinthians 13:4).

We all want people to think well of us. We even want them to have an exaggerated estimation of us. We would rather they overestimate us than underestimate us. We always overestimate ourselves. We never sell ourselves short. We are quick to sell others short. If people do not accept our estimation of ourselves then we are quick to downgrade them. At its root, this is unabashed pride.

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:5-7).

It is spiritual suicide to attempt to share in God's glory.

"I am the Lord, that is My name; And My glory I will not give to another, Nor My praise to carved images" (Isaiah 42:8).

Do you ascribe to God the credit that is due His name or do you assume that credit for yourself?

"Give unto the LORD the glory due to His name; Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness" (Psalm 29:2).

Glory is God's due. It is not our due.

"Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, But to Your name give glory, Because of Your mercy, Because of Your truth" (Psalm 115:1).

Some people love the praise of people more than the praise of God. The gospel team lived to the praise of God (2:4). They rejoiced in delivering the gospel message itself.

"Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God " (John 12:42-43).

when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ

The gospel team could have pulled rank and used their authority as apostles. They never abused their official status. They knew that

God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble (1 Peter 5:5-6).

Paul could have been pontifical, pompous. He could have thrown his weight around but he didn't.

The "demands" that they could have made were 1) to claim financial maintenance while they were in Thessalonica (2:9; 2 Corinthians 11:9; 12:16; 2 Thessalonians 3:8) and 2) to receive honor for the work they did there.

Principle

It is the better part of wisdom not to use our authority at times.

Application

There are two aspects of leadership authority in a congregation. Leaders have the onus not to operate in power-lust or seek approbation. The congregation must recognize the need for authority for the sake of the office.

"And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves. Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all" (1 Thessalonians 5:12-14).

Wise leaders use the authority of leadership carefully. Wise response to leadership honors the office.

1 Thessalonians 2:7

"But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children"

With this verse the emphasis shifts from the gospel team to the response to their message at Thessalonica.

But

The word "but" here is a strong contrast in the original language. This answers the preceding negatives.

we were gentle among you,

The word "gentle" is the word infant in Greek. The reason the gospel team became as infants among the Thessalonians is that they were more concerned about the welfare of the young Christians in that place than they were in asserting their own rights. In their immaturity in Christ, the Thessalonians needed warm care rather than haughty commands. We can injure new Christians very easily.

The gospel team showed tenderness toward the Thessalonians. They accommodated themselves to the culture and the spiritual level of the people to whom they ministered. We reach people by approaching them from their approachable side.

"Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand" (Philippians 4:5).

Paul at times was not gentle. He was not gentle with the Galatians because there was a doctrinal issue among that group. There is no latitude, no flexibility and no compromise with essential doctrinal matters. When it came to people whose hearts were right, he was "gentle."

just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children

The "nursing mother" here is not simply a nurse but a nurse who cherishes her children. This nurse has the capacity and competency to nurse but she has innate mother instinct. It is one thing to be a professional but it is another thing to be a mother. The idea here is not simply that of a nurse but that of a nursing mother because this nurse "cherishes her own children." A nursing mother cares tenderly for her little one.

"As one whom his mother comforts, So I will comfort you; And you shall be comforted in Jerusalem" (Isaiah 66:13).

The word "cherishes" primarily means to heat, to soften by heat; then it came to mean to keep warm,

like birds covering their young with their feathers (Deuteronomy 22:6). "Cherishes" metaphorically came to mean to cherish with tender love, to foster with tender care (Ephesians 5:29 -- of Christ and the Church). In our passage, it is the care of the saints at Thessalonica by the gospel team. They were in the business of fostering the saints. The team lavished on this church the same tender affectionate care as a nursing mother does for her own children.

Principle

Leaders should care for younger Christians in tenderness.

Application

Those who care for new believers should care for them as a mother cares for her little children.

"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 Corinthians 12:15).

"And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will" (2 Timothy 2:24-26).

1 Thessalonians 2:8

"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"

So, affectionately longing for you,

The words "affectionately longing" means to have a strong affection for, a yearning after. The gospel team had a yearning love for the Thessalonians.

"...and by their prayer for you, who long for you because of the exceeding grace of God in you" (2 Corinthians 9:14).

we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God,

The team exercised great delight in imparting the gospel and their lives to the Thessalonians. The word "impart" means more than "to give." It means to give from oneself.

but also our own lives,

The exponents of the gospel shared themselves by moonlighting rather than asking the Thessalonians to support them. They spared nothing so that they could advance the gospel in Thessalonica.

"...men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 15: 26).

The team gave their entire beings so that the church at Thessalonica would grow. Sacrifice is necessary if people are going to develop into what God wants them to become. A truly loving mother pours out her whole life for her children.

because you had become dear to us

The team enlarged their love toward the Thessalonians. Someone said, "I love ministry; it is just people I can't stand!" True ministry has a deep love for people.

Principle

True leaders care about the spiritual and eternal welfare of their followers.

Application

So many Christian leaders make merchandise of those who follow them today. This is a sad story of selfishness in ministry. This is a sad indictment against the nature of leadership in the church.

"But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state. For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:19-21).

Rather than operating on greed, committed leaders should spare no pain for those they serve.

"But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to

testify to the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24).

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"

Another aspect of the love we give the people to whom we minister is sacrificial hard work.

For you remember, brethren,

Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians about a year after he left Thessalonica. Nobody knew better than he did how sacrificially the gospel team gave to the Thessalonians.

our labor and toil;

While in Thessalonica, Paul and his team physically labored at trades to meet their financial needs. They moonlighted during their stay with the Thessalonians. Paul was a tent-maker (Acts 18:3). He made tents in Corinth, Thessalonica and Ephesus. He worked long hours into the night, so that he could preach the gospel in the day.

The word "labor" carries the idea of painful effort, emphasizing toil in work -- hardship, distress. The gospel team put in a lot of hard work in bringing the gospel to the Thessalonians.

for laboring night and day,

Instead of being a financial burden to the church in Thessalonica, the gospel team relieved them of that burden by doing physical labor night and day. They burned the candle at both ends for the sake of giving them the gospel.

that we might not be a burden to any of you,

The word "burden" means to burden heavily.

"For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; 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, not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us" (2 Thessalonians 3:7-9).

The gospel team did not want to be a heavy financial burden to the Thessalonians. No one

knew this better than the church at Thessalonica. This church saw how hard the team worked to advance the gospel among them. They did this so that they would not be a burden to them.

we preached to you the gospel of God.

The word "preached" carries the idea of making a public, formal or official announcement by a herald.

"How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!'" (Romans 10:14-15).

Principle

A willingness to sacrifice selfish ends will advance the gospel throughout the world.

Application

It seems that the idea of sacrificing self for the sake of the gospel is out of date among Christian leaders today. If the church is going to advance the gospel throughout the world in our day, it is going to take some sacrifice.

Would you consider serving Jesus Christ without getting something back for yourself?

"Did I commit sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge? I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you. And when I was present with you, and in need, I was a burden to no one, for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied. And in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep myself" (2 Corinthians 11:7-9).

1 Thessalonians 2:10

"You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe..."

The manner in which the gospel team conducted their ministry at Thessalonica is another indication of their selfless service.

You are witnesses,

The Thessalonians were witnesses as to the conduct of the gospel team. They saw how Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy carried out their ministry.

and God also,

Another witness to the way the gospel team conducted their ministry was God Himself. What Paul writes is no exaggeration or hyperbole for God knows even our motives.

how devoutly

The gospel moved into Thessalonica through people who had pure lives, free from evil conduct and yielded to God's will. They lived their lives in a manner pleasing God. Their life had the stamp of God on it. They lived in such a way that God's impact on them was evident both to the Thessalonians and to God. Their lives manifested more than mere mortal qualities. The team were clearly faithful to God.

"...but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy'" (1 Peter 1:15-16).

Principle

Our integrity must be toward God.

Application

The term "devoutly" is a reflects an orientation toward God. The men who came with the gospel set themselves apart for God. They were His exclusively. As a wife wants her husband for herself alone, so God wants us exclusively for Himself. A wife does not want to share her husband with other women, and God does not want to share our devotion with other gods.

The Lord Jesus demands our all. He is our Lord as well as our Savior. God weighs us by our devotion to Him not by what we do for Him.

"Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You,

For Your judgments have been manifested" (Revelation 15:4).

and justly

The gospel team lived their lives in accordance with what is right. "Justly" carries the idea of real, genuine and true. They clearly understood what God teaches in the Word and lived their lives accordingly.

"Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame" (1 Corinthians 15:34).

"...teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age..." (Titus 2:12).

Principle

Christians should live with integrity toward people.

Application

When we behave "justly," we behave with integrity toward people. Our testimony before people is consistent and carries integrity. We are as good as our word. If we promise something, we make good on that promise. This has to do with our reliability before people. Can people count on us? Do people have concerns that we may not carry through with our promise?

Over time, we establish a reputation for how we carry out our promises. People get our number: "He said that he would serve but he never comes around. Forget it, he is not true to his word." People discount our word after a while because we disappoint them. They don't believe us anymore, because we fail to come through with our promises. They do not trust us any longer, so they discount what we say.

"Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Timothy 4: 12).

Can people count on you? Do people vouch for you? Can people trust you? Alternatively, do they turn off their hearing aid when you come around? God wants us to practice what we preach. We play fair and square; we do not cut corners.

and blamelessly

The word "blamelessly" connotes the idea that no one can sustain a charge against us. No one can make any charges against us. We are people without blame.

No Thessalonian could blame the gospel team for some inconsistency in their lives. No one could censure their ministry in that city. They were without reproach in the eyes of men. They gave no cause of scandal.

"This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men" (Acts 24:16).

Principle

We should live our lives so that no one can point an accusing finger against our testimony.

Application

It is a wonderful thing where we find believers to whom no one can point an accusing finger.

We must be careful here. Blamelessness is not sinlessness. Blamelessness has to do with accusations against us.

we behaved ourselves among you who believe

The word "behaved" literally means to become. The gospel team came on the scene in Thessalonian with the three points of integrity listed earlier in this verse.

Principle

Our lips and our lives must match if we are going to have impact on people.

Application

Obstetrics is one thing and pediatrics another. It is one thing to give people spiritual birth, but it is another to bring them up in the Lord.

Talk is cheap. How we live is more important than what we say. If our lives do not back up what we say, what we say has a hollow ring. If we talk, we must walk. What we say must match how we live.

Consistency in testimony brings credibility to ministry. This is especially true for Christians. If followers criticize their leaders, they undermine the office of the leader. If parents constantly criticize their church, their children will feel that the whole thing is a fraud. No wonder so many

children drop out of church when they get old enough.

There is a big difference between learning how to live and how to make a living. Many people know how to make a living but they do not know how to live. Christians have a different viewpoint on life, because the Bible molds their outlook on life.

"Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel..." (Philippians 1:27).

Does your belief match your behavior? Do people belittle the gospel because of your "testimony?" God expects our testimony to be strong among our Christian friends.

"For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you [Christians]" (2 Corinthians 1:12).

How do you rate among the Christian community? What is your testimony to Christians? Everyone has some estimation of how we live our Christian life. Knowingly or unknowingly, people rate us spiritually. They can tell if we genuinely share our faith or have a prayer life. They can tell the extent of our spirituality by how we react when we serve on boards or committees.

1 Thessalonians 2:11

"...as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children..."

In describing how the gospel team nurtured the Thessalonians, Paul now changes his metaphor from a nursing mother to a father.

as you know how

For the fourth time, Paul appeals to the Thessalonians' knowledge of his ministry. The word "as" means just as. They knew exactly how Paul's team conducted their ministry. They were thoroughly familiar with this ministry. They had the "know-how" of genuine ministry.

we exhorted,

In the "father's" role as the gospel team's, they did three things: exhorted, comforted and charged.

The word "exhorted" literally means to call to one's side. "Exhorted" bears such ideas as comfort, summons, urge, implore and beseech. Thus, it carries both the ideas of comfort and rebuke.

"Exhorted" appeals to the will. The team challenged the Thessalonians to mature in Christ and to take steps of faith in their growth. To exhort is to call someone to courage.

Principle

Leaders must challenge the behaviour of their followers.

Application

There is a verbal element to leadership. Good leaders must be willing to challenge followers face-to-face.

Every father must explain how life operates. Each stage of life brings a new challenge. We expect different things in life at different times. Children need to understand the disciplines of life in relation to different challenges they face. A parent is critical or kind depending on the situation. One situation calls for comfort and another calls for a dressing down. One without the other lacks balance and will produce immature believers.

"And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:24-25).

and comforted,

The word "comforted" is literally to speak soothingly to. The word "comforted" carried the idea of stimulating to the earnest discharge of duties. It comes from two Greek words: with and counsel or advice. Paul and his companions supported, comforted and cheered the Thessalonians in their duress with advice, with consolation, in order to move them beyond a victim mentality.

It is not enough to "exhort," leaders must also speak soothingly to their followers. They need

counsel and advice, as well as challenge. Encouragement points to progress: "I see your growth. I am watching your steps of faith beyond your comfort zone. You are moving toward your potential."

Principle

Followers need encouragement and cheer.

Application

Every ministry faces problems, setbacks and trials. The Devil will do his best to discourage people in God's work. So believers need godly people to come to encourage them.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

and charged

The word "charged" signifies to bear witness, affirm, insist, attest, invoke, implore, summon as a witness. The team solemnly affirms certain principles. They adjure the Thessalonians to move beyond where they are at to a new place in their Christian walk.

The team made serious declarations and emphatic judgments, based on the Thessalonians knowledge of God's Word. The word "charged" means to insist.

"This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind..." (Ephesians 4:17)

Principle

Leaders must appeal to principles that transcend the viewpoint of the world.

Application

Very few of us are willing to adjure others. No one likes to point out faults in others. We prefer to be "nice" to others, even if it means that they remain in a state of carnality or immaturity.

"I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living

and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom..." (2 Timothy 4:1).

Are you willing to lay it on someone if it is necessary for his or her development? We are not talking about the priggish approach of a self-righteous, self-absorbed person who lords spirituality over others. The issue is to be willing to address some area where people need to move beyond where they are spiritually. Again, the issue here is not the leader's opinions or biases but the principles of God's Word.

every one of you,

The team "charged" each believer personally. They challenged them to move beyond the status quo. Although there were many believers in Thessalonica (Acts 17:4), they played no favorites. The team dealt with them one-on-one.

as a father does his own children

If we are in the business of discipling someone, we are in the business of fathering. As a mother nourishes, a father instructs and disciplines his children.

Principle

Good ministry conveys a range of fundamentals that build believers in the faith.

Application

Faithful leaders exhort, comfort and charge their followers. Leaders must lead both like a mother and a father. They must be both gentle and firm. Like good parents who cover the entire range of parenting issues, good leaders cover the entire range of discipleship issues.

A good father explains to his son what people are like. "People are not always what they appear. They try to get your attention by criticism or doing something outlandish. They may be jealous of you." Children need perspective on people. They need to understand why some people are self-righteous. They need to understand the operating biblical principles in order to deal with these things.

"I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you" (1 Corinthians 4: 14).

1 Thessalonians 2:12

"...that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory"

that you would walk worthy of God

The word "that" expresses purpose. The gospel team designed their ministry so that the people at Thessalonica "would walk worthy of God." Any other motive is not suitable to God's purpose. There is a great temptation to minister for our reputation. This is to live for our ego rather than for the highest purpose in life.

Paul appeals we would "walk worthy of God." The figure of "walk" suggests living as a mode of operation. The word "walk" comes from two words: around and walk. Walk around carries the idea of a course of life, a manner of life. We take God into everything we are and do.

"Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4).

"For we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7).

"I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16).

"And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma" (Ephesians 5:2).

"Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time" (Colossians 4:5).

"But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

If it is impossible to be worthy of God, why does Paul challenge us to "walk worthy of God?" We can never be worthy of God because God is absolute. The adverb "worthy" calls attention to the manner or mode of our walk. Our lives should reflect God's character.

"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling

with which you were called..." (Ephesians 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..." (1 Thessalonians 4:1).

To walk worthy of God is to walk in such a way that God would be proud of us.

"For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He [Jesus] is not ashamed to call them brethren..." (Hebrews 2:11).

Our only worth is the finished work of Christ. We can conduct our lives in a way that will glorify Him. We live our lives in a fashion that is consistent with His character. If our lives do not match the Savior's life to any measurable degree, we are not living worthy of our salvation. Our lives should be suitable to our salvation. That is only proper and appropriate for a child of the King.

"...that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance" (Acts 26:20).

Principle

The grand object of ministry is to walk worthy of God.

Application

The grand object of all teaching and discipling is that believers will walk worthy of God because He calls them into His kingdom and glory. This is a big order. Walking worthy of those who disciple us is one thing, but walking worthy of God is another.

"Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel..." (Philippians 1:27).

We crawl before we walk. We toddle when we begin to walk. We walk before we run. The Christian walk is a process. It takes balance to walk physically. It takes appropriation of truth to experience to walk spiritually.

A mature believer lifts the bar, the standard of his purpose in life. He lives in such a way as to be a credit to Christ. He does not dishonor or disgrace the Son of God. We have all watched some children disgrace their parents. Nothing breaks the heart of a parent more than this. It breaks the heart of God to watch His children fall as well.

"...that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God..." (Colossians 1:10).

The mature Christian constantly evaluates what in his life may reflect on God. He holds high the bloodstained banner of the cross.

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

who calls you into His own kingdom and glory

Believers have a special calling, a calling "into His own kingdom and glory." We must temper and tune our lives to this calling. We adjust ourselves to God; He does not adapt Himself to us.

Note that this call is not written in past tense -- "who has called you." Rather it is expressed in present tense -- God is currently calling us to serve continually in His kingdom and glory. God calls you today to this service. His call never ceases.

Note the word "own." We could accept a call to many kingdoms. Those kingdoms would compete for our commitment and these false allegiances will lure us away from our ultimate purpose. Many philosophies will pander to our baser motives. God designed us for the highest calling.

The "kingdom" is that sphere of behavior where God is sovereign and supreme (1 Corinthians 6:9; 15:50; Galatians 5:21; 2 Timothy 4:1,18; 2 Thessalonians 1:5). "Glory" is our glorious future with our glorious God. Kingdom and glory go together. What we shall be is where we should be now.

Principle

What we shall be is where we should be now.

Application

God divinely summons us to an entirely new concept of living.

We are on earth to represent God and His work. We are His ambassadors. As His ambassadors, we need to be a credit to Christ.

"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Ephesians 4:1-6).

"...that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy..." (Colossians 1:10-11).

1 Thessalonians 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"

In describing how the gospel came to Thessalonica, Paul now shifts from the perspective of his team to that of the Thessalonians (2:13-16). We now see their attitude toward the Word of God as the revelation of God. They embraced the Bible as God's voice to them and applied it to their lives.

The Thessalonians' attitude to God's Word made them one of the most outstanding churches in the first century. They faced persecution and trial with a vision that carried them beyond their problems.

This verse is a Bible comment about itself.

For this reason

The gospel team could give thanks because the Thessalonians received the Word as God's revelation. How people receive the Bible affects how they live the Christian life.

we also thank God without ceasing,

The word "also" may indicate that Paul's team thanked God as well as the Thessalonians for the way the gospel came to Thessalonica.

Paul's prayers of thanksgiving to God constantly appear for the Thessalonians. Clearly, one of Paul's major activities was the exercise of prayer and especially in the category of thanksgiving.

"...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 Thessalonians 1:3).

"...pray without ceasing..." (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

"For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers I make mention of you always in my prayers..." (Romans 1:9).

"I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day..." (2 Timothy 1:3).

Principle

Constant prayer is a central to successful ministry.

Application

Some of us pray some of the time. People with dynamic ministries pray "without ceasing" for the people to whom they minister.

because when you received the word of God

The word "because" expresses the reason for the thanksgiving - the nature of the way they received the Bible as God's Word.

The Holy Spirit uses two words for the way the Thessalonians embraced the Bible: "received" and "welcomed." The word "received" comes from two words: from beside and to take or receive. The idea is to take to oneself or to take something from someone else. This is systematic learning of God's Word.

The New Testament uses this term especially for receiving formal instruction in the Word of God (1 Corinthians 11:23; 15:1, 3; Galatians 1:9, 12 [twice], Colossians 2:6; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 4:1; 2

Thessalonians 3:6). This first word stresses the act of prescribed listening to God's Word as a student from a teacher.

"But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Galatians 1:11-12).

"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..." (1 Thessalonians 4:1).

Principle

Formal instruction comes before appropriation of truth to experience.

Application

The believer must understand the truth of God's Word and value its content. If we do not first understand the Word, we will not be able to form principles for life. If we do not form principles for life, we will not be able to apply them to our experience.

"I have not departed from the commandment of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth More than my necessary food" (Job 23:12).

"But He answered and said, 'It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4).

"Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious" (1 Peter 2:1).

The pastor/teacher gift is the primary means whereby people formally learn God's Word.

which you heard from us,

This phrase reads literally "the word of hearing, the one from God." The word that the Thessalonians heard from Paul's team was God speaking to them through His Word. The

emphasis is upon the message as being God's Word and not man's.

The word "heard" carries the idea of the thing heard, a message or teaching (Mark 7:4; John 1:11; 14:3; 1 Corinthians 11:23; 15:1, 3; Galatians 1:9, 12; Philippians 4:9; Colossians 2:6; 4:17). The idea is that when we hear, we believe what we hear and respond to it based on what we heard.

"Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!" (Acts 28:28).

"For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it" (Hebrews 4:2).

"...and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables" (2 Titus 4:4).

Principle

The believer with a heart for God listens to the Bible as God's Word in order to learn principles for life.

Application

The phrase "let him hear" occurs to each of the churches in Revelation. Jesus repeatedly appeals for us to have a heart for His Word.

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God" (Revelation 2:7).

If we have an "ear" for God's Word, we will hear what is important for our lives.

"Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the

word, this one will be blessed in what he does" (James 1:21-25).

you welcomed it

The second word for the way the Thessalonians embraced the Bible is the word "welcomed." The first word "received" carries the idea of openness to listen. The word "welcomed" is an advance on formally listening to God's Word. "Received" emphasizes the understanding while "welcomed" emphasizes the appropriation of that understanding to experience.

The word "welcomed" signifies the idea of accepting by deliberate and ready action the exposition of the Word of God. This is a mode of acceptance (2 Corinthians 8:17; 11:4).

There is a distinction between "received" and "welcomed." "Received" suggests self-prompting whereas "welcomed" indicates a welcoming or an appropriating reception. "Received" alludes to the ear whereas "welcomed" alludes to appropriation by heart (2 Thessalonians 2:10; James 1:21). We welcome the truth when we love it.

"And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God..." (Ephesians 6:17).

Other passages indicate favorable reception of testimony and teaching (Luke 8:13; John 12:38; Acts 8:14; 11:1; 17:11; Romans 10:16, 17; Galatians 3:2, 5; 1 Corinthians 2:14; 2 Corinthians 8:17; 1 Thessalonians 1:6). People with positive volition readily receive the Word of God and regard it as true (Luke 8:13; Acts 8:14; 2 Corinthians 11:4).

Principle

It is not enough to appreciate the teaching of God's Word; we must apply it in our experience to make it fully effective in our lives.

Application

There is more to the Christian life than just hearing the Bible's teaching. Many people hear the Bible weekly but it doesn't do them any good.

"For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it" (Hebrews 4:2).

Positive reception to the Word of God by the people of God makes the Bible effective in our lives. If we stop at appreciating God's Word without applying God's Word, we will not fully comprehend God's plan for our Christian lives. We must both "receive" and "welcome" God's Word. We welcome God's Word when we apply it to our experience.

"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).

"Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was" (James 1: 21-24).

When we make the Word the controlling influence of our lives, then we know we have appropriated God's Word to experience.

not as the word of men,

The Thessalonians did not receive the Word of God as the word of men. They viewed the Bible as a revelation from God. The mere dead words of men are frail and fickle. Anything manmade is imperfect. There is always room for improvement. On the other hand, God's Word is powerful and enables us to face any difficulty in life.

"But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Galatians 1:11-12).

God uses men to communicate His Word, but it is the Holy Spirit who guides what they write. The Bible is the only sacred book on earth inspired by God.

"...knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but

holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:20-21).

Principle

The best way to discern truth from error is by measuring any teaching against the Bible.

Application

Many phony religionists today fake God's voice. They claim their own fraudulent ideas are the Word of God. Take Joseph Smith, the founder of the Mormon faith for example. He said that an angel by the name of Moroni revealed God's mind to him through tablets he found buried in the ground. It is interesting that Moroni quotes the King James Version, which translation occurred long after the golden tablets were supposedly buried.

The only way we can measure whether someone teaches the truth is to measure that teaching against the Bible, the revealed Word of God. God never contradicts Himself. If it is contrary to the Bible, then it is not of God.

We cannot take the Bible as the word of Moses, John or Paul. We must take it as God's Word.

but as it is in truth, the word of God,

The word "but" is a word of strong contrast. The Bible is God's Word, not man's word. It is "in truth, the word of God." God's Word is true, true to facts, true to what actually is.

The Thessalonians clearly identified the message of the gospel team as the Word of God. Truth does not lean on the authority of men but on the authority of God. We must receive and regard the Word as divine revelation.

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3: 16-17).

Principle

Christians who take the Bible as God's living Word and apply its truth to their life will experience dramatic growth.

Application

Christians cannot live the Christian life as it ought to be lived without an understanding of the Word of God as God's message to them. This perspective paves the way for applying the principles of God's Word to their own experience.

If we have no Bible, all that remains is the mere dead words of men. Since man is finite, his ideas are finite. They continually shift with the winds of change and trends. It all ends with one opinion against another opinion. God's Word is eternal and His principles remain eternally true. That's why we must study the Bible seriously.

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

Christians who have a high view of Scripture and believe that the Bible can change their life, will grow powerfully in the Christian life.

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which also effectively works

The words "effectively works" come from a Greek word meaning to put forth power, be operative. We get the English word "energize" from this Greek word [energew]. The Word of God effectively works in our lives. The word "effectively works" is in the present tense indicating that this is an ongoing work.

The words "effectively works" literally mean to work in. This is inherent power. Once the Word of God enters our heart, it is effective in what it does to our souls, because it has inherent power to work where other powers cannot work. The Word of God becomes effective through applying it to our own experience (cf. Jeremiah 23:29; Isaiah 49:2; Romans 1:16; Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12).

in you who believe

The word "believe" is in the present tense indicating continuing action. The Thessalonians continued to believe in the power of the Word of God to change their lives. The Word brings ongoing evidence of changing lives. They endured trial by God's grace (2:14).

"So Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground" (1 Samuel 3: 19).

Paul's team employed strategies to reach the Thessalonians, but they put their confidence in the Word of God to change lives (1:5; cf. Hebrews 4:12).

Principle

If we apply the Bible to our experience, it will continually change our lives.

Application

The truth of the Word of God constantly applied to our problems changes our hearts. When we receive the Bible as the Word of God, it will energize us to live powerfully beyond what our natural powers would allow us to do.

1 Thessalonians 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..."

For you, brethren,

Paul appeals to them as brothers in Christ. He entreats them on the ground of their spiritual accord in Christ.

became imitators of the churches

The New Testament always uses the word "imitators" in a good sense (1 Corinthians 4:16; 11:1; Ephesians 5:1; Hebrews 6:12). An imitator is a copyist, someone who mimics. The idea is more than just following any old pattern; the idea is to follow an authoritative pattern. Imitation involves responding to the principle, as well as copying the behavior. Our authority rests on the superiority of our models (1:6). Discipleship implies conformity to a standard.

"I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you. For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me" (1 Corinthians 4:14-16).

"Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1).

of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus.

The Thessalonians were to imitate the churches that were "of God" and "in Christ Jesus." All churches share in common the blessed privilege of union with Christ.

Judea is in southern Palestine, one of the provinces of Israel. Like the Thessalonians, churches in Judea suffered persecution for their faith.

For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen,

The Thessalonians were to learn from the adversity suffered by their countrymen. The word "suffered" occurs 42 times in the New Testament mostly concerning Christ's sufferings and those of His people (Acts 9:16; Philippians 1:29; 2 Timothy 1:12). Suffering here has to do with suffering for becoming Christians. Their persecutors may have been Jews (Acts 17:5,13).

Suffering is a mark of those who follow Christ. Often our most bitter enemies are our neighbors, because our lives stand in stark contrast to their lives.

just as they did from the Judeans

Christians in Judea suffered from the prejudice of Judean Jews. Thessalonians endured persecution from their Jewish neighbors in Thessalonica.

"But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, 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).

Principle

There is always a price to pay for aggressive commitment to Christ.

Application

Every generation of churches that are aggressive with their faith face persecution. The gospel is not popular when it tells people that they need a Savior because of their sin. This assaults human pride. "Why do I need a Savior? I am a good person. I live a moral life." Those who are faithful to Christ will not allow other people's pride to intimidate them into not sharing their faith.

1 Thessalonians 2:15

"...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..."

Paul levels six charges against the Jews in verses fifteen and sixteen.

who killed both the Lord Jesus

First, the Jews in Judea killed the Lord Jesus in Jerusalem Judea (2:14).

"Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God" (John 5:18).

"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know – "Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; "whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it" (Acts 2:22-24).

and their own prophets,

Secondly, the Jews also killed their very own prophets.

and have persecuted us;

Thirdly, the Jews also persecuted Christians throughout Judea. The word "persecuted" comes from two words: out and to pursue. They pursued Christians out of Judea. This carries the idea of driving out or banishing Christians systematically from their province. They put together a program to harass Christians.

and they do not please God

Fourthly, these Jews were not acceptable to God. They thought that they pleased God by their fanatic religious ideas but their zeal did not please God at all. No rationalization justifies this kind of action.

"Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Romans 8:7-8).

Those who please God do not primarily please themselves or others. They please God by faith.

"But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

and are contrary to all men

Fifthly, the Jews were "contrary to all men." The word "contrary" means over against. The religionists of Judea operated in a way that was contrary to or a reversal of how people should operate. They used hostility as their mode of operation. This is perversity. Paul himself, before his conversion, was one of these persecutors (Acts 26:14-15).

Principle

An operating principle of the Christian life is to live to please the Lord.

Application

Are you living to please the Lord? This may mean that you may not please your friends at times. If they criticize you, so be it. People constantly hurt by what others say about them are usually ineffectual. It is very difficult to live a dynamic Christian life and wear a thin skin.

"Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him" (2 Corinthians 5: 9).

1 Thessalonians 2:16

"...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"

forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved,

We now come to the sixth charge Paul levels against the Jews. The word "forbidding" means to hinder, restrain, withhold, forbid. The Jews prevented Christians from carrying the gospel to the Gentiles. The Jews did not want Christ as their Savior and they did not want the Gentiles to come to Christ either.

so as always to fill up the measure of their sins;

The words "fill up" come from a Greek word meaning to fill up adequately, completely. The Jews so persisted in their antagonism and unbelief

that they completely engrossed themselves in negative volition toward God. They rounded out their sin and brought it to completion. They sped up God's judgment against themselves.

"Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. "And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: 'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, And seeing you will see and not perceive; For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them'" (Matthew 13: 13-15).

but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost

The words "come upon" mean to anticipate, to reach, to attain. God's wrath has reached them sooner than they expected it and it overtook them. It is bad business to hinder the gospel. God establishes consequences to deal with those who would hinder the gospel from going out to the world. Hard-hearted antagonism to the gospel always incurs God's wrath.

Principle

Those who oppose the gospel will get their comeuppance.

Application

It is possible to fill the full complement of sin. God will suddenly and surely seal the fate of those who oppose the gospel. The extreme limit of God's wrath will come down upon them. We can do absolutely nothing for them then. Unless they repent they will finally get their comeuppance.

1 Thessalonians 2:17

"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"

Paul now describes the relationship he had with the Thessalonians since the founding of the church one year earlier.

But we,

The word "but" contrasts the experience of Paul's team with the Thessalonians to the bad experiences in Judea (1 Thessalonians 2:15-16).

brethren,

Again, Paul uses a thoughtful reference to brotherhood to appeal to what they had in common spiritually.

having been taken away from you

In Acts 17, Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke ministered for three Sabbath days in Thessalonica, but then hostile Thessalonians chased them out of town. They left for Berea. Over a year elapsed before Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians, while residing in Corinth.

"Then the brethren [in Thessalonica] immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews" (Acts 17: 10).

The words "taken away" means to make an orphan of someone. It comes from two words: from and to orphan [orphanizw]. This is the only time the New Testament uses this word. The separation of Paul's team from the Thessalonians for a year caused them emotional pain. Paul viewed himself as an orphan separated from his family. The persecution tore Paul from his family. The frenzy of persecution in Thessalonica forced the team out of the city and kept them from coming back.

for a short time

Paul's sorrow was alleviated by two comforting thoughts. First, the separation was "for a short time."

in presence, not in heart,

Secondly, the Thessalonians were out of sight, but not out of mind. Paul was not with them "in presence," meaning physically, but he was with them "in heart." Paul's love for the Thessalonians was not mere sentimentalism that lasted just as long as he was with them. It is not by choice that Paul writes 1 Thessalonians from Corinth. He fled Thessalonica because of the intensity of persecution. He had a heart for the Thessalonians.

endeavored more eagerly to see your face

The word "endeavored" means to make haste. Paul's team made great effort to return to Thessalonica. Paul did not use the absence as a pretext for forgetting them, as some of his critics insinuated. He wanted to make sure that he established them in their faith.

"For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God, night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?" (1 Thessalonians 3:9-10).

"For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established – that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me" (Romans 1:11-12).

with great desire

The team had great motivation to return to Thessalonica, not because of obligation but because they loved the Thessalonians. It felt like the severing of a parent from a child. Paul redoubled his efforts to see the Thessalonians in the face of satanic opposition (1 Thessalonians 2:18). He yearned to see them again. He would never leave in a lurch those to whom he ministered.

Principle

Spiritually minded people have a heart for God's own.

Application

Our time on earth is short and unsure. Only in heaven will there be no more parting. We may never see some of our Christian friends again on this earth, but one day we will be with them for eternity.

True Christian fellowship does not reside on sentiment, but in our common bond in Christ.

1 Thessalonians 2:18

"Therefore we wanted to come to you – even I, Paul, time and again – but Satan hindered us"

Therefore we wanted to come to you –

It was Paul's intention to come back to Thessalonica.

even I, Paul, time and again –

Paul made at least two attempts to come to Thessalonica. Both times Satan, frustrated his plans. Later in the book, he sought God's direction about going to Thessalonica. Paul constantly sought God's mind in his ministry to the Thessalonians.

"Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you" (1 Thessalonians 3:11).

Principle

We must seek God's direction to do His will.

Application

Believers must always seek God's direction. Otherwise, Satan can hinder our ministry, if we do it strictly in human powers. Vision building, goal setting and strategy making are good, but without God's direction, they are vacuous.

but Satan hindered us

The word "hindered" comes from two words: to cut and in. Satan cut into the plans of Paul. He tried to impede him by breaking up his plans and placing obstacles in his path. It is always the strategy of Satan to thwart any program to win people to Christ or to build them up in the faith.

Satan confronts godly strategy with his own strategy. This is the source of our problems spiritually. Not many Christians consider the impact of Satan upon their lives. God considers it important enough to give believers a suit of armor to defend themselves.

"Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices" (2 Corinthians 2:10-11).

"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we

do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand" (Ephesians 6:10-13).

The book of Acts says that men drove Paul's team from their ministry in Thessalonica. This passage points to Satan as the source of this problem. It is clear that Satan uses men as his emissaries to accomplish his ends. We do not see Satan physically but we can see people doing his work.

"Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you, and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith. But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one" (2 Thessalonians 3:1-3).

Although Satan hindered Paul's ministry, he did not daunt his ministry. Paul in writing to the Thessalonians blessed the church with his two epistles for 2000 years. Satan cannot bind the Word of God.

"Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel, for which I suffer trouble as an evildoer, even to the point of chains; but the word of God is not chained. Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (2 Timothy 2:8-10).

Principle

Satan will do all he can to obstruct the work of the Lord.

Application

You have faced times in your life when you tried to do God's will but found many obstacles along the way. You may have met opposition from even good people. That is Satan thwarting your ministry.

Satan may frustrate our ministries but God always providentially allows him to do so. Satan is not

sovereign. He can do nothing without God's permission. He is a finite creature albeit a very powerful finite creature. God is omnipotent; Satan is potent. Satan is mighty; God is almighty.

God originally created Lucifer a brilliant, sinless angel. Later he rebelled against God and became the leader of a vast worldwide organization of demons. Satan is not omnipresent so he put together a worldwide organization of fallen angels that are his henchmen. He can send these emissaries to do extensive injury to the people of God and to the plan of world-evangelism.

At times, God allows Satan to deal with believers. Nothing could happen to Job without God's permission. God concurs with each event that comes into our lives.

"And the LORD said to Satan, 'From where do you come?' So Satan answered the LORD and said, 'From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it.' Then the LORD said to Satan, 'Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?' So Satan answered the LORD and said, 'Does Job fear God for nothing? 'Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. 'But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!' And the LORD said to Satan, 'Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on his person.' So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD" (Job 1:7-12).

God always allows satanic obstruction for a reason. He uses these frustrations to mature us in Christ. As Paul did not concede defeat, so we must not allow one obstruction to become an absolute barricade against everything we might do for God.

1 Thessalonians 2:19

"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?"

Paul asks a rhetorical question in this verse and answers it in the latter part of this verse and the next.

For

Paul now gives his reason for his eagerness to see them.

what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing?

Paul puts his work in perspective. He views himself standing at the Judgment Seat of Christ and receiving rewards from the Lord Jesus Christ for his labor in Thessalonica. Paul's "hope" rests on living a certain kind of life in time, a life of evangelism. Paul has confidence that he will see Thessalonians in heaven.

This is also his "joy." There is no greater joy than seeing someone come to Christ. Paul's joy was the thought of leading someone to Christ and then to know that he will spend eternity in heaven.

"Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved" (Philippians 4:1).

Leading people to Christ will be Paul's "crown of rejoicing" at the Judgment Seat of Christ. His crown is his converts. The word "crown" is the victor's crown, the crown of introducing someone to Christ. There is victory in winning people to Christ, or rather, in allowing God to win people to Christ through us. Those who never introduce anyone to Christ will not receive this crown.

Is it not even you

The Thessalonian converts' presence at the coming of Christ was the hope, joy and crown of rejoicing of the gospel team.

in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?

Paul answers his own question. His reward will be that the Thessalonians who received Christ as their personal Savior will meet the Lord at the Rapture. Winning people to Christ is an eternal investment. It makes life worthwhile. What a day of rejoicing that will be when we see in heaven people we've led to Christ and finally see Christ Himself!

The word "coming" is a term that conveys the idea of presence. One day we will be in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. In First Thessalonians, this

word refers to the Rapture (4:16,17) or to the period from the Rapture to the Second Coming.

Principle

Those we win to Christ are our hope, joy and crown of glory.

Application

The coming of Christ is a great motivation for believers. This motivation sustains us through many trials and tribulations. We keep eternal values in view. If we view life from a secular viewpoint, we will not get God's perspective on the purpose for our lives. In times of trouble, we need to catch the divine viewpoint on things. In this way, we will not allow trouble to overcome us.

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1).

By keeping our eyes on eternal values, we live by faith.

"For we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7).

"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses [chapter 11, those who lived by faith], let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:1-2).

Our faith comes from the Word. The Bible keeps our mind on eternal promises and truths.

"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17).

The Christian does not look back but looks forward to his glorious future. It is not biblical to live in the past with all its regrets. It is the biblical perspective to live in an attitude of looking for the return of Christ. We will finally meet the One we love. O, what a joy it will be.

"He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming quickly.' Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20).

1 Thessalonians 2:20

"For you are our glory and joy"

The word "you" is emphatic in the Greek. "You and especially you are our glory and joy."

The word "glory" means estimation, repute. It is Paul's honor to introduce his converts to the Lord Jesus Christ. When he sees the Lord, he will know that his team's glory will be people in heaven because of their witness. This is legitimate pride because it is based on what God did through them.

"Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things which pertain to God. For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient – in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation, but as it is written: 'To whom He was not announced, they shall see; And those who have not heard shall understand'" (Romans 15:17-21).

"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Corinthians 15:10).

Paul stakes his entire reputation in eternity on winning those without Christ.

Principle

Our reputation in eternity will be based, in part, on winning people to Christ.

Application

God values winning people to Christ.

"How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written:

"How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad

tidings of good things!" But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our report?' So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. But I say, have they not heard? Yes indeed: 'Their sound has gone out to all the earth, And their words to the ends of the world'" (Acts 26:14-18).

Do you have a part in the building of Christ's Kingdom? Will people point to you that you had a part in bringing them into the Kingdom?

1 Thessalonians 3:1

"Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone..."

Therefore,

The word "therefore" gives a deduction of the gospel team's love for the Thessalonians (2:17-20). Because of his special association with the Thessalonians, Paul sends Timothy to encourage them in their trial.

when we could no longer endure it,

The word "endure" means in this context to hold back. He can no longer bear to leave the Thessalonians alone without help from the team. Unable to go to Thessalonica himself, he sends Timothy. Timothy was Paul's troubleshooter. The church suffered severe persecution so they needed encouragement from someone from the gospel team.

we thought it good to be left in Athens alone

The Thessalonians expelled Paul from Thessalonica and he went to Berea. Later Paul traveled from Berea in northern Greece to Athens in southern Greece alone. He sent word back to Berea for Timothy and Silas to join him in Athens (Acts 17:15). Timothy and Silas did join him there.

In spite of his need to have Timothy with him, he sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to encourage them in their trials (3:3). The Thessalonians did not drive Timothy out of Thessalonica like they drove out Paul and Silas. However, this assignment was a very difficult mission. There is no evidence that Timothy protested against Paul in this task.

Paul could have used the full complement of his gospel team in a city like Athens. However, he chose to forego his need for others. The words "thought it good" means to be well pleased. This speaks to the motivation behind Paul's decision. He did not make this decision grudgingly. He knew it was the right decision based on the well-being of the Thessalonians. He accepted the responsibility without complaint.

Timothy and Silas left Paul alone in the world centre of philosophical intellectualism, the city of Athens. Philosophers from around the Roman world assembled there. The city was given wholly to idolatry (Acts 17:16). It is always best to operate with teams in this kind of situation. However, loneliness is just one of those hardships a "good soldier of Christ" bears for his people. Paul made no great impact in Athens. He wrote no epistle to the church at Athens. There is no record of any conversions in that city. Evidently, he did not penetrate that city with the gospel.

Paul moved from Athens to Corinth after Timothy left for Thessalonica. There he formed a church and wrote two epistles to the church there. Timothy later joined Paul in Corinth.

Principle

Ministry involves deep commitment to the people we serve.

Application

Self-denial deprives the self of personal comfort for the sake of others. Ministry involves valuing the people to whom we minister to the point of self-denial.

1 Thessalonians 3:2

"...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..."

and sent Timothy,

Paul personally sent Timothy giving him the endorsement he needed to minister while in Thessalonica. If Paul could trust the credibility of Timothy, the Thessalonians could as well. Paul draws attention to three qualifications of Timothy to minister to the Thessalonians. He was the right

man for the right job. He was the kind of man who could adjust to any situation.

Note how Paul views Timothy's ministry to the Corinthians:

"For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church" (1 Corinthians 4:17).

"Now if Timothy comes, see that he may be with you without fear; for he does the work of the Lord, as I also do" (1 Corinthians 16:10).

Principle

Effective ministry requires a selfless attitude.

Application

Many people in ministry are out for what they can get. They seek their own ends. They feather their own nest. This is an indictment against believers of our day as well.

"And do you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them..." (Jeremiah 45:5).

A temptation of many today is to use ministry to advance their career. They want to be a big shot in the kingdom. We tread on dangerous ground here. God will by-pass people like this.

"But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state. For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:19-21).

our brother

First, Paul calls Timothy "brother." "Brother" is one who has entered the family of God. "Brother" seems to indicate equivalence in ministry with Paul. Elsewhere Paul calls Timothy his "son" because he was younger than Paul. Paul honors Timothy for ministry purposes. Respect is important in ministry so Paul recommends him for ministry.

"And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to

esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves" (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13).

Paul and Timothy were poles apart in age, in educational background and in nationality [Timothy was half-Gentile and half-Jew]. Paul had extensive formal training while there is no evidence that Timothy had any. Yet, God united these men in ministry.

and minister of God,

Secondly, Timothy is God's minister. He is not primarily Paul's associate minister. Paul does not claim Timothy as exclusively his. Timothy represents, not Paul, but God.

"Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on some points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God, that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:15-16).

"I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints" (Colossians 1: 24-26).

and our fellow laborer

Thirdly, Paul calls Timothy a "fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ." A "fellow laborer" is someone who works together with someone else (Romans 16:3,9,21; Philippians 2:25; 4:3; Philemon 1,24). It takes co-operation to advance the cause of Christ. Timothy was a team player. He was no prima donna who sought the limelight. He sought no privileged treatment for himself. He served on the evangelistic gospel team with a great sense of teamwork.

"Timothy, my fellow worker, and Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, my countrymen, greet you" (Romans 16:21).

"...and Jesus who is called Justus. These are my only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision; they have proved to be a comfort to me" (Colossians 4:11).

Principle

God needs brothers, ministers and laborers for His kingdom.

Application

The church of Jesus Christ needs workers. This seems to be a forbidden concept these days. Thank God there are those who are willing to give themselves to advance the cause of Christ throughout the world. If more people would get under the load, the job would be lighter. Will you allow Jesus Christ to harness you for His work?

in the gospel of Christ,

Paul views himself as a "fellow laborer" in the harvest fields. He also views Timothy the same way. He is a "fellow" minister with Paul. Paul does not look upon Timothy as competition. He is one with him in ministry. He gave glory to Jesus Christ to whom the glory belongs. We capitulate to Him in everything. In all work for Jesus Christ, He is Lord.

Principle

Proclaiming the gospel requires freedom from competition.

Application

Christians who capitulate to the cause of Christ, do not look on others with a sense of competition. They cheer others in their efforts to share Christ with others.

"But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24).

The Lord opens doors of opportunity to share the gospel.

"Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was

opened to me by the Lord..." (2 Corinthians 2:12).

Part of the Christian armor is to be prepared to proclaim the gospel.

"...and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace..." (Ephesians 6:15).

Timothy receives his marching orders. Paul asks Timothy to walk all the way from Athens in southern Greece back to Thessalonica three hundred miles to the north and then from Thessalonica to Corinth, which was south of Athens.

to establish you

Timothy's task was twofold: 1) to establish and 2) to encourage the Thessalonians. They needed confirmation and comfort in the Christian faith. They needed someone to come in to stabilize the situation. When churches become unsettled, they always need someone like Timothy.

The word "establish" means fix (firmly), make fast, set, support. It carries the ideas of confirm, strengthen. In 12 of the 14 times this word occurs in the New Testament, it refers to strengthening people in the faith. Timothy was in the business of making the Thessalonians stronger in the sense of more firm and unchanging in their convictions and attitudes. The faith of the Thessalonian church was at stake. Timothy was to make them strong in their faith. He was to help them set their faith fast.

"You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand" (James 5:8).

"But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you" (1 Peter 5:10).

"For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth" (2 Peter 1:12).

"Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God" (Revelation 3:2).

Principle

All Christians need spiritual stability.

Application

Man is inherently unstable. Sin is at the root of instability. That is why some oscillate in their convictions. If people do not know the Bible, any wind of doctrine will sweep them away. They become vulnerable to false teaching.

Christians need to set their faith fast like a deep cement foundation for a skyscraper. It can bear up under any pressure that may come its way.

and encourage you

The second mission of Timothy was to "encourage" the Thessalonians. The word "encouraged" connotes to cause someone to be consoled, either by verbal or non-verbal means. This is more than saying sweet things to fellow Christians. It is giving them strength in their faith to form principles for spiritual living.

Paul and his team left Thessalonica about a year before he wrote this epistle. During the course of that year, the Thessalonians martyred some believers for their faith. Others endured persecution for their faith.

Principle

Encouragement comes from forming biblical principles for life.

Application

Courage does not come from saying sweet things to each other. It comes from promises and principles taken from God's Word.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. And our hope for you is steadfast, because we know that as you are

partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation" (2 Corinthians 1:3-7).

concerning your faith

The word "concerning" is literally on behalf of. Paul sent Timothy to establish and encourage the Thessalonians on behalf of their faith. Faith under trial needs both stability and encouragement.

"And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, 'We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God'" (Acts 14:21-22).

The centre of spiritual stability is our faith. A weak faith triggers instability. Faith that does not rest in the proper object always detracts from the Christian life. Those weak in faith panic when things go wrong.

"...above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one" (Ephesians 6:16).

Five times in the next few verses, Paul refers to the faith of the Thessalonians (vv.5,6,7,10).

"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" (Colossians 2:5).

"But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit..." (Jude 1:20).

Principle

Applying the principles of God's Word to our experience strengthens our faith.

Application

We strengthen our faith by the Word of God.

"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17).

Christians must fight for their faith.

"Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in

the presence of many witnesses" (1 Timothy 6:12).

It is imperative that church leaders strengthen congregations in the faith.

"So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily" (Acts 16:5).

1 Thessalonians 3:3

"...that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this"

that

The word "that" gives us the goal of Timothy's trip: establishing and encouraging the Thessalonians.

no one should be shaken by these afflictions;

The words "no one" indicate that it is Paul's desire that not even one believer's faith be set back by "these afflictions." There was the greatest urgency that their faith be bolstered by Timothy's coming lest even one wavering believer be moved in the midst of these afflictions.

The word "shaken" is a graphic term. The word means literally to wag as of a dog wagging his tail while fawning or cringing. "Shaken" carries the idea of to unsettle like a dog's tail going back and forth. The Thessalonian Christians should not allow themselves to be shaken or unsettled by persecution. False teaching can disturb our souls. Some of them were so emotionally disturbed that they gave up their beliefs. Christians who are mature in their faith will not move from their moorings. Mature believers do not push the panic button.

"Afflictions" means pressure. It is anything that loads the soul. This trouble comes from direct suffering. It was an occupational hazard to become a Christian in those days. There was the awful danger that the Thessalonians would be enticed by the pleasant prospect of the easier life afforded by compromise or reverting to paganism. No doubt, there were plenty of smooth sympathizers on hand encouraging them to make just such a fatal move.

Principle

Mature believers know how to endure affliction.

Application

All Christians face pressure and duress in their lives. The issue is whether we suffer like a mature Christian or like an immature Christian.

Tribulations should never throw a mature believer off course. God provides for the believer in such a way that he can have peace in the pressures of life. The mature Christian rests in that.

If you are in that cycle of your Christian life where everything is resulting in affliction, reverses or trouble, God knows how much you can bear and will not allow the pressure to become too great. The Lord is very careful how He measures out the pain that comes to your life. You can trust Him for that.

for

The word "for" establishes the reason why duress should not shake the faith of believers: this is in God's divine design for them.

you yourselves know

The Thessalonians knew they would face tribulation because Paul told them when he was in Thessalonica that they would face it (3:4). Paul leveled with them that they would meet such things if they became Christians. He never misrepresented the difficulty in becoming a Christian. He never painted a rosy picture of a bed of ease. The Christian life demands confrontation. True Christianity is not convenient. The brand of Christianity in the first century cost something.

that we are appointed to this

We can translate the word "appointed" by the word "ordained." God ordains us to affliction. When people become Christians, they receive a new kind of trouble. Affliction is God's appointment for us. God places affliction strategically in our lives for our personal growth. This is God's destiny for us that comes by His divine design.

Affliction is God's appointment for us. Trial is no accident. We can clearly see the folly of trying to evade persecutions. This was the appointed path of the Thessalonians. The word "appointed" here does not refer to past eternity but to present time. The Christian life being what it is and the godless world being what it is, makes afflictions and persecution certain. God says, "I have an

appointment for you with affliction." We make appointments regularly. This is an appointment that I would prefer not to keep!

"For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me" (Philippians 1:29-30).

"For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps..." (1 Peter 2:20-21).

Principle

Affliction is in the plan and will of God for the believer.

Application

Some of us might say, "What did I ever do to deserve this pain in my life. What did I do wrong?" It may be that you did not do anything wrong. This is just one of the by-products of being the child of the King. You say, "I don't like these side-effects of Christianity." A disciple is someone under discipline. God appoints trial into our lives so that we will become more disciplined in the things of God.

"Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator" (1 Peter 4:19).

1 Thessalonians 3:4

"For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know"

For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you

Paul says he kept on telling them when he was with them about the persecution to come [imperfect tense]. He taught this repeatedly. Paul says, "Do you remember when I was there a year ago? I warned you of coming trouble."

that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know

The words "suffer tribulation" refers to suffering due to the pressure of circumstances or the antagonism of others (2 Thessalonians 1:6,7). This pressure from without hems the believer in a situation like a mountain gorge. God puts conditions in our narrow way and presses us into distressing problems.

"We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair..." (2 Corinthians 4:8).

God puts us into a squeeze play. Compression produces gold and compression produces character in the Christian life.

Christian suffering is inseparable from the Christian life. Christians face different kinds of affliction: persecution (1:6), imprisonment (Acts 20:23), derision (Hebrews 10:33), poverty (2 Corinthians 5:13), sickness (Revelation 2:22), and inner distress (Philippians 1:17; 2 Corinthians 7:5).

Tribulation tests whether we will spread the gospel at the risk of life or limb and whether we will claim the promises of God (2 Corinthians 1:8-9). Faith accepts God's discipline and patiently endures trial (2 Thessalonians 1:4). A Christian has the assurance that the coming glory far overshadows present suffering (2 Corinthians 4:17,18). God's promises give us hope in the face of suffering.

Principle

The mature Christian does not give up when things get tough.

Application

It comes as a great shock to some Christians when trials come their way. Although God plans divine duress in the lives of Christians, they can have a sense of God's presence with them through it.

Christians can have a sense of peace in the midst of trouble. We can have stability during any pressure that comes our way. Christians have the equipment to be stable at all times, in good times or bad.

The mature Christian does not give up when the going gets tough. Most people cave in to trouble. They give up by resorting to booze or drugs. They

cannot look pain in the face so they use some form of escapism. They will pay the piper for this. The mature Christian, however, knows how to cope with duress.

"...rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer..." (Romans 12:12).

Mature Christians glory in tribulation because they know that it is God's design for their lives.

"And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Romans 5:3-5).

God gives grace to the person who knows how to draw on that grace.

"And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

1 Thessalonians 3:5

"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"

For this reason,

The reason Paul sent Timothy to Thessalonica was the subtlety of Satan in discouraging the new church.

when I could no longer endure it,

The word "endure" means to protect, or preserve by covering. It carries the idea of keeping off something that threatens - to bear up against or hold out against something. Paul was troubled that he didn't know the true spiritual condition of the Thessalonians.

"If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more? Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ" (1 Corinthians 9:12).

Because Paul was certain that persecutions were inevitable and had befallen the Thessalonians, he was deeply concerned about their spiritual welfare. He could no longer bear the suspense so he sent to obtain firsthand knowledge of the condition of their faith. He wanted to assure himself that the Tempter had not won them over by his enticements.

I sent to know your faith,

Paul wanted to know the spiritual state of the Thessalonian Christians. "Were they walking with the Lord or were they caving in to pressure?" "Did they have any faith?"

lest by some means the tempter had tempted you,

The Bible refers to the Devil as "tempter" twice -- here and in the temptation of Christ (Matthew 4:1-3) where the Devil tries to lure Jesus into moving away from God's plan.

The Devil uses persecution to discourage Christians from living dynamic Christian lives. The "tempter" will destroy them by guile. Satan will slant their minds against God's will. He does not use honorable strategies like Christians. Christians limit themselves to systems that are biblical and legitimate. The Devil uses strategies consistent with his character.

"Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices" (2 Corinthians 2:10-11).

"But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:3).

"Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Ephesians 6:11).

"And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression" (1 Timothy 2:14).

"So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him" (Revelation 12:9).

Principle

The church persecuted is the church purified. Satan will use his wiles to deceive us.

Application

The church of Christ is filled with fakers and phonies. People need to examine themselves as to whether they are genuine Christians.

"Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? — unless indeed you are disqualified" (2 Corinthians 13:5).

No doubt all phonies will throw in the towel quickly. Persecution always sorts out the fakers. The church popular is the church polluted. The church persecuted is the church purified. If the church receives nothing but favor from the world system then there is something wrong with the church. The world hates the church when it finds out what the church believes.

"If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you" (John 15:18-19).

The Devil will take advantage of your vulnerability. He knows about your history. He knows where he can stick it to you.

Temptation is an awful thing particularly when both Satan and your sin capacity join forces against you. At times, Satan will move into your family and create problems in your household. He hates harmonious Christian homes. He may, for example, attempt to invade the bedroom.

"Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt

you because of your lack of self-control" (1 Corinthians 7:5).

Satan loves misunderstanding, unkindness and thoughtlessness. He wants couples to take each other for granted. He wants them to misuse sex. He delights to see physical and emotional bonds broken and partners drift apart. The Devil may bring a third person onto the scene which can result in cheating, infidelity, and eventual divorce.

1 Thessalonians 3:6

"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..."

But now

Paul now contrasts his apprehension about the state of Thessalonian spirituality with the good report of Timothy.

that Timothy has come to us from you,

Timothy has now made it back from Thessalonica to southern Greece (Acts 18:5). He is now in Corinth with Paul and gives his report on the state of the faith of the church in Thessalonica. Paul knew of their saving faith but he did not know the level of their sustaining faith. Our sustaining faith is the faith whereby we walk before the Lord. That feature of faith differs in every believer. Some believers do not build their faith. They genuinely know the Lord but they do not know Him very well. Sustaining faith is progressive.

Principle

Sustaining faith is the secret of weathering the storms of life.

Application

Sustaining faith is progressive in its development. We can nurture faith so that it becomes robust. We can move from pre-school to kindergarten in our faith. Then we move from kindergarten to grade school and from grade school to high school. Eventually, we graduate from the graduate school of faith. Anywhere along the line, Satan can stymie our faith. We might hit a plateau and stay at that plateau for years. We call this a case of arrested spiritual expansion. This is spiritual malfunction.

If we do not advance in our faith, we move into a stagnant stage of our Christian life. The Devil will do anything in his diabolical power to get Christians into this state. He will try to alienate believers from the Bible -- the source of their faith.

and brought us good news of your faith and love,

Two characteristic attitudes of the Thessalonians were their faith and love toward the gospel team. They loved the gospel and the ministers of the gospel. Timothy's report sounded like the gospel -- "good news." The New Testament often links the qualities of "faith and love" together. Faith precedes love. The order is important. Faith is vertical and love is horizontal.

"We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints..." (Corinthians 1:3-4).

"And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:13).

"We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, 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, knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God" (1 Thessalonians 1:2-4).

"We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other..." (2 Thessalonians 1:3).

"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love" (Galatians 5:6).

and that you always have good remembrance of us,

It is encouraging for Paul to know that the Thessalonians look back on his visit with fond memories. Paul says, "You understood why I had to leave Thessalonica. It was not because I wanted to leave you. I left under duress. Thanks for your understanding."

greatly desiring to see us,

The word "desiring" means to long for greatly, to yearn after. This desiring recognizes that there is a need for fellowship between the Thessalonians and Paul.

The Thessalonians had cherished memories of the gospel team. Note how the New Testament uses the Greek word for "greatly desiring:"

"For this reason I also have been much hindered from coming to you. But now no longer having a place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come to you, whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you. For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your company for a while" (Romans 15:22-24).

"Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was comforted in you, when he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more."

"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" (1 Thessalonians 2:8).

"I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day, greatly desiring to see you, being mindful of your tears, that I may be filled with joy, when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also" (2 Timothy 1: 3-5).

as we also to see you

The desire of the gospel team is reciprocal to the Thessalonians'. They felt the pain of enforced separation just as much as Paul desired to see them. There is a mutual love between the gospel team and the Thessalonians. It is always encouraging to a father's heart to know that his children walk according to the principles of the family.

"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (3 John 4).

In spite of intense persecution, the Thessalonians remained true to the Lord. There is a point where we have to release those who follow us to the Lord. We must cut the apron strings at some point. It is arrogance to think that people cannot get along spiritually without us.

Principle

Dynamic faith produces mutual love.

Application

Dynamic faith produces mutual love. The closest fellowship that believers share is fellowship in the gospel. There is a special love among those who go shoulder to shoulder sharing the good news of the gospel.

"I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:3-8).

1 Thessalonians 3:7

"...therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith"

Verses seven through nine give Paul's response to Timothy's report.

therefore,

The "therefore" draws an inference from verse six.

brethren,

Paul appeals to the common heritage in Christ that he had with the Thessalonians.

in all our affliction and distress

"Affliction" refers to the pressure and tribulation Paul received from hostile people. As Paul writes First Thessalonians, he is in Corinth facing more problems.

"When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ. But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook his garments and said to them, 'Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles'" (Acts 18:5-6).

The word "distress" denotes a necessity, calamity or pressure imposed by either inner pressure or external circumstances. Distress refers to the pressure, constraint or necessity of circumstances Paul faced while writing First Thessalonians in Corinth.

we were comforted concerning you by your faith

Timothy's report brought satisfaction to the souls of the gospel team when they saw the dynamics of the faith of the Thessalonians. The discovery of the sound state of the faith of the Thessalonians made all the difference in the world to Paul. Their faith encouraged Paul. He received renewed spiritual strength when he heard of their healthy spiritual state. This fortified him against pressing distress and crushing affliction he was currently encountering.

In view of this good news, Paul could now move on without the deep concern he had about the church at Thessalonica.

Principle

The test of our spiritual character is opposition.

Application

The test of Christian character is opposition. If everything goes our way without opposition, that demonstrates nothing about the quality of our character. How we react to opposition is the real test. Do we lose our cool? Such tests are frequent in the local church. The more people, the more differences of opinion. God sends sharp experiences into our life to test the level of our spirituality. Do we have a dynamic faith that can

go beyond the rejection and hostility of other people?

The joy of hearing of the spiritual success of those we lead to Christ always encourages us to bear up under distress in ministry. This always renews our commitment to serve in the face of difficulty.

No man lives to himself and no man dies to himself within the sphere of Christian ministry. When fellow servants within our purview have ups, their ups are our ups. When they encounter downs, their downs are our downs. We weep with them that weep, mourn with them that mourn and rejoice with them that rejoice.

1 Thessalonians 3:8

"For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord".

For now

Now, under the state of affairs of seeing the vigorous faith of the Thessalonians, the gospel team engenders a certain outcome -- spiritual animation in the form of encouragement.

we live,

The news of the vitality of the faith of the Thessalonians put life and vigor in Paul's own ministry. This was a further catalyst to Paul's future ministry.

if you stand fast in the Lord

The condition for the flourishing and reviving of Paul's ministry is the Thessalonian steadfastness in the Lord. The words "stand fast" carried the idea of standing firm. Standing in the Lord gives sustaining power.

Standing also carries the idea of standing on guard against falling. It is Paul's heart to see the Thessalonians stabilized under pressure.

"Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:12-13).

Principle

Stability comes from the Lord, not self.

Application

God often puts cheer into our hearts just at the time we need it. When life seems dark, God puts someone or something into our lives to encourage us. In view of this encouraging word, we can move on to further challenges.

We cannot allow people to move us off our spiritual moorings. If we keep our eyes on the Lord, that is 20/20 vision. Things will get blurry if we try to focus on people.

Christians stand firm because of God's promises.

"Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong" (1 Corinthians 16:13).

"Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness..." (Ephesians 6:13-14).

Standing in faith is standing in the Lord. Faith looks to the Lord and the Lord gives us the strength to move on.

"Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel..." (Philippians 1:27).

"Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved" (Philippians 4:1).

1 Thessalonians 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..."

For what thanks

Paul asks a rhetorical question. What adequate thanks can Paul offer to God for the blessing he received from Timothy's report? He knows that all credit goes to the Lord. He feels totally incapable of giving thanks to God in a manner that would do justice to the way God worked in the lives of the Thessalonians.

can we render to God for you,

The word "render" has the idea of to give back as an equivalent, to requite, recompense. It has the idea of a complete return. Paul wants to give a complete return of thanks to God for the Thessalonian Christians. Paul owes God an obligation for bringing the Thessalonians into his life. How can we return God's goodness to us? He was a man of gratitude to God.

"What shall I render to the LORD For all His benefits toward me?" (Psalm 116:12).

Paul knows that he played a role in the lives of the Thessalonians but he also knows that it was God who did the essential work.

for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God

True joy comes from true values. Paul was full of joy because of what God did in the lives of the Thessalonians.

The word "before" in the phrase "before our God" has the sense of Paul rejoicing in the presence of God. He is the source of all blessing. God did the doing so God gets the glory. Paul's joy endures God's penetrating eye. His joy stood in the presence of God. Paul's joy is before God and his thanksgiving is to Him. God is the ultimate author of spiritual victories and joy. He is the One to whom gratitude is due.

Principle

God does the doing so God gets the glory.

Application

Christian workers need to be careful that they do not view their ministries as their personal success. We must give God the glory for His work among our people. We need to get a perspective on our role in the scheme of eternal things. None of us can adequately thank God for how He uses us.

1 Thessalonians 3:10

"...night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?"

night and day

Paul and his partners prayed for the Thessalonians night and day. The team offered consistent prayer

for these people, believing that God would answer their prayers. The Thessalonians were hardly ever out of their prayers.

praying exceedingly

The word "praying" means to desire, to long for. Paul asks with a sense of urgency that he might see the Thessalonians face to face. "Exceedingly" is a double compound word emphasizing the intensity of the prayers of the gospel team. Paul's prayer was fervent prayer. The word "exceedingly" expresses strong praying - superabundant praying. He prayed beyond normal measure for this request. This is extraordinary prayer over what one would normally pray. Paul prayed with extensive earnestness.

Principle

Some situations need extraordinary, superabundant praying.

Application

Have you ever entered extraordinary, superabundant praying? If not, try it. Carve out extra time for this special need in your life or the life of someone else and pray "exceedingly."

that we may see your face

Paul made five requests for the Thessalonians:

1) to see the Thessalonians face to face, 2) to complete what is lacking in their faith, 3) to deliver them from Satan's obstruction, 4) that their love might enlarge to others, 5) to establish their hearts unblameable in holiness.

Paul's first request in his extraordinary prayer was that he might see the Thessalonians in person

and perfect

The second request Paul made in prayer was that he might have the opportunity to "perfect" the faith of the church in Thessalonica. The word "perfect" means to make fit, to equip, prepare, to render complete, to furnish completely, put in order, restore. "Perfect" comes from two Greek words: down and to mend or repair. Secular Greek used the term "perfect" for setting bones, and for manning a fleet or outfitting an army so they would be thoroughly prepared to go to war. The

New Testament uses this word for mending fishing nets (Mark 1:19).

"Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1).

"And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ..." (Ephesians 4:11-12).

"Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Corinthians 1:10).

"Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the authority which the Lord has given me for edification and not for destruction" (2 Corinthians 13:10).

"But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you" (1 Peter 5:10).

Principle

Our faith needs development.

Application

It is one thing to express faith in the Lord Jesus' death on the cross for salvation but it is another thing to grow in that faith. Are you growing in your faith? Is your level of faith the same it was the day you became a Christian?

"Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious" (1 Peter 2:1-3).

"...but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be

the glory both now and forever. Amen" (2 Peter 3:18).

We grow as we apply the principles of God's Word to our experience. We move from spiritual infancy to spiritual adulthood, into maturity. Certain spiritual childhood diseases will infect our Christian lives if we do not mature in our faith. Many new Christians operate on their emotions and move into pseudo-spiritual experiences that have no basis in biblical truth.

what is lacking in your faith

"Lacking" means want, deficiency. Timothy's trip to Thessalonica found some deficiency or shortcoming in the faith of the Thessalonians. There was an area of faith that the gospel team was not able yet to impart to the Thessalonians. Christians never reach a point of absolute completion of their faith. If we stop growing then we plateau in our walk with the Lord.

The word "faith" isolates the area where they needed equipping. Christians need constant development in their knowledge of God's Word, its formation into principles and application to experience. This is how we exercise our faith.

Principle

All Christians have some areas where they need to grow.

Application

There is no place of perfection here on this earth. We should not pray to be free from problems but that God would show us how to cope with problems. We should pray that we would equip our faith to meet whatever problem we might face.

There is always more ground to possess spiritually. We all have serious deficiencies that prevent us from obtaining a well-rounded faith.

Paul prayed many years after he became a Christian that he would grow in his walk with the Lord.

"Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which

are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you" (Philippians 3:12-15).

1 Thessalonians 3:11

"Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you"

Paul lifts up a prayer of invocation for the Thessalonians in verses 11-13 to close his burden of verse 10. He makes this intercession to both God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now may our God and Father Himself,

Paul not only calls God "God" but he also calls him "Father." The attitude of Paul's approach to prayer is to look to God as Father. Like a son to a father, he presents his prayers to the Lord.

The mood of the Greek word here expresses a wish [optative]. Paul does not know how God will answer his prayer. He expresses his prayer in the form of a desire to leave himself open to God's will.

The word "Himself" is very emphatic in the Greek. Answered prayer always comes within God's sovereignty. The more we recognize our finiteness, the more we place ourselves into God's hands. It is the Father Himself who must undertake for us. Only an omnipotent God and a concerned Father can remove Satan's roadblocks and shelter us from his attacks.

and our Lord Jesus Christ,

Paul in addition appeals to the sovereignty of the Lord Jesus Christ in prayer. Note how Paul naturally associates the Lord Jesus Christ on the same plane as God the Father. Both the Father and the Son are equally God. Both equally participate in answering prayer.

This sentence has two subjects [the Father and Lord Jesus Christ] and one verb [direct] showing the unity of the Father and Son as one in essence. Not only does the Lord Jesus Christ share the same position as the Father but He also joins the same work as the Father.

Principle

The more we orient to God, the more we cast ourselves upon His sovereign providence for guidance in our lives.

Application

God providentially orders all events of the universe. Therefore, He can change circumstances in answer to prayer. None of us knows what tomorrow may bring but God does. The only certainty we have is that God is in control of everything. He providentially manages the universe. He cares about us and about our future.

The opposite of trusting the Lord is anxiety or worry. Anxiety never resolves anything. If anything, anxiety compounds our problems. Worry will not heal cancer or pay our bills. It might give us ulcers, however. Living by faith means we put our problems in God's providential hands. We commit ourselves to Him.

Christians do not depend on chance or luck to make their way through life. Non-Christians must go it alone. They sweat it out and hope that by chance it will work out for the best. That is why some people sublimate with booze and drugs. They need something or they will go crazy. They are not satisfied with their lot in life. They are never satisfied with their salary or their investments. They know life is short so they are afraid of getting old. They must bear surgery, disease and undertakers by themselves. They escape into pleasure and amusements. The Christian trusts in the providence of God.

"Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator" (1 Peter 4:19).

direct our way to you.

The word "direct" comes from two words: down and straight. "Direct" literally means to make straight, lead, set right, guide aright. Paul prays that God would direct a straight path back to Thessalonica.

In his second book to the Thessalonians, Paul asks God to lead their hearts to love for God and patient waiting for the Rapture.

"Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ" (2 Thessalonians 3:5).

Believers need God's direction in ministry. Paul prayed for open doors so that God would direct him to certain situations. Paul placed his plans into the hands of God because he knew that he was incapable of managing his ministry by himself.

Paul sees God as managing the universe. If God sovereignly supervises events and people, then Paul can place his life into the hands of a sovereign God. This is what it means to have faith. We place faith in God's management of the universe. We do not have to know the future; we only have to know the One who does.

"O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps" (Jeremiah 10:23).

"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye" (Psalm 32:8).

"Commit your way to the Lord, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring it to pass" (Psalm 37:5).

"The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD, And He delights in his way" (Psalm 37:23).

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths" (Proverbs 3:5-6).

On the basis of the book of Acts (chapter 17; 18:18, 19:10; 20:31), Paul did not return to Thessalonica for at least five years. God finally answered his prayer in Acts 20:1.

"After the uproar had ceased, Paul called the disciples to himself, embraced them, and departed to go to Macedonia [province where the city of Thessalonica was located]" (Acts 20:1).

God does not give us immediate answers to our prayers. Only He knows His plan. God does not work by our plan.

Principle

We cannot dictate to God our plan.

Application

God orders our steps and stops. At times He gives us the green light, at times the caution and yet at other times the red light. If we run God's red lights, we might have a calamity. We obey God's signals so that we know for sure His direction for our lives.

We must pray that God will direct our ways and open doors.

"For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries" (1 Corinthians 16:9).

"Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord..." (2 Corinthians 2:12).

"And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, These things says He who is holy, He who is true, 'He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens: 'I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name'" (Revelation 3:7-8).

We cannot trust ourselves when it comes to the will of God. The Devil has many clever counterfeits of God's will. He loves to imitate God's plan.

"For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you" (Romans 1:9-10).

We cannot make our plans and expect God to bless them. We need God's guidance. We get our marching orders from God's Word. Therefore, we must know the principles of God's Word if we are going to know His will.

1 Thessalonians 3:12

"And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you..."

And may the Lord make you increase and abound

The phrase "make you increase" means to make to abound, to superabound. The word carries the idea of multiplying. Paul prays that Thessalonian love will come in abundance by multiplying. The Lord is the source of multiplying love. A love that increases is a stronger love this year than last year.

The second word "abound" means to be superabundant. Christians are to love each other in an extraordinary way. Christians love in a different way than non-Christians love each other. God expects Christians to excel in love. Mature Christians love more than in the expected way. Their love is a surpassing love. Love that is full to the brim is one thing. Love that overflows the container is another. People get the over-flow of our love.

"And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment..." (Philippians 1:9).

The combination of these words for superabundance reinforces the intensity of Christian love.

in love to one another

Not all Christians love one another. Anyone can love the loveable. It is more difficult to love cantankerous and challenging people. There is little credit for loving the lovely. When we love the unlovely, that is a different issue.

"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; and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia" (1 Thessalonians 4:9-10).

and to all,

Christians should not restrict their love simply to one another. It should reach out to those who do not know Christ.

just as we do to you

Paul and his team claim to be models of love. Just as they loved the Thessalonians, the Thessalonians are to love one another.

Principle

The more we are beloved the more we should love.

Application

God requires mutual love between Christians and a love that extends beyond the Christian community. The Lord gives us the capacity to love one another. We cannot take a seminar on Christian love. This love comes from God. The Lord has to do it in us.

True love tells the truth, not half truths. We do not say things about each other that are half-true, or, as the case may be, half false. We do not spread gossip about one another. It grieves the heart of God to watch believers fighting with each other.

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35).

"These things I command you, that you love one another" (John 15:17).

"Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law" (Romans 13:8).

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.... And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:12-13).

"And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8).

Some of us cannot even love our relatives much less our enemies.

**"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'
"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, "that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:43-45).**

1 Thessalonians 3:13

"...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"

so that

Paul's aim is that the Lord might strengthen the Thessalonians in practical holiness. Abounding love produces stability in the Christian community.

He may establish your hearts

The word "establish" means to support. God wants to fix hearts and make them secure in His love. God is in the business of making our hearts firm and strong in the faith. Our hearts need stability.

"And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:21-22).

"So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily" (Acts 16:5).

"For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established – that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me" (Romans 1:11-12).

"But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you" (1 Peter 5:10).

"For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth" (2 Peter 1:12).

blameless in holiness

To be "blameless" is not sinlessness. "Blameless" means to be free from all valid charge. A blameless person deals with any wrong in his or her life. This person does not cover sin. He or she keeps short accounts with the Lord. When it comes to holiness, it is God's aim that we will be free from censure.

"Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7:1).

before our God and Father

The word "before" means that Christians will give account in the presence of God the Father at the Rapture. He will scrutinize our lives in unadulterated truth.

at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ

The word "coming" means arrival. At the arrival of Christ [the Rapture], God will evaluate us in His very presence. When we stand at the Judgment Seat of Christ, we will stand there blameless because of the cross of Christ. Sin will not be an issue there. The issue is reward.

with all His saints

All Christians will stand at the Judgment Seat of Christ. The word "His" indicates that God will claim us as His own at that judgment. A "saint" is someone set apart unto God as His own.

Principle

Love becomes more stable as we exercise His love in us.

Application

The more we grow in God's love, our love grows stronger and more established. God does not call upon us to love in our own anemic love. God loves through us with His love, not human love.

"Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Romans 5:5).

We do not have to manufacture love. All we have to do is hook up with God's love. When we do this, we will live in blameless holiness.

1 Thessalonians 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..."

Chapter 4 begins the practical section of First Thessalonians. The first eight verses present the sanctified life.

Finally

The word "finally" does not introduce the conclusion to the book. Half of the epistle is yet to follow. Rather, Paul moves to the last remaining section of the book. There is a transition here from the historical to the exhortatory, the personal to the practical, the past to the prophetic and the apologetic to the application.

then,

With the word "then" Paul draws inferences from chapters 1-3.

brethren,

Paul appeals to the Thessalonians by affection. They are his brothers in Christ. They come from the same source -- born into the family of God. Paul holds in tension affectionate appeal and authoritative admonition. He does not take any personal liberties but prescribes personal holiness.

we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus

This challenge is so significant that Paul uses two words to describe the importance of this message: urge and exhort. "Exhort" is a little stronger than "urge."

Paul urges and exhorts them "in the Lord Jesus" -- in the sphere of everything that Jesus represents. Jesus personally passed this down to the apostles and they to us. The apostles operate on the authority of Christ.

The Thessalonians lived in a culture that mixed sex with its religion. These new converts went to their temples for sex with temple prostitutes on a regular basis. Religion was very popular in those days! The Roman Empire was morally debauched during the first century. Men had wives for having children but they had their mistresses for pleasure. Paul will present a discourse on how to deal with our sex drives in this chapter.

that you should abound more and more,

The words "more and more" point to spiritual growth. It is not enough to exist as a Christian, we must move toward excellence. It is one thing to park ourselves in the Christian life but it is another thing to prevail in it. God wants us to move beyond the status quo. We should ask ourselves whether we are making any progress in the Christian life. We do not tell our spouses that we

love them the day we get married and that is supposed to last them for the rest of their lives! Neither do we live the Christian life with one fell swoop. Each day with the Lord should be sweeter than the day before but it will take work.

Principle

Status quo in the Christian life always means stagnation, deterioration and decay in holiness.

Application

Doctrine precedes duty and precept precedes practice. The Christian life is not a set of rules but a set of principles. The design of the Christian life is to teach us God's viewpoint on life by forming that viewpoint into principles. When we apply those principles by faith God transforms our lives.

Christians are no more fit for Heaven 25 years after they become Christians than they were the day they accepted Christ. God sanctified them completely the moment they received Christ as Savior in terms of positional sanctification. Progressive sanctification is an ongoing process.

just as you received from us

Paul reiterates what he taught the Thessalonians on his first visit to the city. The team clearly informed them of the nature of the Christian life. Principles are lifeless without application.

how you ought to walk and to please God

Take note of the word "how" here. Christians should have some know how. They should know how to gain victory over sin in their lives.

The word "ought" is the word "must." There is a logical and moral imperative to walk in order to please God. The Thessalonians lived in a seaport where sin was unbridled. There were many temptations there. No one can be casual about Christianity in the face of temptation. Daily, consistent walk with the Lord is imperative if any victory is going to come their way.

The New Testament repeatedly compares the Christian life to a walk. The Greek word comes from two words: around and to walk. The idea is to walk around as a course of life (Romans 6:4; 2 Corinthians 5:7; Galatians 5:16; Colossians 4:5; Ephesians 4:1,17; 5:8,15; 1 John 1:7; 2:6).

The phrase "to please God" explains "to walk." An acceptable walk pleases God.

Principle

A prime purpose of the Christian life is to please God.

Application

A central characteristic of the Christian life is to please God. Christians accommodate themselves to their God. God never accommodates Himself to us. The idea is not that we appease God or conciliate Him. Christ did that on the cross. We please Him because we honor Him. It is a matter of gratefulness. A holy walk pleases God. We want to walk in a way that puts a smile on the face of God. Many of us make Him frown.

"Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him" (2 Corinthians 5:9).

"And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight" (1 John 3:22).

Wholesome husbands and wives want to please each other. They are not afraid to ask what they are doing that irritates one another. "I want to stay on your right side." We should ask that question to the Lord.

1 Thessalonians 4:2

"...for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus"

The word "commandments" means order, instruction, command, precept, and advice. The idea is that "commandments" are the prescriptions of the Lord Jesus. "Commandments" carry a military connotation. Paul issued orders from his superior, General Jesus, the one ultimately in authority.

Paul taught the Thessalonians divine revelation orally before the close of the New Testament. First Thessalonians was one of Paul's first epistles. He wrote this letter about a year after he left Thessalonica.

through the Lord Jesus

The commandments Paul's team taught the Thessalonians came directly from the Lord Jesus. Paul does not preach on his own authority but from the authority of Christ. He does not conjure up his own ideas about life or draw on current philosophies of the day; he speaks from the authority of Christ. His prescriptions were not some arbitrary orders of his own. To the contrary, General Jesus issued these orders directly from headquarters. Paul passed these orders to Christian soldiers on the firing line fighting the battle of purity in a corrupt world.

"If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15).

"You are My friends if you do whatever I command you" (John 15:14).

The "commandments" that Paul taught did not come from Moses. He taught something that transcended Moses -- the grace of God as a mode of life.

"And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:16-17).

Principle

Jesus gave us the principles of grace to face any challenge we might encounter.

Application

Some Christians want to learn some new thing yet they do not live up to the knowledge they already have. We have precepts or prescriptions directly from our Lord in the Bible. Why do we need anything else?

1 Thessalonians 4:3

"For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality..."

For this is the will of God,

Paul declares the will of God in unadulterated terms. There are many areas where we do not know the explicit will of God but this is not one of them. We know the will of God when it comes to the boundaries of sex. Here we know clearly what God wishes. Christians can yield themselves to

God's sovereign will or assert their own independent will.

We determine God's will from God's Word. We cannot live the Christian life without the Bible. That is the only place we can find absolutes. We can find the will of God in the Word of God.

Principle

God gives believers absolutes so they can make clear, decisive decisions in the area of sex.

Application

Christians cannot set their sail as to how the wind may blow. That is relative ethics. We must set our sail according to the will of God, which may mean that we sail against the prevailing winds of opinion. We want to sail in the same direction God is going.

Before we can do the will of God, we must be willing to do His will no matter what the cost. The Christian who is willing to open himself to God's will unconditionally is the Christian God will use.

"If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority" (John 7:17).

It is possible to understand the will of God. It is no mysterious, ethereal, abstruse will. God reveals His will in very clear terms.

"Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is" (Ephesians 5:17).

It is possible to test the will of God. We do this by a "renewed mind."

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:1-2).

Those committed to living carnal lives cannot prove the will of God. We cannot conform ourselves to the world and find God's will at the same time. These things are mutually exclusive.

"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of

the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever" (1 John 2:15-17).

It is possible to stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.

"Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God" (Colossians 4:12).

The motto of one of my alma maters, William Tyndale College, is "The will of God, nothing more, nothing less, nothing else." Getting into the will of God and staying there gives the believer a great sense of satisfaction.

Certain things in the Christian life are not open to debate. We do not rethink our view of sexuality. We do not rationalize sexual sin so that it meets some convenient need that we perceive that we might have.

your sanctification:

The idea "sanctification" means separation to God (1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Thessalonians 2:13). This is the conduct of separating ourselves from sinful things. This separation befits those separated to God. The Holy Spirit is the agent in sanctification (Romans 15:16; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2). The Christian's body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. We should separate our bodies to the Holy Spirit. The emphasis here is upon one's dedication or consecration to serve God.

Principle

A sanctified person puts himself or herself at the complete disposal of God.

Application

There are three kinds of sanctification in the Bible: positional, progressive and ultimate. Positional sanctification is our eternal status quo with God as completely set apart as His forever at salvation (Acts 20:32; 26:18; 1 Corinthians 1:2, 30; Hebrews 2:11; 1 Peter 1:2; Jude 1). Christ provided for salvation from Hell at the cross (Hebrews

10:10,14). God sets us apart in an eternal, infallible, unalterable position in Christ.

The second kind of sanctification is progressive sanctification. This is our relative growth in becoming more and more like the Lord Jesus. There is a progressive dimension to Christianity.

"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

This is the process whereby the Spirit of God takes the Word of God and makes the child of God like the Son of God. We do this by walking in the Spirit and applying God's Word to our experience. This continues as long as we live. If we progressively improve, there will be development and growth toward maturity.

"They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth" (John 17:16-17).

The third phase of spirituality is ultimate sanctification, our final glorification. When we get to Heaven, we will be free from all sin and the capacity to sin.

"For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified" (Romans 8:29-30).

"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" (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

"Sanctification" is God's will. God wants us for His exclusive use. A sanctified person is a person who is at the complete disposal of God. He can do with us as He pleases. Because we are His, He does not need to check with us first.

that you should abstain from sexual immorality

Three times in verses three to six Paul uses the word "that." The first "that" expresses God's purpose concerning sexual purity.

The word "abstain" literally means to hold oneself off from, be distant. The idea is that Christians must avoid sexual temptations. They should put a lot of distance between themselves and temptation. If there is an area where Christians need to know their limits, it is this one. We should not try to come as close to the fire as we can without being burned. It is interesting that the Bible's solution to sexual sin is to "flee."

"Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body" (1 Corinthians 6:18).

"Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2:22).

"Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation" (1 Peter 2:11-12).

The words "you should" indicate that it is our responsibility to do the abstaining.

"Sexual immorality" means prostitution, fornication and of every kind of unlawful sexual intercourse or sexual lust. This term can refer to any form of sexual sin such as adultery, premarital and extramarital intercourse, homosexuality, sex with animals, pornography or any other kind of sexual sin. We cannot practice sexual indiscretion and become more holy.

"For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. "These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man" (Matthew 15:19-20).

"It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles – that a man has his father's wife!" (1 Corinthians 5:1).

"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. And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For "the two," He says, "shall become one flesh." But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him. Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body" (1 Corinthians 6:13-18).

Sex in itself is not sin. To the contrary, God gave sex for His creatures to enjoy (Proverbs 5; 1 Corinthians 7:1-9). Sex outside the bounds of marriage is sin.

Principle

The onus is upon believers to not put themselves in situations where they might be tempted sexually.

Application

The Bible is very clear on how God wants us to behave sexually. He sets forth unmistakable ground rules for living. There is such a thing as "fouling out" sexually. If Christians enter sexual sin, they disqualify themselves from fellowship with God. They disqualify themselves from God's service (1 Corinthians 9:24-27). God put the rules of the game in His Word. There is no debate about the will of God when it comes to sexual sin.

It is never too late to walk with God. Many of you have already sinned sexually. It is God's will that you move on. He will welcome you into His fellowship. God makes it clear that He will restore us to fellowship. As we trusted the finished work of Christ for salvation, so we trust His finished work on the cross for our sin (1 John 1:9-2:2).

"Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7:1).

1 Thessalonians 4:4

"...that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor..."

that each of you should know how

Avoiding sexual temptation requires some "know how." We learn from the Word of God. When the chips are down and we face temptation, believers should have know how from the Word of God.

to possess his own vessel

Christians should know how to "possess" their "vessel." The word "possess" means to acquire, procure for oneself, gain. We must know how to apply principles of God's Word to our experience. The idea is to win mastery over our souls in temptation. In doing this, we will save ourselves from grave danger. We control our sex life by knowing how to submit ourselves to God's control.

The word "vessel" is a euphemistic way of referring to our sexual life. We must make a clean-cut break with sex sins. Christians must "repent" of fornication.

"...lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness which they have practiced" (2 Corinthians 12:21).

Our "vessel" is how we use our body for the glory of God.

"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us" (2 Corinthians 4:7).

in sanctification and honor

Our sex life should be holy and honorable. The antithesis of allowing our sex drive to run uncontrolled is that we operate "in sanctification and honor." There are privileges and responsibilities in becoming a child of the King. The word "in" refers to the sphere or leading milieu that governs our sexual behavior.

"Holiness" and "honor" control our sexual drives.

"Sanctification" is what we do in setting aside our lives unto God. "Holiness" is our willingness to set apart our life to God. We belong to another. We

are not our own. When we set apart our lives unto God, we give Him our lives for His exclusive use. We are His -- lock, stock and barrel; hook, line and sinker; body, soul and spirit.

Honor is what others see; they see that we live holy lives. "Honor" deems our sexual drive as precious so we deal with it respectfully. A Christian has drastically different attitudes toward sex than non-Christians. For this reason, they carry themselves with "honor." The word "honor" denotes value, esteem. Some of us do not value the honor of our bodies. We devalue it by sexually defacing it. Jesus paid a great price for our salvation, therefore, our lives have great value to Him.

"Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price [same word as "honor"]; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

Principle

Christians need to learn how to control latent sex drives in holiness and honor.

Application

Learning how to handle our sex drive is not easy. The sex drive is one of the most powerful drives of our body. The first lesson we must learn is that our body is not our own (1 Corinthians 6:19,20). The Bible says that we cannot satisfy our sex drive just as we satisfy our sleep, hunger or thirst. However, we must control our sleep or eating. If we allow those desires to get out of control, the result is health problems.

The believer is God's vessel. As God's vessel, we must treat our bodies with holiness and honor. Our sexual drive is God's. He has the right to determine how we use it. His standard is two-fold: 1) flee sexual sins, and 2) pursue things of God.

"But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work. Flee

also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2:20-22).

If we do only one, we will have done a half job. If we flee, but do not pursue, then we fulfil only half of God's command. A half job will not deliver us from sexual sin. Do you fully "possess" your body for the glory of God? Only a clear-cut, definite decision will do this. We cannot have compartments in our lives reserved for self. Such compartments will eventually result in blatant sin. If you are reserving certain sins for yourself, deal with them with one fell swoop today. Do not look back.

That is not enough, however. You must "pursue" righteousness, faith, love, peace with a pure heart. We cannot trifle with sin or the Christian life. It takes all that we have and are. It will cost us something in personal gratification. That cost is worth it because of what Jesus did for us on the cross.

1 Thessalonians 4:5

"...not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God..."

not in passion of lust,

"Passion" is whatever we suffer or experience in any way. It is an affection of the mind, a passionate desire in either a good or a bad sense. Here Paul uses this term in a bad sense of illicit sexual passion.

"Passion" is the passive side of our sinful capacity. It refers to affections that have the potential for arousal. "Lust" is the active side. It refers to strong drives and intense cravings. "Lust" denotes coveting, desire, craving, longing, mostly of evil desires. The idea is to desire something greatly or strongly.

"For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature" (Romans 1:26).

"For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death" (Romans 7:5).

"And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Galatians 5:24).

like the Gentiles

The "Gentiles" are those without Christ. Unrestrained indulgence in sexual passion is characteristic of those without Christ. The Bible divides people into three categories: the Jew, the Gentile and the church of God.

"Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God..." (1 Corinthians 10:32).

who do not know God

Those who know God overcome sexual temptation because of their relationship with Him. It is one thing to know about God; it is another to know God personally. Once we embrace Jesus as our Savior our attitude toward sex changes. To live without restraints sexually, is to live like a heathen.

Principle

Personal relationship with God is the parent of purity.

Application

Christians should never mistake lust for love. Those without Christ often do not know the difference. Hollywood certainly does not for the most part.

"Passion of lust" is mental adultery or fornication as well as the overt act. The battle with sexual sin always begins in the mind. It is as much sin to think it as to act it.

When lusts stir up our passions, we give ourselves over to appetites of the sin capacity. We deny the dignity of that comes from God. We lose all sense of fairness to fellow believers in the family of God.

Overcoming illicit sexual passions begins with a relationship with the Lord. If we allow Him to convict us of these sins and confess them, we have taken the first step toward overcoming. There is far more to conquering these sins but we cannot overcome them without relationship with God.

1 Thessalonians 4:6

"...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"

In verse six, Paul makes another appeal for sexual purity – the impact sexual sin has on your illicit sexual partner.

that no one should take advantage of

The words "should take advantage" denote to go over, used metaphorically as "transgress." The context refers to "passion of lust" so the topic is sexual sins. Someone who takes "advantage of" someone else steps over God's boundaries.

The New Testament uses this term in the commercial sense as well. Violating someone else's wife is like stealing from them.

Principle

Adultery is like stealing.

Application

Many people's activities fly in the face of God's boundaries or prescribed limits. Sexual sins transgress God's standards in dealing with fellow Christians.

This is no different that stealing someone's property. We have no more right to have sex with someone's spouse because they are attractive to us any more than we have a right to steal their car because it appeals to us.

and defraud

The word "defraud" carries the idea of seeking to get more. This person takes advantage of others. Paul uses the word "defraud" in describing Satan's effort to gain an advantage over the church when they did not restore someone who fell into sexual sin (2 Corinthians 12:17,18).

"Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices" (2 Corinthians 2:10-11).

"Defraud" is another commercial term similar to the words "take advantage." Taking someone else's partner is like stealing some one else's goods. Sexual immorality defrauds sisters and brothers of the fidelity they rightfully expect from their

spouses. Sex thieves think little of the wrong done. They think only of gratifying their own greed. They have an insatiable lust for more [Greek]. This word can carry the idea of compulsion.

his brother in this matter,

The word "brother" indicates that the person defrauded is a fellow Christian. We make another Christian a victim of our sin.

Principle

Sexual sin wrongs the partner, the mate as well as the self.

Application

Someone who defrauds others sexually takes advantage of their trust. They outwit and cheat them of their rightful partner. They claim more than their due. Greed is always the motivation behind robbing someone of his or her partner. This person operates on exploitation.

because the Lord is the avenger of all such,

An "avenger" is one who exacts a penalty from a person. The Lord will personally punish sexual sins. God always maintains this right.

The word "all such" refers to any kind of sin: adultery, fornication, homosexuality or sex with animals. Those who commit such sins still have God to reckon with. God keeps books on this issue and He is a very good accountant!

"Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord" (Romans 12:19).

We do not have to get even for immorality perpetrated against us. God will do that for us. There is no need for recrimination because God executes vengeance for us. Commit it to the Lord. The Lord will also mend your broken spirit. He will deal with the shame, sorrow, and disgrace.

as we also forewarned you

The word "forewarned" is literally to say before. This is the idea of warning someone of some future serious consequence.

"...envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those

who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:21).

and testified

The word "testified" is a strong word for giving a testimony. Literally, this word comes from two Greek words: through and testify -- to testify through. Paul thoroughly warned the Thessalonians of God's judgment of sexual sin. Paul bore solemn witness about what God would do with those who "take advantage" and "defraud." The solemn warning here may be due to the close tie between religion and sex in Thessalonica.

Principle

God will deal with sexual wrong against us.

Application

Sexual sin steals from others. It steals both from the person and from their mate. These sins have negative social impact. Sexual sin violates Christian brotherhood.

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's" (Exodus 20:17).

Not only do these sins damage families but the people who commit these sins. Children suffer, parents suffer and the self suffers. This is why God "avenges" these sins. No one escapes the pain of these choices. There are predictable costs to these sins. People give the excuse, "Well, I just fell in love. I couldn't help myself." Ministers who run off with someone hurt their congregations. Those congregations suffer for years to come.

"Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Hebrews 13:4).

God will forgive sexual sins, but He will also deal with these sins just as He did with David's sin with Bathsheba. David's scars lasted until he died.

1 Thessalonians 4:7

"For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness" (1 Thessalonians 4:7).

The first reason we should avoid sexual sins is that God will avenge them (4:6). The second reason is that it violates our calling (4:7).

For God did not call us to uncleanness,

"Uncleanness" denotes something impure such as dirt. The word carries the idea of immorality. Sometimes it carries the idea of unnatural sin such as homosexuality (Romans 1:24). Generally, "uncleanness" refers to the state of moral impurity especially in reference to sexual sin.

The word "to" presents the purpose of uncleanness. A Christian tempted to indulge in sexual sin must think about God's purpose for him or her.

but in holiness

"Holiness" refers to sanctification or separation unto God (1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2). It points to the course befitting those separated unto God (1 Thessalonians 4:3,4,7; Romans 6:19,22; 1 Timothy 2:15; Hebrews 12:14). The believer separates himself from evil things and evil ways because he is a child of God.

"Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7:1).

"...and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:24).

"For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness" (Hebrews 12:10).

"Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord..." (Hebrews 12:14).

God "calls" the Christian "in holiness." God's purpose in choosing us was to set us apart to Himself. The word "in" signifies in the sphere of holiness. Holiness is the sphere of our calling. Sexual sin sins go against God's calling. We reject God's call when we enter into sexual sins.

Principle

Sexual immorality goes against God's calling of the believer.

Application

The subject of sexual immorality is of the deepest doctrinal importance and touches the very foundation of the Christian life. When God calls the believer, He divinely summons us to a new life. This new life is not for the purpose of indulging ourselves but to move us toward sanctification. Every decision we make should move us toward progressive sanctification. This is the main business of a Christian.

To descend to a lower level of life than God's purpose for us is very serious. It belittles God's standards. It despises Him in the role of Giver of holiness.

A dirty soul does not honor a person called by God. We are the complete property of God. We are not our own. We belong to God.

"This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness" (Ephesians 4:17-19).

"But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints..." (Ephesians 5:3).

God summons us to a new kind of life, a life set apart to Him. Every choice we make as a Christian should contribute to our becoming more and more like the Lord Jesus. This is the call of the believer.

1 Thessalonians 4:8

"Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit"

This verse gives Paul's third basis why Christians should flee sexual sins.

Therefore

The word "therefore" is an emphatic marker of result – "for this very reason." A sex life governed by God's call to holiness is the rationale for his next statements. The nature of the child of God

stands in antithesis to the natural urges of the man without Christ.

He who rejects this does not reject man,

The word "rejects" means to annul. If we annul God's call upon our lives (4:7), then we thwart the effectiveness of that call. We nullify God's purpose for us on earth. God lays down His purpose and we set it aside. In so doing, we refuse to recognize the validity of His call and claim on our lives.

but God,

If we annul God's plan, we annul God in our lives. Standards about sex are God's standards. The Romans did not base their view of sexuality upon their polytheistic religion. They were essentially utilitarian in their view of sex. If it works, it's right. We can summarize their approach "Does this serve my self-interest?"

who has also given us His Holy Spirit

At the moment of salvation, God gives His indwelling Holy Spirit to each believer. The New Testament characterizes the "Spirit" as "Holy." The Greek emphasizes the word "Holy." The indwelling spirit inside of each believer is "Holy." The Christian cannot disconnect his life from the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit can work supernaturally in us to empower us to have victory in our sex lives. He enables us in this area.

"That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us" (2 Timothy 1:14).

Principle

Rationalizing sin diminishes God.

Application

When Christians rationalize sexual dalliance they negate God Himself. Rationalization is just a way of kidding ourselves. God gave us the Holy Spirit to empower us to deal with any sin that might come our way. God wants us to rely on Him in these matters.

If we regard sexual sins as a minor matter, we minimize the whole nature of God. To descend to a lower level of Christian living is to belittle God. We despise God in His role as the Giver of His Holy Spirit. He is the one who makes the privilege of holiness possible. Instead of indulging in sexual

gratification, we can live in the temple of the Holy Spirit.

"Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

1Thessalonians 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..."

Chapter three introduced us to the subject of Christian love. Now Paul develops the subject in more detail.

"And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you, 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" (1 Thessalonians 3:12-13).

But concerning brotherly love

The words "but concerning" introduce the new topic of "brotherly love." Sex sins are self-centered. Love is others-centered.

"Brotherly love" is the Greek term philadelphia. Phila is friendship love and adelphia is brothers. Christians should carry friendship love for their brothers and sisters in Christ. This Greek word for love means rapport love, reciprocal love. Christians experience warmth when they meet other Christians.

"Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another..." (Romans 12:10).

"Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart..." (1 Peter 1:22).

"Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous..." (1 Peter 3:8).

"But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love" (2 Peter 1:5-7).

"Let brotherly love continue" (Hebrews 13:1).

you have no need that I should write to you,

There is no need for humans to teach about reciprocal love because this love is natural amongst believers.

for you yourselves are taught by God

God teaches believers innately that they are to love one another. Christians intuitively know that they are to love other Christians.

to love one another

The New Testament commands us to love one another thirteen times. The word "love" here is a different word for love than in the first phrase of this verse. The word here is a self-sacrificing love produced by the Holy Spirit.

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35).

Principle

There is a supernatural compulsion to love fellow believers.

Application

God Himself teaches us to love one another with a divinely implanted determination to love other Christians.

1 Thessalonians 4:10

"...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..."

and indeed

These words confirm verse nine. The Thessalonians were already living examples of those who show love for fellow Christians.

you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia.

The Thessalonians loved believers throughout the province of Macedonia that included such churches as the Berean and Philippian church.

But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more

Paul urges the Thessalonian believers to develop momentum in their love for one another. God did not need to teach them about loving one another but Paul needed to teach them to abound in their love for one another. Christians are constantly to expand their realm of love.

Principle

God wants us to expand our love to a broad range of believers.

Application

How extensive is your love? Do you, "love us four and no more?" God wants us to love those we already love more than we do. He also wants us to expand the sphere of those we love.

"And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment..." (Philippians 1:9).

An overflowing heart of love is one of the surest evidences of spirituality. It is impossible to love fellow Christians too much.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law." (Galatians 5:22-23).

The more Christians love each other the less they pick at each other. The less they love each other the more they snipe and undermine each other.

"But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!" (Galatians 5:15).

The love that increases and spreads is undaunted love. A shriveled love is a dying love. Those who fall out of love tend toward discord. There is very little harmony without extensive love. The greater the love, the greater the harmony. The greater the volume of love, the less the criticism. This is axiomatic.

1 Thessalonians 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..."

Certain members of the church at Thessalonica became fanatics, busybodies and loafers. Paul has a fourfold prescription for these people:

1. Live a calm and orderly life 2. Mind their own business 3. Engage in manual labor 4. Have a mannerly conduct

that you also aspire to lead a quiet life,

First, Paul urges the Thessalonians to aspire to a quiet life. "Aspire" comes from one Greek word with two words joined: to be fond of and honor. "Aspire" has the sense of being strongly ambitious about something or applying oneself to something. The Thessalonians were to make every effort to pursue a tranquil life. Apparently, they were bogged down by unscriptural argument and unwarranted criticism. They could channel all this misspent energy into something more advantageous.

Christians should aspire to lead a quiet life. Paul says, "Do everything in your power to lead a quiet life." Christians should have settled souls, not noisy souls. Noisy souls come from having too much time on our hands.

Principle

Christians usefully employed have a tendency toward more settled souls.

Application

Christians should not get their liver in a quiver. Turmoil is not of Christ. Tone it down. Why should Christians get exasperated with one another? It does not take much to upset some of us. We fly off the handle very quickly, even at minor things. We major on the minors and minor on the majors.

We get worked up over trivial things. After it is over and we have had time to think about the situation, we say, "How foolish of me to get into a sweat over that! How immature of me to do that." God has remedies for fretful living.

"Do not fret because of evildoers, Nor be envious of the workers of iniquity" (Psalms 37:1).

A quiet soul does not enter into rivalry with fellow Christians. Christians are not to draw attention to themselves by ungodly promotion of self. Some people love to let everyone know how important they are among the Christian herd. They establish a very clear pecking order, because they must be on top of the herd. All this comes from having too much time on their hands.

to mind your own business,

Secondly, Christians should mind their own business. A busybody mentality is not of Christ. Many people are much better at telling others how to run their business than at running their own. Paying faithful attention to the normal pursuits of life fosters a Christian attitude, especially when we focus on our own business. Personal industry will save busybodies from themselves.

Principle

Industry saves us from ourselves.

Application

It is easier to mind other people's business than our own. Some people are experts at raising their neighbor's children. The saying, "Mind your own business" applies to busybodies.

"For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies" (2 Thessalonians 3:11).

Busybodies are a plague on any church. Some people love to stick their nose in other people's business.

"Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand" (Romans 14:4).

1 Thessalonians 4:12

"... you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing"

Fourthly, the manner of life before non-Christians should be becoming to Christianity. The word "properly" denotes gracefully, becomingly, in a seemly manner. It is unbecoming for a Christian to

drain other Christians dry financially. It's taking advantage of their charity.

Leeching on other Christians does not impress non-Christians. Non-Christians understand propriety. Christianity is not a license to relieve us from work. On the contrary, it establishes the integrity of labor as a means to meet our needs.

and that you may lack nothing

If believers profitably occupy themselves with their own business, they will not need any financial help from anyone. He will work no hardship on their fellow Christians. Faithful pursuit of personal industry makes support by others unnecessary. If we do our job as unto the Lord, the Lord will meet our financial needs.

Principle

An honest day's work is a good testimony to those without Christ.

Application

Credible Christians pay attention to the way they live on a day-to-day basis. A godless world looks upon those who leech off others with askance. Non-Christians can judge us only by appearances, so our walk should fit the fashion of Christ. What kind of testimony would we have to non-Christians if they viewed us as wranglers, gossips, critics, busybodies and lazy?

"Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one" (Colossians 4:5-6).

Christians must put in an honest day's work. We put 40 hours into a 40-hour workweek. The standard for work for Christians is excellence. They are to be so good at their employment or business that others will take notice. Christians should do their job as unto the Lord.

1 Thessalonians 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"

From verse 13 to the end of the chapter, Paul talks about the rapture of the church to meet the Lord in the air. This is the blessed hope of the believer.

But

The word "but" both introduces a new subject but also connects to the previous paragraph. The restlessness of disorderly believers (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12) was, in part, caused by an incomplete understanding of the Rapture of the church. They rightly understood that the coming of Christ was imminent, that is, no sign needed fulfillment before He came again. However, they had not considered the possibility that some of their friends would die before it occurred. They, therefore, plunged into deep grief. Doubts filled their minds as to the status of these prematurely deceased believers.

I do not want you to be ignorant,

This phrase, expressing that Paul does not want them to be ignorant is a formula customarily used to discuss difficult problems and correct false ideas (Romans 1:13; 11:25; 1 Corinthians 10:1; 12:1). Usually, whenever the Bible warns us that we are ignorant about something, it is warranted. The topic of Christians dying is so important to the Thessalonians that it requires an explanation from the apostle Paul.

The only way we can know about the afterlife is through the revelation found in the Bible. If we have adequate knowledge of what the Bible teaches about this subject, then it will dispel excessive grief in our souls. We can only resolve our ignorance by reading the Bible. We will rid ourselves of excessive grief by eliminating our ignorance about the future.

The Thessalonians were clearly looking for the Lord's return at the rapture, but they did not know the state of their dead loved ones until that point. They thought that those who died would miss the Rapture.

brethren,

The word "brethren" occurs in verses one, six and nine of this chapter. Paul appeals to the relationship the Thessalonians have with Paul in Christ. The truth that Paul is about to reveal is strictly for those who know Christ.

Principle

Knowing biblical truth is the foundation of stability, especially when it comes to eternal things.

Application

The Rapture of the church is an important doctrine, because it affects our future and present hope.

It is important that non-Christians know about the first coming of Christ and its purpose. It is also important for Christians to know about the Rapture and second coming of Christ. Jesus' imminent return to planet earth to translate believers to heaven is a glorious truth that comforts Christians.

concerning those who have fallen asleep,

"Fallen asleep" is the literal meaning of the Greek word. Metaphorically, this word means death, the sleep of death (Matthew 27:52; John 11:11-13; Acts 7:60; 1 Corinthians 7:39; 11:30; 15:6,18,51; 2 Peter 3:4). Some believers in Thessalonica died because of persecution. They wanted to know what happened to their fellow Christians who died.

Some cults teach that the soul sleeps in death. They claim that after a long period, God will wake up the soul. Does the Bible teach this?

The Bible never uses the term "asleep" when referring to non-Christians, but always uses the term for believers. Physical death for believers is nothing more than sleep. God will wake them one day to physical resurrection from the dead.

As well, the Bible never uses "sleep" for the soul. Soul-sleep is a false doctrine. The soul of the dead is unconscious in reference to this world (Job 7:9-10; Ecclesiastes 9:5-6; Isaiah 63:16) but wide awake and fully conscious of the glories of the world to come (Luke 16:19-31; 2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:21-23; Revelation 7:15-17). Stephen's spirit went to be with the Lord, but his body fell asleep (Acts 7:60).

The New Testament uses "sleep" either for physical rest or for the physical body resting in the grave, but never for the soul sleeping. The Thessalonians did not concern themselves with the souls of their departed loved ones, but about the resurrection of their bodies. The sleep of the body

is only temporary; it will rise from the dead one day. God does not annihilate the soul and spirit at the physical death of the body. There was no need for the Thessalonians to worry about the fate of their loved ones.

In John 11:12-13, the disciples thought of the normal physical sense of sleep but the Lord used it in the figurative sense, referring to physical death (1 Thessalonians 11:11,13).

The pagan culture of the Thessalonians offered no hope about a future physical life. Many people viewed the body as evil in any case. They wanted to get rid of the body.

"Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, 'because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.'" And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, 'We will hear you again on this matter'" (Acts 17:30-32).

Paul speaks of those Christians who had died since he left a year previously. What happened to them at death? Did their body and soul just go to sleep at death? No, their souls went immediately and instantaneously into the presence of God.

"For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart [to die] and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh [continue to live physically] is more needful for you" (Philippians 1:23-24).

Those who die simply sleep in body, but not in soul. Even the body will rise from the sleep of physical death one day (1 Corinthians 15:35-57). Physical death is a temporary state that will end when the physical body rises from the dead at the final resurrection.

"Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice "and come forth – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation" (John 5:28-29).

Principle

Sleep in Scripture has to do with the death of the body, not soul-sleep.

Application

A corpse looks as if it is sleeping. The immaterial part of human beings [soul and spirit] does not sleep in the body at death. The moment death hits the body of a Christian, the immaterial part of the person goes immediately and instantaneously into the presence of God.

"We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8).

The physical body sleeps in the casket until Jesus comes again. At that time, He will raise the physical body and make it like His resurrection body (Philippians 3:20,21).

Non-Christians go to a place called Hades. They will stay there until the second resurrection when Hades will be cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20). The first resurrection is for Christians (John 5:28,29). Death does not end all, for death is not annihilation. Non-Christians will live for eternity in the lake of fire.

We will meet Jesus one day as our Savior or as our Judge. These are the only two options. Those who straight-arm Jesus, in time, will meet Him as a Judge. Jesus will sit on the great white throne to pronounce their eternal state in a Christless eternity.

lest you sorrow as others who have no hope

"Sorrow" means to cause pain or grief, to distress, vex, be sad. Christians do not have the same pain as non-Christians when it comes to the death of the physical body. Christians know the soul goes immediately into the presence of God. Therefore, Christians grieve, but not in the same way. Christians do not grieve as those who have no hope.

Jesus grieved over the death of a friend (John 11:35). This does not mean that He despaired over ever seeing His friend again. Normal human beings grieve over the physical death of their loved ones (Philippians 2:27). God does not dehumanize Christians by removing grief from the realm of experience.

Many non-Christians believe that, when they die, they will go into a dark, dank hole and decay until their body is no more. They have no hope beyond the grave. Others have no idea what is on the other side. They have no guarantee about eternity. They hope only in the present, not in the future.

"Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh – who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands – that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world" (Ephesians 2:11-12).

Principle

Death does not end all for believers, so there is no need for unnecessary sorrow.

Application

Some Christians grieve over their dead loved ones like pagans do, as if they have no hope of ever seeing them again. Christians sorrow, but they do not sorrow like the lost. God does not keep Christians from human sorrow. But their sorrow is not a final sorrow. There is as much difference between a Christian funeral and a pagan funeral as there is between black and white.

Many non-Christians are afraid to die, because they do not have a hope beyond the grave. They have no Heaven. They know nothing of sins forgiven.

Christians have a glorious hope. Because Christ rose from the death eternally, so we will also rise.

"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13).

"To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27).

"Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Savior and the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope..." (1 Timothy 1:1).

"...in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began..." (Titus 1:2).

"...looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ..." (Titus 2:13).

There is no hope apart from Christ. If we put our hope in our church, we will be disappointed. If we put our hope in a political system, that will fail us. Washington or Ottawa will not offer permanent peace. If we place our hope in the United Nations, we will end in disillusionment. Only Christ offers permanent, eternal hope.

It is one thing for Christians to grieve over their loved ones but it is another to grieve inordinately. The resurrection of Christ persuades against surplus sorrow. Christ's resurrection gives us hope. His resurrection kills death; therefore, death does not annihilate the person from existence. It simply separates the immaterial part of human beings [soul and spirit] from the material part [the body]; until the resurrection of the body from the grave.

1 Thessalonians 4:14

"For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus"

For

Paul now sets forth two great features in the work of Christ that banish unfounded grief. Removal of ignorance about these will remove worries about what happens to the physical body of the Christians who die.

if we believe

The word "if" in the Greek means that this supposition is assumed true. Paul assumes that the Thessalonians believe in the death and resurrection of Christ (Acts 17:3). The following truths only carry currency if we believe them. Hope rests on our faith in the resurrection of Christ. The certainty of our hope is inseparable from Christ's resurrection.

that Jesus died and rose again,

Paul here uses Jesus' human name on earth, emphasizing his historical nature. In His

humanity, Jesus launched two foundations of the Christian faith – His death to pay for our sins and His resurrection to initiate us into eternal life.

Thus, in one statement we have the two foundations of the Christian faith.

Paul does not use the word "slept" for the death of Christ; instead, he uses the harsher word – "died." Christians can enjoy peaceful sleep because Jesus endured death as a penalty for sin. Jesus' death took away the sting of death.

The second great fact is the truth that Jesus rose again. Because of His victory over death, the body of the Christian believer sleeping in Christ will rise to participate in the Rapture and be caught away from earth.

The death and resurrection of Jesus is the irreducible minimum of the gospel. A person cannot become a Christian without believing these two great truths.

"Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it" (Acts 2:23-24).

"But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses" (Acts 3:14-15).

"The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree" (Acts 5:30).

"...who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification" (Romans 4:25).

"Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us" (Romans 8:34).

"For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living" (Romans 14:9).

"For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who

live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again" (2 Corinthians 5:14-15).

"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit..." (1 Peter 3:18).

"I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death" (Revelation 1:8).

Principle

A person becomes a Christian by believing in the death of Christ to pay for our sins and in the resurrection of Christ to give us eternal life.

Application

A person becomes a Christian by believing that Jesus substituted His death on the cross for our eternal death and that He bodily rose from the dead to give us eternal life.

even so

The words "even so" show the parallel between the resurrection of the bodies of believers and the resurrection of Christ. Paul now draws his first conclusion. There is complete concord there. The resurrection of the body of the believer is as sure as the resurrection of Christ. Our physical bodies will rise from the dead since Christ rose from the dead.

God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus

God will personally bring believers with Him in the resurrection of the physical body from the dead. The soul and spirit will reunite with the physical body at that time. God will give us a resurrection body that is like the resurrection body of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself" (Philippians 3:20-21).

The Father thus fully acknowledges the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus and acts on it by

resurrecting our bodies when Jesus comes back. The guarantee of our bodily resurrection is the resurrection of Christ. This is not a general resurrection for He will bring back only those who fell asleep in Christ and no others.

The comparison would be more exact if Paul had said, "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again even so also will God raise us up." However, departed Christians are spiritually with Christ in heaven and God will not raise their bodies until He brings back their souls and spirits to earth. This is why they come back "with Him," accompanying Christ in the closest kind of association and fellowship.

Paul will show how God will bring Christians back with Him in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18.

Principle

One day the Father will undo the work of the undertaker.

Application

Because the undertaker's work will be done, Christians do not fear death because they know that their resurrection is as sure as the resurrection of Christ. Christians will break the bonds of the casket. God will raise us from the dead. Even more, He will rapture us into His presence (1 Thessalonians 4:15-18).

"But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming" (1 Corinthians 15:20-23).

"When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory" (Colossians 3:4).

God will resurrect our physical body and transform it into a resurrection body first. Then He will translate that body to Heaven [the Rapture]. We will meet the Lord in the air with a new resurrected body.

1 Thessalonians 4:15

"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"

For

Verse fifteen explains verse fourteen. "Since Jesus died and rose, it follows that God will...." Paul, building on the two great facts of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, does not present some novel analysis of his own about the Rapture. Rather, he makes these statements on the authority of Christ.

this we say to you by the word of the Lord,

Paul's authority for making statements came personally from the Lord Jesus by direct revelation. Jesus made no such statements when He was on earth. The Lord gave to Paul special revelation about the church (Ephesians 3:1ff) and the Rapture (1 Corinthians 15:51-52). Nowhere in all the history of Israel or the teachings of Jesus was there any information on the Rapture until this special revelation to Paul.

Paul's special revelation included two things: 1) there will be a special resurrection of departed saints in the church prior to the Tribulation period, and 2) Jesus will rapture the church to Heaven.

This is the first time the New Testament explains the Rapture of the church in writing. This is brand new truth. The Lord alluded to the Rapture in John 14:1-3, but this is the first formal presentation of the Rapture in writing [John wrote long after 1 Thessalonians].

that we who are alive

First, Paul deals with the special resurrection of all church saints prior to the Tribulation period. Those who "are alive" here are believers still alive when Jesus comes again. They never experienced death.

The idea of resurrection was not new. The Old Testament taught about resurrection and so did Jesus. The Old Testament consistently associates the resurrection of Israel with the Tribulation, particularly at the end in connection with the millennial kingdom (Isaiah 26:19 with 16-18, 20-21; 27:1; also 26:1-15 for Millennium; Daniel 12:1-2).

Martha knew that there would be a resurrection of Israel when the Messiah returned to set up His earthly kingdom (John 11:24). This is a resurrection of Israel at the Second Coming [in distinction from the Rapture] at the end of the Tribulation.

Paul includes himself in those he named as living and remaining at Christ's return, because he was not at all certain whether he might die first. He believed the Lord's return could occur at any moment in his lifetime. He was disappointed, but not mistaken. The Rapture is a signless, timeless event that is always imminent. Jesus can come at any time. Each generation of Christians have justification to expect the Lord to come in their generation.

and remain

The word "remain" means be left behind, survive. These are those who survive bodily until Christ comes back. No Christian will leave until God wants them to leave. None of us can stay here if God wants us to go and none of us can go if God wants us to stay.

until the coming of the Lord

The second component God uniquely revealed to Paul was the Rapture. The idea that the Messiah would come to earth and raise the dead saints of Israel in the Old Testament was not unique to New Testament Christians. However, the idea of a Rapture was unique because there is no hint of this concept from Genesis to Malachi.

The word "coming" means a presence. It comes from two words: with and being. The coming of the Lord will be the time He will be with us. He will arrive and we will stand in His presence. Paul uses this term for His presence in contrast to His bodily absence.

"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling..." (Philippians 2:12).

When the New Testament uses "presence" for the Rapture of the church, it signifies not merely the momentary coming of Christ, but His presence until He manifests Himself to the world. It is a reference to His advent, arrival. Jesus at that time will be at hand in person.

There are three Greek words for Christ's coming. The New Testament uses both terms for the Rapture and for the Second Coming (when He comes to earth on the Mount of Olives). Only the context can determine whether it is the Rapture or Second Coming.

There is an important distinction between the Rapture and the Second Coming. The Rapture is a private coming for the church, whereas the Second Coming is a public coming where every eye will see Him. The Rapture is for the church only. In the Rapture, Jesus will come in the clouds to catch away the church. The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit is no longer in the church. At the Rapture, God changes the believer's body into a body like the resurrected body of Christ. In the Second Coming, Jesus will come to earth to establish His millennial kingdom on earth (Zechariah 14:1-4). Satan no longer is loose on earth. At the Second Coming, the desert will blossom like the rose.

Principle

The Rapture is a New Testament revelation.

Application

The blessed future of the church is the Rapture. The church will not enter the Tribulation.

"...looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ..." (Titus 2:13).

will by no means precede those who are asleep

The word "precede" means to come before. Those still living when Christ comes back will not precede in the Rapture all those who died before the Rapture. Jesus will raise all dead bodies of all Christians of all ages before He raptures the church.

The words "no means" are very emphatic. The reality of deceased Christians joining live Christians at the Rapture is without doubt. God has a plan, not only for the resurrection of Israel but also for us as individuals.

The body sleeps, not the soul. The New Testament guarantees that those forming the class of living believers at Christ's return shall in no wise precede Christians who died before the Rapture. This shows that those who died did not die by accident. The Lord deliberately chose a specific number to

die, whereas the living were deliberately left over. It is absolutely impossible for living saints to get the advantage or start over departed saints.

The reason is obvious. Deceased believers whose souls are in Heaven have a part in the coming of Christ from the very start. They are like those in the first division of a parade that are associated with the dignitaries, marshals and escorts. Living believers are like a division that joins the parade along the line of march.

Principle

Souls in heaven will join living people on earth in the resurrection of their bodies from death.

Application

Christians should not get the idea that when believers go to heaven they are somewhere in outer space sleeping in nylon nighties! That is a fairy tale that is more like a nightmare! When we go to Heaven, we will be more awake than we are now. Our souls and spirits will be in heaven fully conscious, but our bodies will remain on earth until just before the Rapture when God will resurrect our bodies and transform them so they will be just like the resurrection body of Christ (Philippians 3:21).

Christians in heaven will join living people on earth in the resurrection and rapture of their bodies to Heaven. Their souls and spirits will join their bodies in the Rapture of the church.

1 Thessalonians 4:16

"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"

Paul now shows why the living will not precede the dead by elaborating on the prophetic order of events at the Rapture.

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout,

The word "descend" literally means to go down. The Lord Himself will descend personally from heaven to the sky. If there is to be rapture, He can employ no lesser agency or person than Himself. He is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25).

The word "shout" carries the idea of a call, summons, shout of command. This shout is a signal for the church to get ready for the Lord to rapture it. Jesus will summon His church to be with Him forever just as a general would summon his soldiers or an admiral, his sailors. Such a shout both demands and expects instant compliance even in the heat of battle. The call knows no defeat in the conflict and conquest. There can be only one result once the life-giving voice of the Son of God rings forth (John 11:43; 5:25, 28-29).

with the voice of an archangel,

An "archangel" is an angel of exalted rank, the highest rank of any angel. Jesus' shout will be with the authority of the ultimate rank of an archangel. The rapture is one of the greatest interventions into the affairs of men in the history of the universe. It is backed by all the authority, power and majesty of heaven.

The Rapture not only marks the culmination of the progressive sanctification of the saint but also the completion and glorification of the church. No wonder Jesus shouts with the voice of an archangel. This is an announcement of the victory of the redeemed over sin and the world.

and with the trumpet of God.

A trumpet is a wind instrument usually made of bronze or iron broadening out to a megaphone. Ancients blew the trumpet on solemn occasions to stir up others to get their attention. This was true of the seven angels of Revelation. They used the trumpet in war for various signals of military actions.

Trumpets in the Old Testament were a signal to God's people (not to the lost). This signified the approach of God to His people and their assembly before Him (Exodus 19:13,16-17,19), the ongoing march (Numbers 10:2), movements in battle, divine deliverance and great festival occasions. God's trumpet sound is an indication of something momentous. This is the divine summons that the church has awaited for centuries.

And the dead in Christ will rise first.

This phrase is an explicit statement about the resurrection of the believer from physical death. The word "rise" literally means to stand up or to

make to stand up. Jesus will cause Christians to live physically again.

Dead believers will rise before living believers (1 Corinthians 15:52). Not just any person will rise from the dead but only those who are "in Christ." This phrase refers to the spiritual position into which God places Christians when they believe in the death of Christ to forgive their sin. The Bible never claims that the Old Testament saint is "in Christ." Christ makes positional truth possible by virtue of His work on earth. Death does not disturb our spiritual union with Christ.

Principle

God is able to rebuild a decaying body into a resurrected body.

Application

God will restore our present physical bodies in the resurrection into a likeness of the resurrected body of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself" (Philippians 3:20-21).

This resurrection of physical bodies into the likeness of Christ's resurrected body is only for those who have a right relationship with God. We enter this relationship when we place our trust solely in the death of Christ to obtain forgiveness for our sins.

1 Thessalonians 4:17

"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"

This passage gives us a chronological sequence of events related to the Rapture.

Then

The word "then" means afterward, thereupon, thereafter. This word denotes succession in numbering and shows chronological sequence. The word "then" strongly opposes the former state of resurrecting the dead. This is an entirely different event. The previous verse explained the

place of the dead bodies at the Rapture. This verse explains what happens to those living when Jesus comes again.

we who are alive and remain

By the word "we," Paul includes himself in those who might be living at the Rapture. He was disappointed but not mistaken. Paul's expectation of the Rapture kept him on the tiptoe of anticipation of meeting the Lord face to face.

Principle

Healthy Christians live in anticipation of the Lord's return.

Application

A healthy Christian lives on the tiptoe of expecting Jesus' return. Jesus may come today, glad day! Are you living in anticipation of the Lord's return?

shall be caught up

The words "caught up" mean to seize, snatch away, carry off by force. This is the idea of rapture. We get the English word "rapture" from the Latin rapture -- to catch up.

Jesus will take the church away from earth suddenly and by force in the Rapture. This is a signless and timeless event. Note the use of the Greek word for "caught up" in the following verses: Matthew 11:12; 12:29; 13:19; John 6:15; 10:12, 28,29; Acts 8:39-40,40; 23:10; 2 Corinthians 12:2,4; Jude 23; Revelation 12:5.

together

The word "together" marks a link in place and time. Living Christians associate with the resurrected bodies of past saints in the Rapture. The Rapture of the church into Heaven is the next event on God's prophetic timetable.

Christians will accompany Christ back to Heaven. He will take us by force. He will suddenly seize us and carry us off in order to claim us for Himself.

"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. 'In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 'And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also'" (John 14:1-3).

Principle

The Rapture is a signless, timeless event whereby we will accompany Christ to heaven, body and soul.

Application

No prophetic event needs to occur before the Rapture. The church does not need to enter the final apostasy. Israel does not have to possess fully the land of Palestine from the Euphrates to the River of Egypt. The church does not have to evangelize the world before the Lord comes for her. None of these things need happen before the Rapture. However, all these things must occur before the Second Coming. It is crucial to distinguish between the Rapture and the Second Coming to keep a proper prophetic perspective.

The Rapture is a signless, timeless event. No one knows the time. Therefore, we must live in the light of His unannounced coming.

"Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 John 3:2-3).

with them

The "them" here are those physically raised from the dead in verse 16. We will reunite with our loved ones who died as Christians.

in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.

The New Testament used the word "meet" for the arrival of a magistrate. This word carries the idea of an official welcome of a newly arrived dignitary. Our meeting of the Sovereign Lord of the universe will be the most auspicious and awe-inspiring occasion of the ages. This is when He takes us, His bride, the church, to Heaven.

The church will meet the Lord in the "air." This is the earth's atmosphere, the space immediately above the surface of the earth.

And thus we shall always be with the Lord

The principal purpose of the Rapture is to "be with the Lord." We will live in fellowship with Him eternally. We will never be separate from Him. As

well, nothing will separate us from fellow believers either. We will never say "goodbye" again.

Principle

Jesus will bring the church into endless, blissful fellowship at the Rapture of the church into Heaven.

Application

At the Rapture, bodies of Christians who died and went to Heaven will rise first (4:16). These are those who died before the Rapture. Immediately after Jesus comes, they will rise from their burial place.

Immediately following that, God will rapture both those whom He resurrected bodily and those then living into the air. From this point, all Christians will be with the Lord forever. What a blessed reunion! First and foremost, we will reunite with the Lord and then secondly, we will reunite with those we love. The Rapture completes the church. From this point on, there will be no more division or separation.

1 Thessalonians 4:18

"Therefore comfort one another with these words"

Therefore

The "therefore" shows that a purpose of the Rapture is "comfort." Christians will reunite with their bodies. God will both raise the physical bodies of believers and rapture them. He will rapture those living when He comes. This is comfort for Christians.

comfort one another with these words

God puts His promises on paper. He challenges believers to comfort one another with the promise of the Rapture. Paul asks the Thessalonians to comfort one another in the loss of their loved ones with this truth. They can rest on God's truth.

There is a difference in the Christian's grief verses the non-Christian. His grief is not permanent. We will meet our loved ones again. We anticipate that day. This changes our view of life and death.

Principle

The Rapture comforts those who lose loved ones in death.

Application

The idea of the Rapture frightens some people. Those who live in unconfessed sin probably do not anticipate Christ's coming. Sin blunts one's desire to meet the Lord.

Death is a certainty. Christians may meet physical death [if the Rapture does not occur] but they will never face eternal death.

"And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment..." (Hebrews 9:27).

"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus..." (Romans 8:1).

Christians pass into eternal life the moment they accept Christ. This is our great hope. The bleak, barren pit where we put our loved ones will come alive at the Rapture.

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life" (John 5:24).

"You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand" (James 5:8).

"He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming quickly.' Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20).

1 Thessalonians 5:1

"But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you"

Chapter 4 gave us the blessed hope of the believer, the rapture of the church to Heaven. This chapter gravely warns us of the coming Day of the Lord that deals with Israel and Gentiles (5:1-11).

The first three verses warn of the coming Day of the Lord.

But concerning

The words "but concerning" is a signpost showing that Paul now shifts to a new topic. These words are his usual formula for moving to a new line of thought (4:9,13; 1 Corinthians 7:1; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1). In chapter 4, Paul discusses the Rapture but in this chapter, he turns to the Day of the Lord, which comes immediately after the Rapture.

Apparently, Timothy, in his report from his visit to Thessalonica, indicated to Paul that the new church needed further clarification about the Day of the Lord. The Day of the Lord is the next prophetic event after the Lord Jesus comes to rapture the church to Heaven.

The Day of the Lord is a period of 1007 years. The first part of this era is judgment on the world for a seven-year period. In the Tribulation, God will judge proud Gentiles and apostate Jews. However, He will deliver a faithful Jewish remnant and Gentiles who put their trust in Him. Following these seven years, Jesus will reign on the earth for one thousand years, fulfilling the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants (Genesis 15-18; 2 Samuel 7).

the times and the seasons, brethren,

Paul now expands God's prophetic plan. He moves from the Rapture to the time after the Rapture - the Day of the Lord.

We get the English word "chronology" from the Greek word for "times." "Times" refers to the succession of events, the chronology of events. This word as well as "seasons" refer to dispensations.

The word "seasons" refers to the "events" of the Tribulation and Millennium. The word "times" denotes quantity whereas "seasons" carries the idea of quality - kinds of time. Thus, Paul deals with end time events following the Rapture. There are two kinds of "seasons" following the Rapture - the Tribulation and the Millennium. These are different and unique features of the Day of the Lord.

All of this is just the opposite of the Rapture, which is a signless timeless event. The Rapture could happen at any moment, in a twinkling of an eye (1 Corinthians 15:51-52). The "times and seasons" are related to earth (Daniel 2:21; 7:12; Ecclesiastes 3:1). The Rapture, however, will

snatch the church entirely away from the earth to glorious scenes in Heaven.

A "dispensation" is not primarily a period of time but a way of life. It is an economy of God. God dealt with Israel by a system of laws because she was a national entity. God deals with the church in an entirely different way because she is an organism, not an organization like Israel.

Every believer in the church has the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. In the old economy, only certain special people had the privilege of the indwelling Spirit such as David and only for periods in his life. That is why he prayed, "Take not your Holy Spirit from me (Psalm 51:11)."

The distinction between Israel and the church is very important because there is a massive difference in mode of living the godly life. In the church, every believer is a priest, therefore, he or she does not need a priest. We have the right to offer our own sacrifices to the Lord. We do not need to go through a mediator. The church has the prerogative of a right standing before God, earned by Christ. We have an eternal relationship with the Son of God.

you have no need that I should write to you

Paul previously taught the Thessalonians about the Day of the Lord when he established the church a year prior to writing this epistle so they did not need instruction on that doctrine. They did need instruction, however, on the Rapture.

Principle

God wants us to change the character of our lives by knowing prophetic truth.

Application

God gives us no date to circle in our Daytimer (Acts 1:6-8) as to when the Rapture will occur. He wants us to live with anticipation that He might come back any day. No sign needs to be fulfilled before He comes. He could come at any moment. Living in the light of His imminent coming sharpens our spirituality.

The purpose of prophecy is to comfort (4:18), edify, encourage holiness and give hope. Christians who do not understand prophecy are unstable. They do not understand the counterfeiting schema of Satan. Thus, they cannot

distinguish the Devil's plan from God's plan. These Christians will buy into globalism and one-world government.

Prophecy distinguishes Christians from non-Christians. We live for a different purpose and with a different hope. The character of the sons of light stands in complete contrast to the coming dark Day of the Lord (5:1-11).

1 Thessalonians 5:2

"For you yourselves know perfectly that the Day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night"

Someone told the Thessalonians that they were in the Tribulation because they suffered such persecution. Paul writes chapter 5 to clarify this point.

For you yourselves know perfectly

The Thessalonians knew "perfectly" that the Day of the Lord would come as a thief in the night. The word "perfectly" indicates that they gained knowledge of the Day of the Lord from the accurate teaching of the Old Testament by Paul. Paul was careful in his interpretation of the Old Testament. The root for "perfectly" means pointed. Paul accurately, exactly, pointedly and precisely expounded the Bible. He paid close attention to details when he read the Bible. He conformed strictly to norms and standards of detail when it came to the Word. Since Paul taught the Bible accurately, the Thessalonians understood it "perfectly," or better, precisely.

that the day of the Lord

The Day of the Lord refers to both the Tribulation period of seven years and the Millennium [1000 years], thus; the Day of the Lord covers 1007 years. This is the time when the Lord will sovereignly and directly intervene into the affairs of man. Old Testament prophets expounded this day (Isaiah 13:9-11; Joel 2:28-32; Zephaniah 1:14-18; 3:14-15). This time will commence after the Rapture.

The Day of the Lord does not necessarily come immediately after the Rapture but it follows as the next event in God's prophetic plan. We know the Day of the Lord occurs after the Rapture because, sequentially, chapter 5 follows chapter 4.

so comes as a thief

Every time the New Testament refers to the Lord's coming as a thief, it refers to the Day of the Lord or the Second Coming, not the Rapture. The Day of the Lord will come like a thief who does not send an engraved invitation that he is coming. We do not say, "I understand that a thief is coming tomorrow morning at 2:00 am. We better prepare ourselves." A thief is different from a robber. A robber openly takes what he wants by brute force. A thief steals in secret or by fraud. The thief does not openly announce his designs. He comes unexpectedly when his victim is totally unprepared. Paul adds shock to the unforeseen.

in the night

A thief comes when people are asleep. This day will be both a surprise and sudden to those living at that time. The New Testament describes both the Rapture and the Day of the Lord as sudden comings.

Paul does not concern himself with what happens in the Day of the Lord as such over this period of 1007 years. His sole interest is how it begins. That is why he refers to this period as beginning in the same manner as a thief in the night. The way it will come is very important for its manner of coming determines what sort of day it is. The way it comes also tells what it has to do with the church, if anything!

Principle

The church will not enter the Tribulation period.

Application

The arrival of the Day of the Lord is quite different from the Rapture. In the Day of the Lord, a hostile, unknown thief comes to destroy. In the Rapture, the Lord Himself comes to deliver the church.

No one ever gains by the call of a thief. There is only loss and grief. The Bible flatly contradicts any notion that the Lord Jesus will come to the true believer as a pillaging thief (5:4). The Rapture will be eternal gain, not loss. However, when the Day of the Lord comes, unbelievers stand to lose everything they hold dear. All their material gains will be lost (Revelation 17,18).

1 Thessalonians 5:3

"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"

Paul now explains in what sense unbelievers left on earth after the Rapture will resemble unsuspecting victims of a thief. Just at the moment they least expect it, judgment will fall upon them.

For when they say, "Peace and safety!"

Paul does not include himself among those in this verse. He views them as "they." This third-person pronoun refers to those left in the Tribulation after the Rapture. The church will not experience this "sudden destruction." Paul contrasts believers with non-believers in the next verse (4:4).

Elsewhere, the Bible tells us what brings this delusion of peace. In the Tribulation, a world ruler signs a seven-year contract (Daniel 9:27) wherein the world expects world peace. This is a peace of outward social and political conditions such as will exist at the first part of Daniel's 70th week. It will seem that mankind achieved inward peace of mind and outward one-world stability.

In the beginning of the Day of the Lord, that is, in the beginning of the Tribulation period, people will say, "Peace and safety!" This slogan spreads around the world.

Peace refers to inward tranquility of mind. The word "safety" means not liable to fall, to be firm. They are under the delusion that man has come to a place of world peace so they are safe from any form of danger.

The word "when" indicates that non-Christians will say this right up to the moment of disaster. While they repeat their slogan "Peace and safety!" destruction comes on them.

Principle

World peace is a delusion without Christ.

Application

Political and religious organizations that pawn off the idea of world peace will delude the world at the beginning of the Day of the Lord. They will attempt to disarm the world. Man left to human nature in the raw will reap the pain of that fantasy.

World peace has always been the pipe dream of man without God. There is no true peace without peace with God. Legislation cannot change the heart of man. The only way to change the world is to change the heart of man. Any other approach is an illusion.

The delusion of world-peace is the great apostasy throughout the world at the beginning of the Tribulation period. There will be an attempt not only to disarm people by state and nationally but there will be an attempt to disarm people worldwide. People will utter maudlin platitudes about peace. There is no peace apart from the person of Christ.

"For they have healed the hurt of the daughter of My people slightly, Saying, 'Peace, peace!' When there is no peace" (Jeremiah 8:11).

then sudden destruction comes upon them,

"Destruction" means come to ruin. This is a state of utter ruin but not annihilation, a loss of all that humans think makes life worthwhile. It is not destruction of being but of well-being. Destruction ruins peace and safety. In our verse and in 2 Thessalonians 1:9, Paul uses "destruction" for ushering in the Day of the Lord. Destruction will come suddenly. God's wrath will come to the world when they least expect it.

Operating under the myth that they have come to a place of "peace and safety," humans will suddenly face "destruction." This destruction "comes upon" them. The words "come upon" mean to stand over, to set upon. The idea may be that this destruction is at hand but has not fully arrived. Destruction is near, imminent, approaching and impending.

as labor pains upon a pregnant woman.

Destruction will come upon the world like pangs of a pregnant woman giving birth. The idea is that this is great pain. Calamities will come upon men in Day of the Lord. When the Day of the Lord comes, the world will be pregnant with pain.

And they shall not escape

No one will be able to escape judgment in the Day of the Lord. The word "escape" means to flee out of a place. No one will escape the judgment of

God. They will find no safety in flight. There is no place to go. There is no refuge from God.

The word "not" is strong in the Greek so to flee will be futile. There is no way to avoid God's judgment. They can no more escape destruction any more than a pregnant woman can escape the pain of delivering her child.

Jesus warned us that people would not listen to warnings of the Day of the Lord (Matthew 24:34). We have a warning of prophetic pain in this passage. The coming Day of the Lord will be terrible for those without Christ.

Principle

Non-Christians live under the delusion that man by man's means will give them peace and safety.

Application

In the Tribulation, the world will be shocked at the instability of human answers. Humanism, not humanitarianism, is the idea that man can get along without God. Man can find answers in himself. He does not need God. "The idea of God is for the feeble-minded and for those who need a crutch to lean upon. We know how to control our destiny. We know how to solve the world's problems without God. We do not need Jesus Christ to save us from our sins. All we need to do is believe in ourselves." Man lulls himself to sleep with these delusions.

About the time that man comes to a place of complete confidence in himself, a fancied fool's paradise, then all his ideas for peace and safety come crashing down in complete destruction. They will face judgment of God and that without escape.

All of this stands in diametrically opposed to the Rapture. Christ will catch Christians up and away from this destruction (4:13-18).

1 Thessalonians 5:4

"But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief"

But you, brethren,

Christians stand in stark contrast to those without Christ [the "they" of verse 3]. The coming Day of the Lord will not surprise them.

are not in darkness,

Paul previously told the Thessalonians about the coming Day of the Lord so they were not in the dark about that day. God takes Christians into His confidence about future things. Non-Christians live in deluded darkness about that day.

so that this Day

Christians will not participate in the beginning of the Day of the Lord, the Tribulation (5:9-10).

should overtake you as a thief

The word "overtake" properly signifies to lay hold of; then, to lay hold of so as to possess as one's own, to appropriate, apprehend, overtake. Jesus will have already raptured the church by the Day of the Lord (4:13-18). That is why this day will not overtake them.

"Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial [the seven year Tribulation] which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth" (Revelation 3:10).

Principle

God discriminates between what He does with believers and non-believers.

Application

God always makes a distinction between His people and the non-Christian. We cannot emphasize this distinction too strongly. God will translate the Christian to heaven at the Rapture. God will leave non-Christians on earth to go into the Day of the Lord.

The children of the Light have knowledge about the coming dark day. They are in the light about God's purpose.

The Day of the Lord is when the Lord returns to earth in great glory to judge the world. He will make things right in that day. First, He will bring great judgment on the earth during the Tribulation. Then, in His Second Coming, He will come back with the saints to establish His Kingdom on earth for 1,000 years. The Day of the Lord includes both the Tribulation and Kingdom.

"...and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from

heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed" (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10).

1 Thessalonians 5:5

"You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness"

You are all sons of light and sons of the day.

Note that Paul does not say, "You are all sons in light and sons in the day" but "of the light" and "of the day." The issue is not where they are but who they are. It is not a matter of environment but of origin and source. The Christian lives in the orb of light and day. Status as sons of light and of the day carries privilege.

"Sons of light" denotes that a person partakes of and possesses the character of his origin or derivation just as a child takes after his parent. God characterizes sons of light as to their nature. Christians are inevitably light. Sons of light are also sons of day when light rules supreme.

God deems "all" Christians as light, not just some.

We are not of the night nor of darkness

The coming Day of the Lord is a day of darkness, a day of wrath. Christians will not participate in that day.

Paul changes from "you" to "we." We were sons of the night and darkness.

Principle

Christians are inevitably light.

Application

Regardless of the state of the Christian, he is the personal responsibility of the Lord Jesus Christ. Every Christian is a personal representative of the Lord Jesus on earth. We are here for the purpose of glorifying Him through the witness of our life and lips. Every believer is in full-time service, a

priest of the Lord Jesus. We are here to represent the Lord Jesus.

We might say, "I have failed Him and do not deserve to serve Him." However, we represent Him for good or bad. We remain His ambassadors here. We are lights in the world (Matthew 5:14) because He is the "light of the world" (John 1:1-9; 8:12; 9:5). Jesus was the light as long as He was on the earth.

"...that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world..." (Philippians 2:15).

Many Christians do not give out very much light. That is why the world is so dark.

"For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light..." (Ephesians 5:8).

God illumines Christians. Some of us give out more light than others. Christians are lighthouses that war against of the shoals of hell and shine light on eternal life.

1 Thessalonians 5:6

"Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober"

Paul now turns to the practical implications of the day of the Lord.

Therefore

Now we come to the punch line for prophecy. The word "therefore" draws an emphatic, inescapable conclusion to the doctrine of the teaching on the coming Day of the Lord. Paul draws the upshot of this truth to our personal lives. It is out of character for the believer to live in the night (5:5) because darkness is foreign to his character.

Paul now gives a number of directives to the believers in Thessalonica that the Holy Spirit intends for us today.

let us not sleep,

The first exhortation of how a believer should carry himself is to stay awake spiritually. "Sleep" here refers to carnal indifference to spiritual things by believers (Ephesians 5:14; 1 Thessalonians 5:6). This is a condition of insensibility to God's values.

as others do,

The "others" are those who do not know the Lord (4:13). They do not have a single ray of light from the Lord to beckon them on. They live their lives in hopeless despair and indulgence. They live as if Christ will never return and that they will never experience the awful day of wrath. Like the foolish virgins of Jesus' parable they sleep in spiritual unpreparedness (Matthew 25:5). They are indifferent due to stupor and sloth of sin.

Principle

Staying alert to prophecy enables Christians to stay spiritually alert.

Application

Carnal Christians are usually dull to prophetic things. They show little interest in things to come. However, the Bible has much to say about the correlation between prophecy and godly living. We cannot help but be sensitive to God's values when we anticipate what God is going to do in the future.

but let us watch

Paul sets "watch" in contrast to "sleep." "Watch" signifies not simply absence of spiritual sleep but a determination to keep awake spiritually. Instead of indifference to spiritual things, the believer should vigilantly stay alert to God's plan. Those who fail to watch will suffer loss (1 Corinthians 3:15; 9:27; 2 Corinthians 5:10). Like a sentinel, Christians are to be on alert. Determined wakefulness alerts us to the dangers and urgency of God's plan.

"Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong" (1 Corinthians 16:13).

"Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving..." (Colossians 4:2).

Principle

Determination to stay on top of prophecy will impact our spiritual lives.

Application

The antithesis to spiritual stupor is a spiritual determination to stay in tune with God's plan for the future. Christians should be fully awake to the dulling effects of immorality, indulgence,

carnality, corruption and covetousness of a dying, God-defying age. They refuse to succumb to the opiate of materialism.

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

and be sober

Spiritual apathy to God's program for the future will bring spiritual instability. The idea of "sober" is to be free from excess and imprudence. This well-balanced and self-controlled person is circumspect about God's viewpoint on life. A sober person refrains from carnality. When it comes to spiritual things, a believer must be in control of his thought processes and freedom from irrational thinking. Self-control is at the core of spiritual strength. Christians need to know how to restrain and moderate themselves.

"But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry" (2 Timothy 4:5).

Christians should never lose sight of God's prophetic program but should live in the light of the reality of what God is doing in the world. Satanic movements and influences do not seduce a sober-oriented believer.

Spiritual poise refuses to be rattled by a unsteady age fast getting out of control. This is the sane perspective of those not clouded by scholarly rationalism, theological compromise or worldly orthodoxy. Many Christians today buy into the world system. They believe they can fulfil themselves by self-indulgence.

Principle

Spiritual-minded believers maintain a sane viewpoint on life.

Application

Pseudo security of spiritual sloth will put us in danger. Be on guard against spiritual indifference. A believer who has the viewpoint of God on prophecy has a sane outlook on the future. He knows that God has a plan. He knows everything is in control.

God expects believers to behave in keeping with their prerogatives and status as Christians. God

gives to us special revelation about the Rapture and the Day of the Lord in the Bible. Prophecy is not for the carnal or curious. All prophecy has a practical, spiritual lesson to teach.

1 Thessalonians 5:7

"For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night"

Watching God's prophetic program is no mysterious or obscure truth (5:6). It is profound because it is so simple. As a universal principle, it is evident in the everyday life of men as we seen in this verse.

For those who sleep, sleep at night,

The sleepers here are those without Christ. Sleeping by day was a sign of great laziness in the first century. Non-Christians are night people. They live in the dark.

and those who get drunk are drunk at night

Both sleepers and drunkards operate in the night because of shame. They are people of the dark.

Christians are people of the day, not night people. Our behaviour bears the light of day. Therefore, the Christian must stay alert to God's program. The Christian anticipates what God will do in the Rapture and the Day of the Lord.

Principle

Believers must orient to God's prophetic program.

Application

Non-Christians have a commonality. They are night people. Operating in the night is a natural analogy to parallel spiritual truth. Only with the exception of those who throw away all decency to the winds choose to carouse by daylight (2 Peter 2:13). Those without Christ are nightlife people. They may not actually go to all the parties but their hearts do.

Night people will enter the Day of the Lord, a day of darkness. The church will not go into that day. The believer must orient to his own dispensation, a day of light. He expects the Rapture and the coming Day of the Lord. The very fact that the Christian is of the day, in the nature of the case, compels him to be sober, to maintain a cool and collected attitude so that he stands on guard in a wicked world.

1 Thessalonians 5:8

**"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"**

Paul now introduces the metaphor of the armor of a soldier to establish the believer's spiritual armor (Romans 13:12; Ephesians 6:10-18; 1 Timothy 6:12; 2 Timothy 2:3-4; 4:7).

But let us who are of the day be sober,

Paul appeals to the Thessalonians on the basis that they are "of the day." Christians live according to the norms of the Christian day, not the Devil's night.

The idea of "sober" here refers spiritual stability. Paul repeats this idea for emphasis (5:6), not for padding. Being of the day is not enough for Christians to withstand darkness. They must understand the importance of having a cool and collected attitude toward temptation. Being "sober" has nothing to do with being gloomy and sad. There is nothing in the Bible against humor.

putting on

Christians must don their spiritual armor. The words "putting on" are the normal words for attiring oneself with clothes. If we are going to institute stability into our lives, we must put on our spiritual armor. God will not do this for us. This is our responsibility.

the breastplate of faith and love,

Paul argues for putting on two pieces of armor in particular: the breastplate and helmet. The "breastplate" consists of two parts in front and back, that protect the body on both sides, from the neck to the middle of the body. This piece of armor protects the chest against blows and arrows. In ancient times the breastplate covered a soldier's vital organs. The modern-day equivalent is the bulletproof vest.

Paul's breastplate has two features: faith and love. "Faith" and "love" may allude to the two parts of the breastplate. The first piece of armor is the faith that protects the affections or heart. Unbelief strikes hardest at the heart, so Paul mentions it first. The downfall of those without Christ is that they "believed not the truth" (2 Thessalonians 2:12). If we live by faith, this will keep us "sober" --

spiritually stable in spiritual war. Faith will enable us to stand against those who would undermine what we believe.

The other side of the breastplate is love. God pronounces a curse on those without Christ, because they love not the Lord (1 Corinthians 16:22). Believers, on the other hand, have a very special reward because they love Christ's appearing (2 Timothy 4:8). A heart full of love will arm us against broken relationships. It will stabilize relationships and promote accountability, thus reducing the chances that people will steer into apostasy.

"And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light" (Romans 13:11-12).

Principle

God provides two pieces of spiritual armor to protect us vertically and horizontally.

Application

Faith and love protect believers against vertical problems and horizontal problems. Faith protects our ability to trust God when we're in difficulty. Love protects our relationships. If we trust God, we will love people. These two graces will enable us to fortify ourselves in the Christian life. Faith and love are our armor against satanic influences.

and as a helmet the hope of salvation

The protective armor for the head is the "helmet." This helmet is the hope of salvation. The lost have no such covering. Our hope is in the coming of the Lord Jesus at the Rapture for the church.

Those without Christ have no hope, but believers look forward with anticipation to the blessed hope, the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13). This is the hope directed to ultimate salvation.

"Hope" does not mean that Christians simply yearn for eternal life. The Greek word "hope" does not carry the same meaning as the English. In English the word has the idea of a wish as in, "I hope it does not rain tomorrow for our picnic."

The Greek word incorporates the idea of confidence in God's promise.

"...in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began..." (Titus 1:2).

"...looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ..." (Titus 2:13).

"...that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:7).

"Salvation" here is that future deliverance for which believers hope at the coming of the Lord Jesus in the Rapture. Negatively, it means they will be rescued from the wrath of the Day of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9; 2 Thessalonians 1:8,9). Positively, it means the perfect redemption of their physical body (Romans 8:23) and their sanctification and glorification (1 John 3:2).

The hope of salvation in the future is the best safeguard for the here and now. No team ever gave up, no matter how bad the reverses, if they were confident of victory in the end. The hope of salvation is an indication of our eternal security in Christ.

"And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God..." (Ephesians 6:17).

God links these three pre-eminent graces of faith, hope and love in a number of places in the New Testament. They are a blessed trilogy (1 Thessalonians 1:3; 1 Corinthians 13:13).

Principle

Christians must give strict attention to donning themselves with the armor of faith, hope and love if they're going to have spiritual stability.

Application

Both the breastplate and the helmet are defensive equipment. A Christian needs defensive equipment as well as offensive. To go to spiritual war without defense is to incur deep spiritual trouble. God designed a specific armor for spiritual battle (Ephesians 6:11). This is God's equipment but it is our responsibility to put on the gear.

The breastplate and helmet protect against harm to vital areas of the human body. Both the head and heart need protection against the assault of the enemy. That is why Christians must give strict attention to faith, love and hope.

Believers are not ignorant of prophetic issues. They understand their hope in Christ. They are confident about their marvelous future with the Lord. Nothing or no one can destroy that. If believers arm themselves in anticipation of spiritual war, they will prepare themselves for any eventuality.

1 Thessalonians 5:9

"For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ..."

For

Paul gives both a negative and a positive reason as a basis for the hope of salvation (5:8).

God did not appoint us to wrath,

First, the negative reason. Paul here alludes to God's sovereign placing of the church in a situation whereby she will not go through the Tribulation [the Day of the Lord].

"...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 Thessalonians 1:10).

"Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth" (Revelation 3:10).

God constructed the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation, chronologically. We can decipher the plain strokes of prophecy by studying the argument of the entire book. First, Revelation deals with the church, then the Tribulation, the Second Advent, the Millennium and finally the eternal state. Almost two-thirds of the book expounds the tribulation period.

but to obtain salvation

Secondly and positively, God appoints believers to "obtain salvation." The word "obtain" literally means to make around. The idea is the obtaining

of something in its completeness. God obtained salvation in its completeness for us. It is our possession because God did everything to acquire it (Ephesians 1:14; 1 Peter 2:9). Because God acquired it, it is a complete and full salvation. He keeps it safe.

Note that the word is "obtain" and not "attain" salvation. We can do nothing to attain salvation. We rest on the finished work of Christ for that. Salvation is a gift with no strings attached. We cannot work for our salvation in order to merit brownie points with God.

through our Lord Jesus Christ

Jesus merited our salvation, not us. We owe our salvation to Him. We cannot acquire salvation for ourselves. Jesus died on our behalf. His work on the cross is the means of our salvation. Jesus is the only way of salvation. No one can do business with God apart from the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me'" (John 14:6).

"For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time..." (1 Timothy 2:5-6).

Satan invents religious works to appeal to the pride of people. People can do nothing to work for salvation. Religious works are a satanic imitation of salvation. This is difficult for most people to swallow, because they think that people must pay the price for eternal life. All of this is to blind people to the true way to Heaven -- believing in the death of Christ on the cross for our sins. Salvation is free, but not cheap. It cost the Lord Jesus His life on the cross.

Principle

God makes appointments for us in His eternal calendar.

Application

There are certain divine appointments that God ordains for every believer. There are appointments God does not want us to keep. One of them is the Tribulation. Christians in the church not will go through the Tribulation. God will rapture them first.

God does appoint trial for the believer's life. Sometimes He does this for remedial reasons. He does this to build our faith, but not for punishment. At other times, He does this for many other reasons such as glorifying Himself, building our character, witnessing to those without Christ and many other reasons.

"For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake..." (Philippians 1:29).

1 Thessalonians 5:10

"...who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him"

The foundation of our assurance before God is the person and work of Christ.

who died for us,

The phrase "who died for us" modifies "through our Lord Jesus Christ" of the previous verse. Paul points to the sweeping scope of salvation we have in Christ.

The word "for" in the phrase "for us" means in our behalf. Jesus died in our behalf on the cross. He suffered all that needs to be suffered for our sins.

that whether we wake or sleep,

The idea of "wake or sleep" in this context refers to spiritual vigilance versus spiritual softness (1 Thessalonians 5:6,7) rather than to life and death.

we should live together with Him

It makes no difference whether we are spiritual or carnal, the Lord will rapture us into His presence. This argues against the partial rapture theory that claims that God will translate only the spiritual at the Rapture. The Rapture will shock some carnal Christians living in sin, as God translates them to Heaven right in the act of their sin.

Principle

We owe our salvation exclusively to the death of Christ on the cross.

Application

God will not judge us, because He has already judged Christ for our sins. We owe our salvation exclusively to the work of Christ on the cross. Christians will never face the judgment of God.

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. "Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live" (John 5:24-25).

"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:1).

1 Thessalonians 5:11

"Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing"

Therefore

Paul appeals to the Thessalonians to comfort and edify one another because of the truths in verses one through eleven.

comfort each other

Christians are to care for the pain of other Christians (1 Thessalonians 4:18). God comforts us so that we might comfort others. This is a clear responsibility for every Christian.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

As Christians see the rapture coming, they are to exhort one another even more.

"...not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25).

Principle

A responsibility of every Christian is to encourage other Christians.

Application

Many Christians come to church discouraged and defeated. Some come disenchanted about life. Our

warm encouragement might be just what they need that day. When the pastor announces the benediction, do you charge for the nearest door or do you head for people who need encouragement?

The blessing of the Rapture is for every believer. This is a common blessing that all can share. This is a basis for mutual edification. Because of this hope, Christians will develop a strong sense of comfort.

and edify one another,

The word "edify" is literally to build a house, to erect a construction of some kind. Metaphorically, it means to edify the character of believers by teaching or example. This word implies progress in developing an edification multiplex of strength in other Christians.

The words "one another" means one another of the same kind. Christians can build up other Christians because they have a common faith. Christians cannot build non-Christians.

just as you also are doing

The Thessalonians were already comforting and edifying one another, based on Paul's teaching the year before. Now they are to continue to do this, based on 1 Thessalonians. Truth needs reinforcement.

Principle

A responsibility of every Christian is to build up other Christians in the faith.

Application

God expects believers to care for other Christians. Cain's statement "Am I my brother's keeper?" is not Christian.

"Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another" (Romans 14:19).

Our responsibility to edify other Christians is not something we should take lightly. This passage indicates that we should "pursue" this. The idea is to hotly pursue the edification of others.

Christians must constantly reinforce the Word of God in each other. We do this through our pastor's teaching and through Bible studies and personal conversation. Christians who go to church strictly

for themselves miss God's will. Church is a place where we both receive and give something.

"For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister" (Hebrews 6:10).

We do not want to be a weight; we want to be a wing. It is easy to tear others down. It is more difficult to build them up in their faith. Criticism and slander tear others down.

1 Thessalonians 5:12

"And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you..."

We come now to the conclusion of 1 Thessalonians, which goes from verse 12 to 24. Paul changes the subject from prophesy to present issues in the church. This verse shows their accountability to leaders.

And we urge you, brethren,

Respect for church leadership is a matter of urgency. The word "urge" means to ask. Evidently, there was some disrespect for the leadership at Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 5:14) so Paul asks them kindly to respect their leaders. This is a plea, not a demand.

In his two epistles to the Thessalonians, Paul addresses them twenty-one times as "brethren." The emphasis is upon Christians in relationship to one another. The children of God need the family of God for mutual encouragement.

to recognize those

Church members are "to recognize" leadership in the local church. They are to value the role of leaders. Leadership deserves esteem, not for its own sake but for the sake of the work of Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:13). Church members must recognize the authority of leaders if the church is going to function properly.

Literally, the word "recognize" means to know. Know your leadership. Do not take them for granted. Respect them by yielding to their leadership.

Principle

Respect of church leadership is essential for the health of individual believers and the congregation as a whole.

Application

One of the greatest problems in the local church today is lack of good leadership. Aggressive leadership is a threat to many weak people in the local church. Some folks are quick to put the label of "autocrat" on leaders. It seems that churches do not have the capacity to recognize good leadership.

Many pastors are subject to the whim of a board that has little understanding of what makes a church tick. It is possible to read the Bible and not see the truths that are in it. It is possible to watch a professional golfer and not recognize the techniques he uses. It is possible to belong to a local church and not recognize what it takes to lead a congregation.

Church members who recognize the true character and position of their pastor see the spiritual gifts and graces that God gave their leader. It takes a follower with discernment to recognize God's leader. When a person becomes a member of a congregation, it takes a time of discerning transition to come to honor God's leader.

who labor among you,

There are three qualities in leaders the congregation is to "recognize."

The first feature is those "who labor among you." The Greek word indicates that the church leaders at Thessalonica labored to the point of exhaustion. Someone said about his pastor, "He is incomprehensible on Sunday and invisible during the week!" Most evangelical pastors I know work hard. They put in far more than forty hours a week. Jokes about working one hour a week are just not true. On the contrary, most pastors give many hours to their ministries.

Principle

Pastoring a local church is hard work.

Application

Pastoring a church is hard work. As a pastor, I spent at least twenty to thirty hours a week in

study, not counting administrative duties and meetings. If you are thinking about the pastorate as a career, you need to evaluate that decision very carefully. It will take sacrifice and deep commitment to do the job properly. It will not be easy, but it will be the most gratifying career in the world.

Pastors see much heartache. They see the problems of people up close and personal. This is a grievous task, but a necessary part of their job. To watch people go through divorce, get on drugs and deal with alcohol, breaks the heart of pastors that care about people.

Pastors' main labor is in the Word and doctrine. Many pastors no longer labor in these areas. Many modern pastors labor in almost anything but the Bible and especially the theology that comes from the Bible.

"Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine" (1 Timothy 5:17).

and are over you

The second quality of a leader that the congregation is to respect is the ability to lead. The words "are over" mean to preside, rule. Literally, they mean to stand before, hence to lead, direct. The Greek word occurs eight times in the New Testament (Romans 12:8; 1 Timothy 3:4 [twice], 5,12; 5:17; Titus 3:8, 14). Church members have a responsibility to their spiritual leaders (Hebrews 13:17).

"...he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness" (Romans 12:8)

"...one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?)..." (1 Timothy 3:4-5).

"Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine" (1 Timothy 5:17).

God sovereignly designed the church so that it has hierarchical leadership. Most Christians think that they have no human spiritual authority over them.

The Bible clearly teaches that every believer is a priest equally with every other believer. Every Christian has equal access to God and stands perfect before God because of the work of Christ. That is one thing. However, the issue of leadership in the local church is another. God does not lead everyone into leadership of the local church. God endows certain people with leadership gifts to direct large groups of believers in doing the work of God. Those who have these gifts have commensurate authority to exercise those gifts.

in the Lord

This qualifying prepositional phrase is important in this discussion. Leadership of the local church does not extend beyond the local church. Some church leaders invade every aspect of their people's lives. National, state and city officials have authority over our function within society. The pastor has authority within the local church.

Leaders "in the Lord" come from the Lord. God appoints these leaders to lead. The church is to deem them as His leaders.

Principle

Congregations are to recognize the authority of their leadership in the local church.

Application

There has never been a church anywhere that amounted to anything where there was little leadership. A congregation that runs over leadership will never amount to much. Everyone in that church suffers from lack of leadership.

There is no such thing as a perfect church. We must respect leadership even if leadership lacks direction.

"Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct" (Hebrews 13:7).

"Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you" (Hebrews 13:17).

"Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you" (Hebrews 13:24).

Many Christians have the attitude, "I will not submit to any human authority. I will not stand for it." This is an issue of pride. Eventually, these people make a mess of their lives. They will not take advice from anyone.

The Bible does not present the doctrine of the infallible pastor. Nor does the Bible set forth the idea of an infallible church. Both pastor and church can fall into error. But we believe in an infallible Bible.

and admonish you

The third type of leader we should respect is the one who has the ability to address problems in the local church. "Admonish" means to put in mind, warn, instruct. The idea is to provide instruction to correct behaviour and belief. This is to put good sense into the head of a person who lacks sense. The responsibility of the pastor is to put certain ideas into the minds of his people. He points out the foolishness of our generation. He directs the congregation to God's viewpoint about life.

A wise leader does not issue edicts from the pulpit or in small meetings. There is a difference between leadership by position and leadership by influence. There is a difference between dictating and indicating. Leaders are not "lords" (1 Peter 5:3) but their authority is "in the Lord."

Principle

Congregations have the responsibility to accept the authority of their pastors so that they will be open to accept the admonishment they need.

Application

The Bible clearly spells out the responsibilities of both pastor and people. A congregation has the responsibility to obey their pastor. The pastor as the responsibility to "admonish" the congregation. What does this say about people who never commit to a local church?

In combat, if you do not know who your leaders are, you are in deep trouble. If you are in a local church without leadership, you will not win spiritual battles.

No one likes other human beings to admonish him. No leader of a local church has the right to admonish someone else based on his or her own authority. True admonishment must come from the Word of God if it is going to carry authority.

There is no authority in "It is my opinion that...." Our authority comes from "Thus says the Lord, chapter, book and verse." Admonishment is a thankless task. Most leaders do not enjoy this aspect of their responsibilities but they must be faithful to their Lord or the congregation will suffer.

"Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn [admonish] everyone night and day with tears" (Acts 20:31).

"Him we preach, warning [admonishing] every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Colossians 1:28).

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Colossians 3:16).

1 Thessalonians 5:13

"...and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves"

and to esteem them

The word "esteem" primarily signifies to lead before the mind, guide the mind, then to account, consider, esteem. God wants us to hold a high view of church leadership. As church leaders are to rule over the congregation, so the congregation is to rule over their mind when it comes to esteeming its leaders.

very highly

Congregations are to hold their leaders in high esteem. It is easier to hold leaders in lower esteem than higher. The words "very highly" mean exceeding abundantly. When it comes to esteeming church leadership, the Word of God uses superlative terms.

Principle

Christian leaders deserve superlative distinction for the sake of their office.

Application

Leadership has the right of superabundant respect. This is an area where we can legitimately go beyond measure to an extraordinary degree.

"When it comes to respect for church leadership, go to an extraordinary degree." Congregations who hold leaders to this measure of degree will have dynamic ministries.

in love

The congregation has the responsibility to "love" their leaders. It is one thing to hold them in high regard but it is something else to "love" them.

Principle

It is not enough to respect our leaders; we must love them.

Application

It is not enough to respect your leaders; you must love them. We do not love our leaders when we criticize and malign them. "Roast preacher" for Sunday dinner is a direct violation of this passage. If we debunk and belittle our leaders then there is not much hope for that local church.

for their work's sake.

No doubt some leaders do not command respect but we must respect them for their "work's sake" – for their office. Respect and love for leaders are not for their sake personally but for their "work's sake."

Principle

Respect for local church leadership is important, not for the individual, but for the ministry of the church.

Application

There may be no earthly reason to respect your leader except for the purpose of what they do but we respect them for their ministry. The nature of the work of the local church should motivate us to love and respect leaders.

David would not malign King Saul although Saul was an unfaithful king. David understood

something about the anointing of kings. Kings had the stamp of God's authority upon them.

"Saying, "Do not touch My anointed ones, And do My prophets no harm" (Psalm 105:15).

No doubt, many abuse their authority in ministry today. There are biblical ways to deal with this.

Be at peace among yourselves

If a congregation respects and loves its leaders, its members will have "peace among" themselves. Dissension in local churches primarily revolves around disrespect and lack of love for leaders. Churches that respect their leaders are generally free from friction.

Peace in the church depends on our perspective of our leader's office. Peace permits Christians to get along with each other, to co-operate with one another.

"Salt is good, but if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another" (Mark 9:50).

Principle

Disagreements, quarrels and enmities in the church root themselves in disrespect and lack of love for leaders.

Application

Are you carrying on a running feud with leaders in your church? Life is too short for that. This will tear your spiritual heart out. Do you avoid your pastor or some other leader? This will cast a pall on your church and inhibit the cause of Christ from moving forward.

"If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men" (Romans 12:18).

"Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another" (Romans 14:19).

A church not on speaking terms with its leadership will not have answered prayer, win people to Christ or build believers in the faith. These are the bald facts of a church in disarray. Bury the hatchet but not in your brother's back!

A critical, contemptuous and contentious attitude toward church leaders creates discord and

disharmony. Peace within a congregation depends on respect for leadership. Each of us lists our leaders in some pecking order. We have an estimation of their leadership capacities in our mind. We know whether they have an adequate vision, strategy, and goals, or not. We know whether they will keep their word and follow through with their plans. Whatever our perspective on their ability, we give them respect for their office.

If you do not have confidence in your pastor, find a pastor that you can trust. Why undermine a ministry by criticizing its leadership? Get into a ministry where you can give your entire support. Consider giving your full support to your pastor, staff, board and leaders of your church. It is God's will. A united church has the greatest opportunity to move forward for the cause of Christ.

**"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is
For brethren to dwell together in unity!"
(Psalm 133:1).**

1 Thessalonians 5:14

**"Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those
who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted,
uphold the weak, be patient with all"**

This verse shows that there are different strokes for different folks. Different methods apply to different needs. Paul encourages us to use four different methods with four different people.

Now we exhort you, brethren,

The word "exhort" carries the idea of appeal to, urge. The entire church "brethren" is to accept the following challenges. Maintenance of order within the church is the responsibility of each person in the church. All believers must exercise a concern for the corporate family testimony.

Principle

No man is an island; we need each other.

Application

Will you come to the assistance of helping your church develop a corporate testimony? It is easy to find people who experience spiritual difficulties. You can be either a help or a hindrance.

**"For none of us lives to himself, and no one
dies to himself" (Romans 14:7).**

We deal with each person according to his individual need. We find the people catalogued in this verse in every church. People are people wherever you find them. There is no perfect church. If you move to another church, you take your problems with you.

**"Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any
trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a
one in a spirit of gentleness, considering
yourself lest you also be tempted" (Galatians
6:1).**

**"Brethren, if anyone among you wanders
from the truth, and someone turns him back,
let him know that he who turns a sinner
from the error of his way will save a soul
from death and cover a multitude of sins"
(James 5:19-20).**

warn those who are unruly,

Again, Paul uses the term "warn" meaning to put in mind, admonish. He issues a warning to the "unruly."

The word "unruly" signifies to not keep order. Secular Greek used this term in the military for someone who did not keep rank, an insubordinate. Certain church members did not keep rank in Thessalonica. There is a rank of leadership and these believers did not honor that rank. They carried an insubordinate spirit and knew little about the discipline of following leaders. Some Christians are lawless in the local church.

It is wrong to act disorderly in the local church so leaders in the local church must admonish people who disrupt unity in the church. The context implies that some Thessalonians did not respect their leadership (5:11-12). They were out of step with the vision and goals of the church.

Principle

It is the responsibility of the mature to admonish those who rebel against the leaders of the church.

Application

We need to warn those who break rank in the congregation. Leadership must deal with people out-of-step with the direction and vision of a local church. Individual church members must support their leadership in doing this. A good church

member follows his or her leadership. Only a person who is in-step can set the pace for others!

Some people will not hold still for correction from others. They reject any authority over them. They emphasize the priesthood of the believer to the exclusion of God-given authority in the local church. If these people persist in breaking rank with the leaders of a local church, we are to withdraw ourselves from them.

"But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you..." (2 Thessalonians 3:6-7).

If church leaders do not deal with those who gossip and meddle in other people's business, there will be trouble in that church. It matters not if they do not take kindly to warning. They are out-of-step and they could not care less what others think about it. They expect the detachment to get in step with them. They are not team players. They have the idea that "I am right and everyone else is wrong." To get back in step with a local church is a humbling experience. It means that we must concede that we were wrong.

It is easy to identify the person out of step in a parade. That person wants to think that everyone else is out of step. The unruly, who do not accept human authority, usually have a problem with God's authority in their lives. They know better than anyone else does. They will allow no one to rule them for they are a law unto themselves. These people warrant a warning.

comfort the fainthearted,

The word "comfort" means to soothe, console, encourage. The "fainthearted" need the stimulation of encouragement (2:11). "Comfort" comes from two Greek words: alongside, with and counsel, advise. Paul is saying, "Come along-side discouraged Christians and stimulate them to move on."

There are always those Christians who lose heart. They need special attention. A despondent person needs consolation. The word "fainthearted" comes from two words: small and soul. A "fainthearted" person is a small soul who discourages very easily.

A discouraged person has limited motivation for living up to the goals of Christianity.

"The spirit of a man will sustain him in sickness, But who can bear a broken spirit?" (Proverbs 18:14)

"For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: 'dwell in the high and holy place, With him who has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones'" (Isaiah 57:15).

Principle

Downhearted people need encouragement.

Application

Fainthearted people require entirely different treatment than the "unruly." Downhearted people discourage quicker than others do. Such people are of such a makeup that it does not take much to dishearten them. They give up at almost any obstacle in their path. They will throw in the towel at the slightest provocation. They will quit on you. These types need encouragement from other Christians. They do not have the ability to live the Christian life independent from mature Christians.

Are you there for people discouraged from moving ahead in their Christian life? A person of encouragement helps people through bewildering troubles. They know what it means to possess staying strength so they can share it with others who do not have that strength.

"If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,' is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,' is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you'; nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you'" (1 Corinthians 12:15-21).

Our body is in accord with every individual part of the body. If we hit our finger with a hammer,

our entire body feels it. Our eyes look to see the damage. Our other hand reaches for a bandage. That is joint effort. People in the family of God help each other when they are down.

Many people cave into their problems when God wants them to tackle their weakness. There are always those who want to quit and give up. They get their feelings injured easily. We handle them with kid gloves or they take offense at the smallest slight. Mature Christians will not allow them to wallow in sensitivity. They will encourage them to move out of this victim mentality.

The Christian life is full of obstacles and obstructions. We cannot give up at the least resistance. Things do not always go as we think they should. To assume that everything will always go right is a perfectionist mentality. Perfectionism is a self-defeating proposition. There is no such thing as perfection this side of Heaven. Perfectionism is a tool of Satan.

The Devil loves nothing more than to discourage a Christian because a discouraged Christian is a defeated Christian. The evil one will use criticism to discourage you. If politicians quit every time someone criticized them, we would not have any politicians left. If your pastor quit every time someone criticized him or her, you would have no pastor. No one can get through life without criticism. This is part and parcel of God's plan for our development. It is an over-simplification to quit. God wants us to take on the challenge and face our problems, not run from them.

uphold the weak,

The word "weak" comes from two words: without and strength. A weak person is without strength. These people are immature in their Christian walk.

The word "uphold" means to join with and to maintain loyalty to. "Weak" people need someone to come alongside and "uphold" them until they can mature in their faith. People have different weakness in the areas of sexual lust, financial integrity and vulnerability to criticism. Whatever the weakness, strong Christians are to move alongside them and stick to them like glue to carry them through their weakness.

Principle

Mature Christians are to be there for immature Christians.

Application

Some people neglect their spiritual lives, so mature believers should stir them to action. There are many Christians who are spiritually weak. Usually, these are people who do not know the principles of the Word of God so that they can apply them to their experience. These people are vulnerable to the slightest enticement. They will quickly wander off into compromise or sensual sins.

"For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Hebrews 5:12-14).

There is a proclivity to push the weak away from us in exasperation with their weakness. The mature Christian, however, holds up the weak until they can get on their feet. We do not denounce or desert them. Instead, they need mature Christians to help on the way. God places the strong in the church to help the weak. Maturity can sustain immaturity.

"We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves" (Romans 15:1).

If soldiers fall injured in war, they need someone to come alongside to give support until they can make it to the medic. Mature Christians can transform immature Christians. We have a responsibility to other members of the household of faith.

be patient

There are two main words for "patient" in the Greek. One means patience with circumstances and the other means patience with people. Our term is the second word – patience with people.

"Patient" comes from two Greek words: long and temper. This person has a lo-o-o-ong temper, not a short temper. A "patient" person can put up with people. They can "bear with" obnoxious people because they are long-tempered. They can exhibit patience in spite of difficult people. Patient people are slow to react because there is a delay mechanism built into their attitude.

"Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up..." (1 Corinthians 13:4).

"And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise" (Hebrew 6:15).

"Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain" (James 5:7).

with all

Everyone knows an annoying person. There is a tendency to show our ire toward these jerks. The difficulty with this attitude is that we are to be patient with "all" people, jerks included.

The word "with" means face-to-face and implies fellowship. It is easy to isolate people we do not like.

Principle

All Christians need patience from every other Christian.

Application

Christians must not only bear with people they like but with people they do not like. We are to bear with other people but we must also forbear against reacting to them. Mature Christians do not retaliate against every wrong against them.

Immature people feel that they must take affront at every injury against them. Mature people try to bring stability to every tense situation.

How do you react when someone provokes you? Mature people do not react in the face of provocation. Instead, even in the face of that aggravation, they are there for people, even maddening people. Not only do they not strike back but, to the contrary, help those who hurt them.

It is one thing to show a long temper to our families but it is something else to show it to "all men." We improve the situation with no exceptions. We do not render evil for evil but, on the contrary, blessing. The patient person goes the extra mile in the face of aggravation. We make the extra effort to help others. Patience is one thing that we cannot borrow from others. That is why we must not run short of it.

God does not ask us to agree with every cockeyed idea that comes down the pike from other Christians. We do not have to share others opinions, but we must free ourselves from resentment toward them. They may snub us, ignore us and treat us with disrespect but God expects us to carry a long temper toward them. We give them the benefit of the doubt. We construe what they say in the best light. This will prevent much heartache.

1 Thessalonians 5:15

"See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all"

See that

In this context, "see that" is a warning against the attitude of revenge. Not only must the church as a whole display longsuffering [5:14] to one another but also they must not pay back an injury with an injury.

no one renders evil for evil

The word "renders" signifies to give back, to restore, return, render what is due, to pay, give an account. The New Testament uses this term for paying back a financial debt. It also carries the bad sense to pay someone back for a wrong. The idea in this case is revenge or retaliation.

"Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men" (Romans 12:17).

"...not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing" (1 Peter 3:9).

to anyone,

Mature Christians do not retaliate against the Christian or the non-Christian, people we like or people we do not like.

Immaturity repays evil with evil and good for good. Maturity repays good for evil. The mature person can place justice in the hands of God. It is the responsibility of mature leadership to repay good for evil.

Principle

Vengeance usurps the place of God.

Application

Some Christians will take nothing lying down. The law of the jungle is kill or be killed. "I will pay you back for this if it is the last thing I do." This attitude usurps the place of God. The sovereign execution of vengeance belongs to God.

"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" (Romans 12:17-21).

But always pursue what is good

Paul now gives the other side of the coin of retaliation. The word "but" is the "but" of strong contrast in the Greek. In contrast to retaliation "pursue whatever is intrinsically good [Greek] for the other person." "Instead of seeking to injure someone, put great effort in seeking their good."

The word "pursue" in this passage means to follow after, strive for, to pursue the "good." The idea is to put some earnestness in going after the good of other people. "Don't be half-hearted when doing them good." Paul used this term in Philippians.

"Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.... I press toward the

goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:12-14).

Paul uses "pursue" in the sense of a foot race in the above passage. "Run after the good. Don't stroll along after the good for you will not win the race for good. The goal is to win the race, not just participate in it. Chase it down, don't saunter along." This takes energy, intense effort, quickness and a definite goal.

The word "always" is an easy word to miss. The principle of pursuing the intrinsic good of other people is not something we do occasionally but something that we must "always" pursue. There are no exceptions.

both for yourselves and for all

The church at Thessalonica faced protracted persecution from the non-Christian community. It would be an easy reaction to retaliate against them but this would not be intrinsically good for the Christian or the non-Christian. Persecution can cause Christians to turn on one another as well.

Principle

God wants us to put full effort into helping people.

Application

Many of us put a half-hearted effort into what we do. This always yields half-hearted results. We will revert to type quickly if we are not earnest about pursuing the intrinsic good of other people. Our spiritual reflexes are so poor that if we do not train them to react when the time comes, they will revert to basic instinct. We respond in kind.

People can say some untrue and cruel things about us. This may stab us like a spear. It is not enough to stuff this in our soul. We must deal with it by "pursuing the good." We cannot be half-hearted about it or we will never make it. We will open our mouth and put our foot in it.

It is tempting to avenge ourselves. "If someone injures me, I injure them. After all, I am justified in doing this because they did it to me first." The heat of passion can get us into trouble but if we have the idea of pursuing the good no matter what happens to us then maturity will have the upper hand.

"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, "that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. "For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? "And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:44-48).

The law of the jungle is to give evil for evil. When we give evil for evil, we behave like animals. When we pay back evil for good, we function like the Devil. When we give good for evil we conduct ourselves like God.

None of us can get through life without a mountain of unfair treatment by others. How we respond to unfair treatment depends on whether we pursue the good.

"Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:

"Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth"; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness – by whose stripes you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls" (1 Peter 2:18-25).

Eternity is too long and life too short to get into a mode of revenge. If we move into this mode, it will sour our soul. Married folks get into verbal duels that end worse than the beginning. Harsh

remarks bring harsh replies. If they do not have the maturity to stop this cycle, they will infuse attitudes of antipathy into their souls. They will begin to hold grudges. Grudge builds on grudge. Someone must become mature somewhere and break the deadlock.

1 Thessalonians 5:16

"Rejoice always..."

Paul now turns to dealing with the attitude of the individual Christian. Spiritual responsibilities towards others call for addresses one's own viewpoint. Paul now prescribes the personal issues that correspond to the fellowship of the saints.

This is the shortest verse in the Greek New Testament.

Rejoice

A rejoicing attitude does not tumble into a survival mode toward life. The Holy Spirit commands the believer at Thessalonica to "rejoice" even in duress situations. The Thessalonians were living with deep and daily persecution. Their circumstances did not alter their joy. True joy transcends circumstance. This is not self-hypnosis. Biblical joy rests in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

always

God wants us to rejoice "always," not just some of the time but all of the time.

Principle

At the heart of Christianity is the outlook of joy.

Application

We cannot constantly carry joy in our lives if we look to the circumstances of life. Joy is not the same thing as happiness. Happiness depends on circumstances being right. If I get a new car, I am happy. If someone bumps my fender in the parking lot, I am not happy. Joy is inner animation of soul regardless of circumstance. Our joy depends on our orientation to God's providence and promises.

The foundation for the believer's rejoicing is in who God is and what He does. There are many reasons why a Christian should always rejoice:

God's presence – Psalm 16:11 The God of our salvation – Habakkuk 3:18 Answered prayer –

John 16:24 Our hope -- Acts 5:41 Our hope --
 Romans 5:2 Our hope -- Romans 12:12 The Holy
 Spirit -- Romans 14:17 The fruit of the Spirit -- Gal
 5:22 The Lord is the source of our joy --
 Philippians 4:4 Tribulation works endurance --
 James 1:2-3 Purpose in suffering -- 1 Peter 4:12,13
 Joy in trial -- 1 Peter 1:5-8

1 Thessalonians 5:17

"...pray without ceasing..."

The Greek used the word "without ceasing" for a person with a hacking cough and for repeated military attacks. This is not continuous prayer but prayer that recurs regularly. The idea is persistence in prayer.

The word "pray" is in the present tense and carries the idea of customary prayer. This person shoots up prayers throughout the day.

Principle

Dynamic prayer prays at stated and non-stated times.

Application

When thankful, pray. When in trouble, pray. When lacking in wisdom, pray. Pray at stated times and non-stated times. Always be willing and ready to pray. We do not have to lift the receiver off the hook to talk to God. We do not even need to dial; we just shoot up our requests. We can talk to God while we work or drive our car.

"Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, And He shall hear my voice" (Psalm 55:17).

"Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart..." (Luke 18:1).

"...but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4).

"Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church" (Acts 12:5).

"...rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer..." (Romans 12:12).

"...praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints -- ..." (Ephesians 6:18).

"Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving..." (Colossians 4:2).

Continued prayer is a state of steady communion with God. We do not allow great gaps to intervene between episodes of prayers. He takes interest in the small areas of our lives. We do not brush off our children when they come to us with a little scratch. Neither does God brush us off when we come to Him with little things.

Great people of God in the Bible persevered in their appointed times and non-appointed times of prayer. They never got out of communication with the throne of grace. They constantly had a sense of dependence on God.

1 Thessalonians 5:18

"...in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you"

in everything give thanks;

We can give thanks "in everything" because we know that "all things work together for good to them that love God" (Romans 8:28). God ordains adversity as well as prosperity. Every circumstance that comes our way is from God. Failure to accept this as true is an indication of skepticism about God's plan for the universe. We can give thanks for everything because God is in control.

Principle

We give thanks in everything that comes into our lives because it comes by the will of God.

Application

There is a difference in giving thanks "for" everything and "in" everything. If we gave thanks "for" everything that would mean that we give thanks for the Devil and his plan for the world!

Neither do we give thanks necessarily "after" everything. It does not require much faith to trace the hand of God with the benefit of hindsight. However, it takes faith to accept one's lot with gratitude in the midst of circumstances.

"...giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ..." (Ephesians 5:20).

This passage in Ephesians is more powerful than our verse in Thessalonians. We are to give thanks always for all things. When the police call and tell you that your son is in jail, it is difficult to give thanks for that. But we need to have the attitude of Samuel in 1 Samuel 3:18,

Whatever comes in our lives comes in by the will of God, otherwise, He would prevent it. God mixes with His divine compound the bitter and the sweet, the good and the bad, in appropriate proportions so that they work together for good. God knows just the right amount of sunshine and rain. He measures out these things with great precision.

for this is the will of God

The Holy Spirit highlights giving thanks in everything by saying that it is the will of God. By recognizing God's will, we give thanks for both prosperity and adversity. By knowing that God has a sovereign plan for adversity, we can put right our anxiety about trouble that comes our way. This is one area where we can know God's will without a doubt.

"So the king did not listen to the people; for the turn of events was from the LORD, that He might fulfill His word, which the LORD had spoken by Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat" (1 King 15:15).

in Christ Jesus

God always links His will for us in association with Christ. Jesus is the reason we accept suffering as God's will for us. We have an occasion to represent Him in adversity.

for you

God designs all circumstances for the benefit of the believer. God thinks about your limitations. He knows the proper proportions of adversity that are right for you. We should not concern ourselves with the portion given to someone else. God works in each person's life differently.

He custom designs the structure of their circumstances by divine design. God knows the straw that will break the camel's back. He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you can

bear, but He wants a tested product. Engineers of today's automobiles test drive prototypes so that they know what these cars can tolerate. God wants to bring out the best in us.

Principle

God has a purpose for everything that happens to the believer.

Application

God's providential plan for our lives includes all contingencies. God foresees every circumstance that comes into our lives. Not only does He foresee everything that happens to us, but He providentially plans or allows each situation that comes into our lives.

There is no substitute for understanding the will of God for our suffering. Nothing can come into our lives unless the Lord allows it. God must put His initials on everything that comes into our state of affairs. We may give thanks through tears.

Our obligation is to believe God's Word about these matters. The Bible teaches God's providential care of His creatures throughout the Scriptures.

1 Thessalonians 5:19

"Do not quench the Spirit"

Paul transitions from individual responsibility to corporate worship with verse 19. God reveals His will to the church as well as to the individual. We can squelch the public movement of the Holy Spirit. Five commands about life in the assembly follow.

The Bible commonly portrays the Holy Spirit like a flame. The idea of "quench" carries the idea of putting out a light of a torch, lamp or fire (Matthew 12:20; 25:8; Hebrews 11:34). Paul uses "quench" metaphorically to speak of hindering the operations of the Holy Spirit. People who refuse to submit to the teaching of the Word "quench" the Spirit. Those who usurp the ministry of the Spirit in the local church throw cold water on God's work in the congregation.

The Bible portrays the Holy Spirit as both heat and light. As heat, He impresses the reality of God upon the believer. As light, He reveals who God is to the believer. Some Christians blow out the flame of the Spirit in their lives. They do this by not

yielding to the conviction of the Spirit about their sin and by accommodating sin.

The Greek indicates that the Thessalonians were to stop something they were already doing. In essence, "stop stifling the Spirit."

Principle

Rebellion in the local church against its leadership quenches the Spirit's ministry in that church.

Application

A believer can extinguish the work of the Spirit in the church. Every local church has those who try to stifle the ministry. Some do this by opposing leadership. Others do it by indifference to leadership and thus lull themselves and others to sleep. Whatever means they may use, the result is that they extinguish the fire of the Spirit.

A dynamic move of the Spirit of God may be perceived as a threat to some people in the church. Lacking understanding, they will reject any proposal outside their comfort zone.

Christians need to be careful about limiting the ministry of the Spirit in the local assembly. To put out the flame of a manifestation of the Spirit is to interfere in what God is doing. Either we yield to the work of the Spirit or we extinguish His work. Those are the alternatives. We can grieve the Spirit as well as quenching the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30).

If you are hindering the work of your local church, you may be suppressing what the Spirit is doing. Do you take the negative position on most things? Are you on the negative side of every positive issue and on the positive side over every negative issue? It is incumbent upon Spirit-filled believers to be on the side of the ministry of the Spirit in the local church.

We must be careful not to stifle the Spirit of God in our church. When we do this, we are spiritual anarchists against the work of God in our church.

"But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; So He turned Himself against them as an enemy, And He fought against them" (Isaiah 63:10).

1 Thessalonians 5:20

"Do not despise prophecies"

We now come to the second command about corporate worship.

The word "despise" means to make of no account and frequently signifies to despise. We can make prophecies of no account and treat them with contempt. "No account" is less than one. We can treat the Bible as nothing. It is a dangerous thing to treat with disdain what God says or reject with contempt God's revelation.

"Prophecies" here probably refers to the gift of prophecy. The person with this gift could directly receive revelation from God before the Bible was completed. There came a time toward the close of the first century when this prophetic gift became inoperative (1 Corinthians 13:8). The prophetic gift not only dealt with future things but things in the present (Acts 13:2). "Prophecies" include both a prophetic element and a proclaiming element. These were oral proclamations before the revelation of the New Testament. The prophetic element came to close but the preaching element continues to this day.

Some people in Thessalonica may have pawned off their own personal notions without the gift of prophecy. People today pawn off their personal ideas about God by claiming that they special contact with God.

Others despise the teaching of God's Word. They falsely interpret and twist the Bible to suit their biases. They reject the clear claims of Scripture. The believer who treasures the Word is the believer who honors what it says.

"But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification" (1 Corinthians 14:3-5).

Prophecy was a special, temporary gift before the completion of the canon [the writing of the New Testament books] of the New Testament. By this gift, God revealed His mind and will to a prophet so that Christians could understand New Testament truth before the New Testament existed.

Today God succeeded the prophet by the teacher who expounds the mind of God already revealed on the pages of completed Scripture.

Principle

Christians are to carry a positive attitude toward the teaching of God's Word by their pastor.

Application

Some Christians believe that they must challenge all teaching from the pastor. They make themselves the final arbiter of truth. Their pride keeps them from learning from God's appointed teacher. The three pastoral books (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus) all declare that the church is to operate under a pastor/teacher who clearly and systematically sets forth doctrine.

The qualification to the above statement is that Christians who listen to the exposition of Scripture should check what the pastor teaches against the Word of God (Acts 17:11). That is why the church is to "test" the prophecy (5:21).

It is bad enough to discourage the preaching of God's Word. It is even worse to despise it. When we underestimate the significance of God's Word, we do it to our loss. Some people view the teaching of the Bible as irrelevant to their lives.

1 Thessalonians 5:21

"Test all things; hold fast what is good"

By challenging the Thessalonians to not despise prophecies, Paul did not want to imply that they were to be gullible and swallow any religious nonsense that might come their way. This verse puts a qualification on the previous verse.

Test

We test preaching (5:20) against the Word of God. The final arbiter of truth is God's Word. The word "test" means to test with the purpose to approve. We approve prophecy by the Bible.

"To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20).

"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" (1 John 4:1).

Satan is in the business of imitating God's Word. Christians are to test truth as a FBI agents examine counterfeit money. Some people will contrive ideas and pass them off as God's ideas.

all things;

God wants us to test "all" things, not simply most things. Do not condemn anything without first investigating it. On the other hand, do not accept anything until you first test it against the objective truth of God's Word.

It is difficult to put aside our preconceptions about truth because we build security around what we believe. Honesty means that we examine the Bible without bias as much as possible.

Principle

All Christians need to develop a sense of discernment.

Application

Some people try to pawn off their personal ideas as being from God. This confuses the voice of God with the voice of man.

One drop of poison in your food spoils the entire meal. False doctrine usually carries much truth. The Devil is too smart to tempt you with absolute contradiction to what you believe. He takes what you believe and modifies it slightly. Peter, for example did not discern the plan of God, so Jesus rebuked him.

"But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, 'Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men'" (Mark 8:33).

Jesus said in effect, "Peter, you are peddling the Devil's lie. What may look right to you is, in fact, a lie." Very few Christians today take the time to sniff out error. Everything seems to sit right with them because they do not rightly divide the word of truth.

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

hold fast what is good

Once we test a teaching against the Bible, then we hold on to that truth with the confidence that this is what God says. After we search the Scriptures, there comes a point where we need stability in what we believe. The phrase words "hold fast" means to have and hold. First we gain truth, then we retain it.

If we constantly open ourselves to new things without the appropriate testing, we introduce instability into our Christian experience. We come to settled convictions by extensive study, not by impulsively embracing some new idea.

The word "good" is the term for something profitable or useful. God's Word is profitable for our lives (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Principle

Learning the principles of God's Word is profitable and aids our everyday living.

Application

We are not to seek truth to denounce false ideas primarily, but to find what is true in God's Word. We study the Word to preserve its true teaching and apply it to our experience. Once we establish genuine teaching from God's Word then we hold onto it tenaciously.

"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).

1 Thessalonians 5:22

"Abstain from every form of evil"

The word "form" is something that strikes the eye, or which is out in the open. It is the external appearance or shape of something. Our passage probably carries the idea of "sort, kind". There are many kinds of evil out there – including doctrinal error.

The word "abstain" means to hold oneself from (4:3). Invariably, this word refers to evil practices whether doctrinal or moral (Acts 15:20,29; 1 Timothy 4:3; 1 Peter 2:11). Christians are to keep themselves from foul doctrine. We should not play

with evil teaching. We should distance ourselves from it.

The phrase "form of evil" is a contrast to the phrase in verse twenty, "hold fast what is good." Christians are to avoid anything that smacks of bogus doctrine. They cannot do this if they have not examined the Word of God thoroughly. "Hold yourselves aloof from any prophecy that is not based in truth from the Bible."

"Every form of evil" does not restrict itself to those things that appear evil. Rather, we must recognize that evil, including false doctrine, may manifest itself in any visible outward form. However, when evil clearly manifests itself, believers must keep their distance lest they be implicated in it (Numbers 16:26).

Principle

Christians should avoid anything that is a forerunner to false doctrine, seems like fake doctrine or is beyond the borders of truth.

Application

God expects us to make a clean break with error when we become Christians. The worst form that evil takes is false prophecy or untrue religious teaching. Christians should not associate themselves with any religious organization that seems to endorse doctrine that has been proven unscriptural or dishonoring to Christ.

Christians should also avoid doctrine that may not be evil in itself, but does not appear right. Christians who flirt with false doctrine open themselves up to trouble. Once these Christians adopt bogus principles for living, they move into misery. We must live out our lives based on solid, godly principles evident in God's revealed Word.

1 Thessalonians 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"

Since the preceding 16 exhortations require God to make them possible, Paul invokes God's help toward that end. Without God's work on our behalf, it is tough to live up to these directions.

Paul concludes this section on sanctification with a prayer. Verse 23 is Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians.

Now

With the word "now" Paul shifts into his conclusion to the book. Paul prays that God will enable the Thessalonians to fulfil the imperatives of the previous section. By adding up the 16 exhortations like a string of numbers, he draws the sum of sanctification. God finishes what He starts. God never embarks upon a job He does not finish. God takes different courses of action, based on the response of the believer.

may the God of peace

God, characterized by peace, will sanctify and preserve the Thessalonians. Paul presents God as the God of peace because He puts everything in order. Nothing goes without His notice. Only God can impart peace to the soul. As long as He ensures that spiritual harmony and tranquility prevail, there will be no discord in the life of the believer. Thus, God works an overall progressive holiness in our lives that will find its ultimate completion at the coming of Christ where we will receive ultimate sanctification.

God made His peace with us initially by sending His Son to die on the cross (Romans 5:1). He is in the process of making peace with us daily as we depend on Him to overcome sin in our lives. He will ultimately make His peace with us by eradicating any sin in our lives in the eternal state.

"And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen" (Romans 16:20).

"Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, 21 make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen" (Hebrews 13:20-21).

Himself

The word "Himself" is emphatic in the Greek and indicates that God will have to do this, not us. No one else can do this for us either. This does not

imply that we have no part in sanctification. God sets us apart when we come to Christ in terms of our position with Him. Then He enables us to become more and more like the Lord Jesus. Finally, He will completely sanctify us at the coming of Christ.

Principle

Sanctification is not only the will of God but also His work.

Application

Sanctification is the will of God (1 Thessalonians 4:3,4,7). Sanctification is also the work of God (Exodus 31:13; Leviticus 21:8; Ezekiel 37:28; John 17:19).

God's commands are one thing but His enablement is something else. Understanding the principles of God is one thing but the power to live them out is another. We do not find that power in ourselves but in God Himself. God is the singular source for our sanctification because He does it "wholly." God is the God of peace because God puts all things in order.

sanctify you completely;

God will sanctify you "completely," sanctify you to every part of your being, all three essential parts of your being. God will sanctify us through and through, with no area escaping His sanctifying influence. He will sanctify us quantitatively, qualitatively and ultimately when He delivers us from our sin capacity. God sanctifies us from stem to stern, from time into eternity.

Jesus will save us "completely" (Hebrews 7:25). We believe in the finished and unfinished work of Christ and we believe in the unfinished work of Christ. Jesus did a work for us on the cross and He is doing a work for us in Heaven. He is saving us daily. He is in the business of keeping saved people saved.

"For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life" (Romans 5:10).

"Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25).

We have a "great high priest" (Hebrews 4:14). We are not trying to get one. Jesus is taking care of our affairs over there.

"My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world" (1 John 2:1-2).

As a "high priest," Jesus advocates for us as a lawyer. He represents us personally and pleads the case of His shed blood.

Jesus will work for us until He comes back again.

"...being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ..." (Philippians 1:6).

and may your whole spirit, soul, and body

The word "whole" means complete, sound in every part. This is a qualitative term implying having integrity, complete, undamaged, intact, blameless. The Lord can make us complete in all our parts, in the entity as a whole. God is not interested in getting just our "leftovers" or "unwanted items."

Paul describes the believer in this passage as having three parts. The "spirit" is the capacity to relate to God. This spiritual dimension puts us in touch with God. The Bible never says that God saves the "spirit," only the soul can be saved.

The "soul" is the person, the psychology of man. This is the mind, emotions and will of man, the seat of personality (Luke 1:46,47; Hebrews 4:12).

The "body" is the material part of man; it is what carries the immaterial part of man, the spirit and soul.

No part of our spiritual existence escapes the impact of God upon our lives. God must sanctify each of the three aspects of our being. Then, we avoid every category of evil.

be preserved blameless

The word "preserved" means to watch over, keep. The Lord will watch over our entire spirit, soul and body, the complete person. God will guard our blamelessness even up to and including the

point of the coming of Christ. He is the one who keeps us saved.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:3-5).

A "blameless" person is someone against whom no one can lay a charge. The Lord will preserve us in such a way that no one can lay a charge against us. The Christian in this sense is without fault, innocent.

at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ

No one can point an accusing finger at us, even at the coming of Christ.

It is not simply "until" the coming of Christ but "at" His coming. When Jesus comes, no one will point a finger at us. Not only will holiness stand the test of life's trials and temptations but it will have a permanent, real existence that Christ will recognize when He comes.

Principle

God sanctifies us at three levels.

Application

Thank God, He saved us perfectly in the person and work of Christ.

There are three kinds or times of sanctification:

Positional - we hold the same status that Jesus holds before God when we believe in the death of Christ to forgive our sins whether we are carnal or spiritual. This is perfect sanctification in God's eyes, not in our experience (4:3,4,7). Progressive - we become more and more like the Lord Jesus as we yield to the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives (John 17:17; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Ephesians 5:26).

This is a relative sanctification. Permanent - ultimately we will be just like the Lord Jesus without a sin capacity in the eternal state (Romans 8:29,30). We will not have the capacity to sin ever again.

God saved us positionally when we believed on His Son's death on the cross as the only way He will accept us into His Heaven.

When it comes to our progressive sanctification, God may have to discipline us to get our attention. The more we yield to the Spirit to enable us to apply more and more of the principles of God's Word to our experience, the more we will become like the Lord Jesus in time.

One day, God will sanctify us totally, absolutely, completely. God will perfectly sanctify us in the eternity. As far as God is concerned, our eternal sanctification is as good as done.

Jesus saved us from the penalty of sin. He is saving us from the power of us. Eventually, He will save us from the presence of sin.

1 Thessalonians 5:24

"He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it"

In verse 23, Paul prays for the Thessalonians that God would sanctify them. In this verse, he asserts that God will faithfully do this.

He who calls you

God brings certain people to Himself in salvation by His call. This is God's first work in us but He does not leave us at the point of initial salvation.

is faithful,

God's character ensures He will fulfil that to which He calls us. God will faithfully complete His work. God is faithful to His promises so He is faithful to those people whom He elects. The Greek puts emphasis on the word "faithful." God's faithfulness to His sanctifying work stands on His integrity. God is reliable and trustworthy when it comes to finishing what He starts.

"...being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ..." (Philippians 1:6).

God cannot be unfaithful to Himself. It is impossible for Him to call us and then not preserve us. Since God's character is immutable, He must be true to His commitments. God cannot go back on His promises whether they are promises about time or eternity. He will faithfully forgive every Christian who confesses his sin (1

John 1:9). God will keep us saved (2 Timothy 2:13). He is faithful to sustain the believer through temptations (1 Corinthians 10:13). The Christian's present and future depend entirely on God's faithfulness.

"Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22-23).

Principle

Once God calls us, His faithfulness will see us to the end.

Application

Just as we can trust God to save us eternally so we can trust Him to sanctify us completely. We can trust God for our personal growth. What God does will continue into eternity. This is a far cry from our feeble and frail attempts to sanctify ourselves. God both calls and sustains us. He calls us to His ends and He enables us to reach those ends.

No one will point an accusing finger at us because God is faithful in bringing us to a point of absolute sanctification in the eternal state. God preserves us through and through. God will fit us for Heaven as well as earth.

The reason Job could say, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him," is that God is faithful to Himself. Job could stand up under unimaginable pressure because He understood something about the character of God. He knew God always keeps His Word.

Christians who have confidence in God's faithfulness to Himself can trust Him with anything that may come their way.

"Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator" (1 Peter 4:19).

who also will do it

Grace means that God does the doing. Legalism means that we do the doing. If God does the work, He will sanctify the believer initially, progressively and ultimately. God will preserve us and present us blameless at the coming of Christ (5:23). He will not waver in this. He is credible because He is faithful to Himself and His promises.

Principle

It is God's responsibility to preserve our eternal life.

Application

If our salvation or Christian life depended on us, we would be Christians one day and not the next. We would be spiritual Christians one day and failures the next. We cannot do what only God can do. These issues are all up to God. If He does not do it, we are in trouble.

We want a share in becoming Christians. We want a share in our spiritual lives. We cannot save our souls; neither can we sustain our souls. Everything is by God's grace.

"And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!" (2 Timothy 4:18).

God consummates our salvation. We cannot do this. Our salvation or sanctification does not depend on our faithfulness. They depend on His faithfulness. I am not faithful, He is. Nothing nullifies His faithfulness.

"For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39).

"And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him..." (Hebrews 5:9).

"Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25).

"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:1-2).

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:3-5).

"Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present you faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, Be glory and majesty, Dominion and power, Both now and forever. Amen" (Jude 24-25).

1 Thessalonians 5:25

"Brethren, pray for us"

This verse brings us to the conclusion of First Thessalonians (5:25-28). Paul advises three concluding recommendations upon the congregation and then gives a final blessing.

Brethren,

The word "brethren" is emphatic in the Greek. Paul strongly pleads for the Thessalonians to pray for him. Paul clearly understood the pitfalls of ministry. He knew he could not go into ministry naked, without the help of God.

pray for us

The word "pray" is in the present tense indicating continued prayer. No one can do God's work without prayer. Those who want prayer and who pray understand that they are not sufficient in themselves to do God's work. They know they must depend on God to do it. Paul clearly understood his need for prayer (2 Thessalonians 3:1; Romans 15:30; Ephesians 6:18-19; Colossians 4:3.). Paul asked for prayer at the close of six of the thirteen letters he wrote.

The "us" here is the gospel team of Paul, Silas and Timothy that came to Thessalonica (1:1). Paul closes this letter as he began with an emphasis on prayer. He says in effect, "I prayed for you so you pray for me. We will pray for each other." This is mutual Christianity.

"We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers..." (1 Thessalonians 1:2).

Principle

If we understand our role in the brotherhood of Christ properly, we would pray for our brothers in Christ more regularly.

Application

How strong is your supportive tie to those in your church? Can they depend on your prevailing prayer for them? We fulfil God's purpose in our lives through the prayers of our fellow Christians.

Living the Christian life depends on teamwork. If we play on a team, we depend on our teammates to fulfill their role. Soldiers depend heavily on other soldiers in their company. Their lives are at stake if others fail to fulfil their function. Every area of life needs teamwork. This is no less true in the church. Part of our teamwork is praying for one another. This is something that everyone can do.

"Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you" (Romans 15:30-32).

"...praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints – and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak" (Ephesians 6:18-20).

"Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak" (Colossians 4:2-4).

1 Thessalonians 5:26

"Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss"

Paul gives one final expression of his love for the Thessalonians. He wanted to extend a greeting with a "holy kiss."

The word "all" indicates that Paul extended his love even to the "disorderly" brethren. He excludes no one in his love.

The "holy kiss" in the first century was a physical token of welcome or farewell kiss, a token of brotherhood in Christ (Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12).

The term "holy" guards against anything untoward in the kiss. In the Mid East, the kiss was a form of greeting and took place between members of the same sex. They kissed on the cheek, not the mouth.

Societies where the kiss is not a greeting can find trouble with the "holy kiss." Practicing the "holy kiss" in a Western culture can create some problems. This verse is no justification for establishing a "Lonely Hearts Club" in the local church!

Principle

Christians are to show public affection for one another.

Application

The "holy kiss" in Western culture is more like a handshake or hug. Church members do not kiss the same way lovers kiss each other or family members kiss each other.

The biblical kiss signifies personal affection, not romantic passion. When we give a public sign of spiritual oneness, equality and mutual dependence in the household of faith, we demonstrate biblical love.

God does not want us to extend sticky, saccharin sentimentalism. Our physical love toward one another is to have a "holy" dimension to it. We love each brother in Christ with no strings attached.

Christians should show love to one another publicly.

"Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to you all who are in Christ Jesus. Amen" (1 Peter 5:14).

1 Thessalonians 5:27

"I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren"

Paul's final exhortation of the three in the conclusion is that the leaders of the Thessalonian church read First Thessalonians publicly to the congregation.

I charge you by the Lord

The word "charge" literally means to put under (or bind by) an oath, to adjure. Paul demands or commands that the leadership at Thessalonica take an oath that First Thessalonians be read in the public assembly. This is stronger than a suggestion or exhortation.

The phrase "by the Lord" indicates that Paul gets his authority to put them under an oath from the Lord.

that this epistle be read

Paul wants the leaders at Thessalonica to read First Thessalonians publicly thus acknowledging its place in the Bible. Most people in the early church did not read. They got their Bible from public reading. Most likely, this was more than just reading the text. It involved explanation and exposition of the text.

"And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up.... ..helped the people to understand the Law; and the people stood in their place. So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading" (Nehemiah 8:5-8).

to all the holy brethren

Note the word "all." It is imperative that everyone in the local church be exposed to the exposition of God's Word, whether men, women or children.

Principle

Exposition of Scripture is central to worship.

Application

The strength in Paul's command to read the Bible publicly indicates that the Word of God was central to local church worship. If Paul believed

vehemently that the leadership should read the Bible publicly, should not our churches today put great emphasis on Bible exposition as well?

"But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 1:14-17).

1 Thessalonians 5:28

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen"

First Thessalonians does not fade away insignificantly. Paul invokes the matchless, amazing grace of the Lord Jesus Christ upon the Thessalonians.

There is nothing the Thessalonians need more than the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. They needed sanctifying grace that strengthens the spiritual life.

Notice this grace comes with the authority of the full title of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have the full ineffable authority of Christ for this grace. This grace is grace that comes from the work of Christ.

be with you.

Grace is not for the elite but for anyone in the local church. Paul ends as he began with the grace of God (1:1). It is one thing to know about grace but it is something else to have it as a partner.

Amen

The word "amen" means so be it. It is a word of faith. Paul says in effect, "I agree with the idea that God's grace abides with believers for their sustaining power to live out the Christian life."

Principle

Grace can be our partner as we walk through life.

Application

If we go through our Christian life without the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, we go it on our

own. If we appropriate His grace, it will abide with us and give us strength we would not otherwise have. Sanctifying grace strengthens our spiritual lives.

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen" (2 Corinthians 13:14).
