

THE GOSPEL IN THESSALONICA
Acts 17:1-10

Intro: There are many reasons for the importance of Paul's letters to the church at Thessalonica. But I will just mention two of them:

- 1) They were the first of Paul's inspired epistles, and thus initiated his written ministry which was so greatly blessed of God. Think of what a great loss it would be to us, and to the church in every generation, not to have Paul's letters.
- 2) They give us some real insights into the ministry of the of the Apostle Paul. They could really be called, Paul's Letters on Pastoral Theology. Anyone involved in the work of a local church must take the time to get acquainted with these letters. This is one reason that I want to consider them with you in a verse-by-verse exposition.

The account of the establishment of the work of the Lord in Thessalonica is most amazing because he was there only "three sabbath days." See Acts 17:2. Paul was on his second missionary journey, traveling with Silas and Timothy (who are both mentioned in 1 Thess. 1:1). Forced to leave Thessalonica by opposition initiated by the Jews, he went down to Athens and then on to Corinth where it is thought that he wrote to the Thessalonian believers. The year was either 50 or 51 A.D.

— To say the least, although Paul and his fellow-workers were forced to leave the city, the work of those three Sabbaths was very, very fruitful. See 1 Thess. 2:1. The question we need to ask is, "Why? Why was it so blessed of God?"

In answering this question we must recognize that God does not always see fit to bless every ministry to the same extent, but there certainly must be some reason beyond the historical record for putting the details into the Scriptures which we have in Acts 17 as well as in 1 and 2 Thessalonians. We should be interested in it from the standpoint of our own work today. Time makes no changes in the ways of the Lord. Otherwise the Bible would be of no help to us today. But it is a help, really our only true help, because there is no real light on the work of the Lord unless it is based upon what we find in the Scriptures.

What do we find?

I. THE RECORD IN ACTS 17.

— The first thing that we note is this:

A. It

RECOGNIZING GOD'S ELECT
1 Thessalonians 1:5-10

Intro: When you read through 1 and 2 Thessalonians, you see that Paul and his co-workers had done an amazing job of teaching during the "three sabbath days" that they were in Thessalonica. Not only had he taught them a great deal about the Gospel, but also about living for the Lord, and then about the coming of the Lord. It shows what can be done in a very short period of time when the blessing of the Lord is upon the work.

One thing that the Thessalonians had learned was the doctrine of election. That is apparent from verse 4. See also 1 Thess. 5:9, 10. We could also add verses like 2:12 and 4:7 and 5:24.

They knew that only the elect would be saved. They also knew that all of the elect would be saved. They knew, too, that God was the One Who determined who the elect would be, and that that was decided before the foundation of the world.

In addition to all of this, they knew that Paul was convinced that they were of the elect. Since God does not indicate beforehand who His elect are, how did Paul know? He knew by what had taken place before and during and after the Gospel was preached in Thessalonica.

Let us trace the evidence that is given to us in the Word of God.

I. THEIR CALL TO MACEDONIA (Acts 16:9, 10).

Do you remember how they had tried to go to Asia, but God said, "No." They tried then to God into Bithynia, but again the Spirit of God indicated that they were not to go there. Finally, Paul had a vision in the night of "a man of Macedonia appealing to him for help.

Thus, when Paul and his fellowworkers went to Philippi and then to Thessalonica, they knew that that was where the Lord had led them. They were there by divine guidance.

Secondly--and now let us go to 1 Thessalnians 1, they knew that God was at work by . . .

II. THE POWER OF THEIR PREACHING (1 Thess. 1:5).

I am sure that every servant of the Lord knows what it is to preach "in word only." The Lord may bless. People may be helped. But nothing unusual happens.

And then there are other times when the blessing of the Lord

is upon the ministry of the Word in a special way! This was the case in Thessalonica. It was evident that God was doing a work. The Holy Spirit's power was evident, but also the Lord's servants seemed to speak with special conviction. Paul called it, "with much assurance."

1 Thessalonians 2:13 gives another aspect of what was happening. People did not always respond to Paul's preaching in this way, receiving his message as "the word of God," but they did on this occasion.

So, again, they had reason to believe that God was at work.

III. THE EFFECT OF THEIR PREACHING (1 Thess. 1:6-10).

So often when people make a profession of faith, no changes are evident, but that was not the case in Thessalonica. Amazing changes took place. This is an illustration of what takes place when the Lord is calling His elect to Himself. Remember that the Lord Jesus said,

All that the Father giveth me shall come to me;
and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out
(John 6:37).

There are a number of things which are important here in identifying the elect of God. Let us look at verse 6 first, but notice the order in which things happened.

A. The condition under which the Word was received: "in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost."

Some people put up all kinds of excuses as to why they cannot believe. But that is not the case with the elect. They will believe regardless of the obstacles that the enemy may put in their way.

Then we also see in verse 6 that Paul said,

B. "Ye became followers of us, and of the Lord."

This same idea is expressed in another way in verse 9:
" . . . how ye turned to God from idols . . ."

They did not remain the same. They could not be the same. Their lives were transformed. The idols had to go. They wanted to be with the Lord's servants. More than that, they wanted to be like the Lord's servants. What the Lord's servants did, they did. But most important of all, they wanted to be like the Lord!

But this is not all!

- C. They became types of what all Christians should be.
See 1 Thess. 1:7.

This shows the extent to which their lives were changed. There was no question but that God had done a most amazing work in their hearts. There was no question but that they had been saved.

And still we are not at the end of what Paul had to say about the reasons he was assured of their "election of God."

- D. They became concerned about others who did not know the Lord. See 1 Thess. 1:8.

Have you ever heard it said that, if you believe in election, it will kill any interest you might otherwise have in seeing people come to Christ?

That was not true with Paul. He taught election, and it is doubtful if anyone, except our Lord, ever had a great burden for the lost than Paul did.

Neither was it true of the Thessalonians. They had been taught election, and they believed it. But, if anything, it made them even more zealous to preach the Gospel to others. They were not satisfied to be limited to Macedonia, but they went down into Achaia as well.

This verse may mean that the report of what had happened got into these other places before they did!

But, then, at the end of this verse Paul added a very interesting statement. It is this: " . . . so that we need not to speak anything."

Do you know how we feel that it is necessary to get out "reports" of what God is doing? Well, when God is really at work, "reports" are not necessary. The news cannot be silenced. That is how it was in Thessalonica. So, when the messengers of the Gospel came, it only confirmed what the people in those areas had already heard.

That latter part of verse 9 emphasizes this point:
" . . . how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God."

One more point:

- E. They were waiting for the Lord Jesus to return. See 1 Thess. 1:10.

Thayer, in his Greek Lexicon, says that this means to await one whose coming is known, with patience and trust.

Do you see what this meant in the lives of the Thessalonians? It meant that their hopes were no longer centered in this life or in this world. Their "hope" was centered in the coming of the Lord.

This, too, was further proof of their "election of God." Note how 1 Thess. 1:3 says the same thing.

Concl: In these days when we see so many things going on in the Name of the Lord, and we see many who claim to be Christians, it is important for us to place the ministry of the Gospel today alongside of the Biblical record of what took place in the early days. What a difference there often is!

And yet the Gospel has not changed. Salvation has not changed. God's way of reaching His elect has not changed. It is still to be done through the preaching of the Word.

Why do we not see the same kind of things taking place today that Paul and his fellowservants in the Gospel saw. Are there no more of the elect to be reached? Certainly there are. And they will be reached. But we need to realize that salvation is a divine work in which God will use us to reach His chosen people, and that they will be reached under the leading of the Lord and through the preaching of the Word. And then what God does in the hearts of His own will spread out and affect the lives of others who also have been appointed for salvation.

THE CHURCH THAT WAS NOT FORGOTTEN
1 Thessalonians 1:1-4

Intro: What a delightful Epistle this is! You can see how Paul loved his work, and how he loved the people he had been used to reach with the Gospel. But there must have been a special way in which the Thessalonian believers had won his heart. He had not known them long, nor had he been away from them for very long, but you can tell from this letter that he loved them very much.

I have taken my subject from the first three words of verse 3: "Remembering without ceasing . . ." This the translation of two Greek words in the original text, but actually the word, "remembering," would have conveyed the same idea--that he was continuously remembering. But for him to add the other word made it that much more emphatic.

"Without ceasing" was used by Paul two more times in this letter: in 2:13, and in 5:17. The Thessalonian believers were remembered unintermittently. Truly they were never forgotten!

But, to see the meaning of the text, let us ask,

I. REMEMBERED BY WHOM?

Of course they were remembered by the Lord. He never forgets His own.

A few years ago when I was teaching the book of Isaiah I noted those wonderful statements found in Isaiah 44:21 and 49:13-16.

The Lord never forgets us, and He never will!

But neither do His servants forget. God sees to that. Paul and Silas and Timothy had been sent away from Thessalonica by night because their lives were endangered, but they could not forget the people there who had been saved. They wondered how they were doing, what troubles they were having, and if they were standing fast.

Paul and Silas and Timothy may have been different in other ways, but in their remembrance of the Thessalonians, they were the same.

We need to remember this ourselves. People need to know that the Lord has not forgotten them, but they need to know that we are remembering them, too. And, from the example of Paul, it is a good thing to tell them.

But now ~~let~~ us ask,

II. HOW WERE THEY REMEMBERED?

Answering this question will take us through the rest of our text.

In the first place note that

A. They were remembered as a church.

And Paul remembered where they were both geographically and spiritually.

As "the church of the Thessalonians," they were still in Thessalonica, and were still Thessalonians, but now there was a difference. They were "the church." They had been called out. They were a separated group, and their life in Thessalonica could never be the same again. They had been left with a group of violent, unbelieving Jews--and so they were in danger.

But Paul also remembered that, as a church, they were also "in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ." Paul and Silas and Timothy had had to leave, but God the Father was still there, and so was the Lord Jesus Christ. Only the Spirit of God can teach us the meaning of what it means to be IN God, and IN Christ.

But this gives us an idea of how Paul remembered them. And it obviously was a comfort to him and to his co-workers.

B. They were remembered as a needy church:

Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Some MSS leave off the last part of the verse beginning with the word, "from." But if it were not a part of Paul's original letter, the phrase was certainly understood.

This familiar greeting indicates that they were remembered in prayer. This was a very familiar greeting, but, oh, how important it was. Paul remembered that they were going through trials, and that the Lord was with them, but he also remembered to pray that they would daily draw upon the unlimited resources that they had in the Lord for "grace" and "peace."

C. They were remembered with thanksgiving to God.

There is no way in which Paul and Silas and Timothy, or any one of them took credit for what God had done in the hearts of those Thessalonians who had believed.

But what, specifically, was Paul thankful for?

There are four things that he mentioned here.

1. "Your work of faith."

Note what Paul wrote later in verse 9: " . . . how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God."

Their work was a "work of faith" because:

- 1) It resulted from their faith, and
- 2) It was characterized by faith.

Their lives had been changed. Their interests had been changed. They were not expecting to do something great for God; they were expecting God to work through them.

It is amazing to see how much they had learned about the Lord and His work in such a short time!

2. "And labour of love."

Most students of the Greek language seem to agree that the difference between "work" and "labour" is that the first has reference to what they did; the latter, to how they did it. They prayed, they taught, they witnessed, they gave, they visited and comforted, but they did it because they loved the Lord, and so they did it with zeal, tirelessly, joyfully.

Paul remembered this. And, if you ever see this in the lives of the Lord's people, you will never forget it because it is so rare.

3. "And patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father."

How long had they been saved?

Probably no longer than a matter of weeks. But here is Paul commending them for their patience in waiting for the Lord to come and for all that they would receive when He did come.

Could people say that we are patient about the coming of the Lord, or are we just indifferent?

And note what else Paul mentioned in this connection. Perhaps it needs to be mentioned separately. I refer to the phrase, "in the sight of God and our Father." Somehow these Thessalonian believers had experienced a special awareness of the Lord's presence.

But there is one other thing that Paul remembered about the Thessalonian church, and for which he continually gave thanks:

4. "Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God."

Do I hear anyone saying, "Why did Paul have to spoil it? He was doing just fine until he mentioned election!"

Here you get an excellent idea about the way Paul thought about election. He felt that it was a matter for praising God! And we rob God of glory which rightfully belongs to Him if we do not praise Him that all that has been done for us and all of the good that has been done by us are traceable to the time before the foundation of the world when He chose us to be His very own, and then during our lifetime moved upon our hearts and in our wills to make us His own people.

It would never have happened if it had not all started with God.

What do you think people substitute for election when they either do not believe in it, or decide never to mention it? There is only one thing they can do--give the glory to some man, either to themselves, or to the person, or persons, who brought the Gospel to them. But the glory is God's!

Concl: This is a wonderful passage of Scripture to teach us how we should be praying for our ministry, and the ministries of others, and how we should look upon the work of the Lord. Do you see any similarities between "the church of the Thessalonians" and Trinity Bible Church? I trust that there are many, and that there will be many more in the days to come.

A TRUE SERVANT OF GOD
1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

Intro: We know that Paul's ministry at Thessalonica had been severely opposed. We also can tell from our text that the opposition had continued after he had been forced to leave the city. The charges brought against the Apostle were so serious that he was compelled to speak out. He did this for the Gospel's sake. He and his message were so closely related that, if he were discredited, his message would be discredited also.

But it is interesting to note the connection between verses 2 and 3. Paul indicated there that, if he had been all that his enemies had said that he was, they would not have opposed him. It was because he was not what they said he was that they had caused such "contention," or, lit., agony.

What Paul wrote in these 12 verses was not unknown. (1) He knew that what he was writing was true. (2) The Thessalonian church knew that he was speaking the truth. See vv. 1, 2, 5, 9, 10, 11. (3) Most important of all, God knew! See vv. 5, 10.

But Paul laid out the whole record so that they would be reminded again of what actually took place. But in so doing, he was instructing all future generations of the church, all men called to serve God, what the distinguishing characteristics of a servant of the Lord are.

Let us note what they are.

I. A TRUE SERVANT OF THE LORD IS GOD-CENTERED.

There is much evidence of this in what Paul has written. Notice, for example, how many times he mentioned "God." The references to God can be grouped under the following points:

A. He depended upon God.

Note the expression, "we were bold in our God." See v. 2.

B. He was conscious of the divine origin and divine ownership of his message.

Cf. "the gospel of God" in vv. 2, 8, 9. What a difference this makes when any man realizes where his message has come from.

C. His primary object was to please God. Cf. v. 4.

"Allowed" means approved. The same word is used at the

end of the verse where it is translated, "trieth."
By this he meant that he was continually being tested
as to the purpose of his ministry. And note that it
was a matter of his heart.

Here is an important point. The Lord opened doors in
accordance with the motive which Paul had in his heart.

D. He lived as in the presence of the Lord.

We come again here to the verses in which he referred
to God as his Witness. See vv. 5, 10. God knew where
he was. God heard what he said. But, even more impor-
tant, was the fact that God knew his heart. Everywhere,
and at all times, he was under the watchful eye of God.

E. Finally, with regard to the Thessalonians, he sought
to get them to "walk worthy of God." See v. 12.

This is what it means to be God-centered.

But there are some other things for us to notice here.

II. A TRUE SERVANT OF THE LORD DOES NOT QUIT BECAUSE OF OPPOSITION (1 Thess. 2:1, 2).

Neither does he change his message, nor water it down in
any way!

III. A TRUE SERVANT OF THE LORD GENUINELY SINCERE.

There were at least six specific charges that Paul was
answering here:

- A. That he was a deceiver (v. 3).
- B. That he was immoral (v. 3)--"uncleanness."
- C. That he himself was deceived (v. 3)--"in guile."
- D. That he was a man-pleaser (v. 4).
- E. That he was covetous (v. 5). Cf. vv. 6, 9--a part of
his answer.
- F. That he was seeking to exalt himself (v. 6).

It was not unusual for men to get disgruntled with their
leaders, and then start a new sect.

But even this was not all that he had to say.

IV. A TRUE SERVANT OF GOD IS GENTLE AND LOVING.

Think how hard this would be when he was forced to live in an atmosphere of opposition, when many times he would not know who his enemies were.

But Paul used two figures of speech to illustrate how he had ministered to those who believed:

A. "As a nurse" (vv. 7, 8).

Paul, a man of God, daily facing death for the sake of the Gospel, was as gentle as a woman.

B. "As a father" (vv. 11, 12).

Do you remember what Paul said to the Corinthian church in 1 Cor. 4:14-16? (Read.)

By the way, fathers, will you note that indirectly the Apostle Paul was indicating who should be the teacher of the children in the family?

Paul described the ministry in Eph. 4:15 as "speaking the truth in love."

We are not through yet.

V. A TRUE SERVANT OF GOD IS HOLY (1 Thess. 2:10).

Students of the Greek New Testament differ as to what Paul had in mind when he used these three words, "how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe."

But there seems to be some basis for believing that he was speaking of his relationship with God, with men, and that he was above reproach in both of these areas. Possibly his relationship to the Word of God would also have to be included, especially with "justly."

VI. A TRUE SERVANT OF GOD IS CONCERNED THAT BELIEVERS "WALK WORTHY OF GOD" (1 Thess. 2:12).

He is not satisfied with their talk, with their expressed understanding of their knowledge of the truth, but with their walk.

Concl: What a pattern! Paul believed that a servant of God should set an example for what the people of God should be--that it was not just a matter of telling, but of living. As Paul said to the Corinthians, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1).

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE WORD IS PREACHED?

1 Thessalonians 2:13-20

Intro: In spite of all of the trouble that Paul had in Thessalonica, he must have had a wonderful time preaching and teaching the Word. He referred to it several times in this Epistle. His main concern was to get them to receive it, by which he meant, to believe it. In this sense receiving is believing, and believing is receiving. See verse 13. Also see the way the two words are used in John 1:12.

We see this happening again and again in the ministry of the Apostle Paul, when the Word is preached:

I. SOME RECEIVE THE WORD (1 Thess. 2:13).

How did they receive it? "As it is in truth, the word of God." They did not receive it as a message just from Paul, but from God!

What happened when they did receive it? It showed itself at work, or, as Paul expressed it, "which effectually worketh also in you that believe."

In other words, they did not remain the same. They were changed in their hearts, and their lives were changed.

How did Paul account for all of this? Was it his preaching? NO! Was it something different about those who did believe so that they were more receptive than the others. NO! PAUL GAVE ALL OF THE CREDIT TO GOD! "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing." For what cause? See verse 12. (Read.)

This is further proof of what Paul wrote in Romans 1:16, 17. It is the Gospel which God uses to transform lives. It is through the Word that faith is given.

So this is the first result that Paul mentioned.

But other things took place.

II. THOSE WHO RECEIVED THE WORD WERE PERSECUTED (1 Thess. 2: 14-18).

This all means that although SOME RECEIVED THE WORD, OTHERS REJECTED THE WORD.

This happened to the Lord. It happened to the prophets. It happened to Paul and to Silas and to Timothy. It happens whenever the Gospel is preached in such a way so that people are saved.

Paul felt very keenly that the Thessalonians should be helped to see this and to face such tribulation. This was the reason he sent Timothy back to them, as we see in 1 Thess. 3:1-8.

What kind of persecution was it?

Paul and his co-workers had to flee for their lives. The Lord Jesus was actually killed. And so were many of the prophets. It was a physical, violent kind of opposition.

What was their object?

To put a stop to the preaching of the Gospel, the Word of God. See verse 16. See also Acts 4:18.

Who was behind it?

Twice the Apostle indicated where the real trouble came from: see 2:18 and 3:5. Satan (meaning, adversary) was behind it all. And that is the reason Paul wrote as he did in Eph. 6:12, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, . . ."

This was always the result in those early days. Even on Paul's first missionary journey, he and Barnabas retraced their steps back to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, as Acts 14:22 says,

Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.

But there was another result:

III. THEY BECAME A PART OF A GREAT FELLOWSHIP OF SAINTS.

The passage here overlaps a little with the verses for the preceding point: verses 17-20.

They had become a part of the Church. And note how Paul emphasized two things--one having to do with the present, the other having to do with the future.

A. The present: his great concern for them.

Paul was always concerned about how persecution would affect others, but he did not let it hinder him from going about his work. Time and time again he had tried to get back to them, "but Satan hindered us."

Do you ever wonder how many there are who really are

concerned about some of the Lord's people? How many are there who pray regularly for you, who write to encourage you, who seek to teach you? Who prays for your children regularly? Do you? Does anyone else? How many Christians do you know who are having a hard time spiritually and otherwise? Is anyone remembering them in prayer.

I know that the Lord prays for us. And I know that the Holy Spirit prays for us. But the Word of God teaches us that we need to pray for the people of God, for each other!

Have you counted the ways Paul expressed his concern for the Thessalonian believers?

- 1) He prayed for them.
- 2) He wrote to them.
- 3) He was continually trying to get to see them.
- 4) When he could not go, he sent Timothy.

Oh, there is a tremendous ministry for us all with each other. We are in the same battle, and the Enemy is just as anxious to shut off the Gospel today as he ever was. That is the reason we need to be on the job with each other.

But there is a final point:

B. The future: the coming of the Lord. See verses 19, 20.

You see, it is not just here and now that we need to be concerned about, but eternity! What is going to be our great joy when the Lord Jesus comes?

Will it be seeing the Lord? Yes. Who can measure the joy that will be ours when we see Him?

Will it be that we will be through with sin forever? Oh, YES! None of us knows now what that will be like.

But what was Paul saying here? He was saying that one of our greatest joys will be seeing those we have prayed for, have helped, and certainly those people whom the Lord has seen fit to bring to Himself through ways in which He has used us!

Concl: This is why the Lord did not get rid of Peter. Peter may have denied the Lord, but he belonged to the Lord. Peter did not realize what the Lord was saying when He said, "But I have prayed for thee . . ." When the Lord restored him, He said, "Feed my sheep." Or, in other words, "Go do for my sheep what I have done for you." May the Lord give us hearts like Peter and Paul in our concern for each other!

CALLED TO HOLINESS
1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

Intro: We have the subject of this passage in verse 7. Here is the purpose of our salvation. God did not call us to be impure, but to be pure, to be holy.

Once before in this letter Paul had referred to the purpose of our calling. See it in 2:12. We have been "called" by God "unto his kingdom and glory."

These two are intimately related to each other although our text may have more of a present emphasis, while 2:12 speaks of the ultimate destiny of the child of God, when we will be perfectly holy.

There is another expression which Paul used in this Epistle two times which is also connected with our calling. It is the word "appointed." See 3:3 and 5:9. Our afflictions contribute to our holiness, and, of course, the way Paul used "salvation" in 5:9 indicates that he was thinking about the ultimate goal of our salvation--salvation completed in glorification.

All of these terms speak of God's purpose in our salvation.

If we are to be holy, what does it require? This is what Paul was dealing with in these eight verses of chapter 4. "Furthermore" at the beginning of chapter 4 indicates that this is really the only other thing that Paul wanted to say to them--and this is concluded at the end of chapter 5 with his prayer in verse 23. (Read.)

In the first three chapters Paul reviewed his ministry among them, and expressed his great concern regarding the work of the Lord in their hearts. But once assured that it was a genuine work as a result of Timothy's visit in Thessalonica, Paul went on to this subject which ought to be the chief concern of every child of God--the need to be holy.

But, how are we to be holy? Paul gave five answers to this question, which apply just as much to us today as they did to the Thessalonians in the first century. Any one of these answers could be used to describe the Christian life.

First, it is

I. THE ABOUNDING LIFE (1 Thess. 4:1).

Note this in 3:12, and note it again in 4:9, 10.

What did Paul mean by this? He meant that if any group of the Lord's people who had been taught like the Thessalonians

had been would, would only seek to be more faithful to what they already knew, without learning any more, they would make tremendous progress in a life of holiness.

Is this not true of most of us? The problem is not that we are ignorant of what it means to be holy; it is that we are not living out what we already know!

How often are you convicted during the course of a day that you are not living up to the light that you already have?

But let me go on to a second emphasis that Paul made because these are not exclusive of each other, but different ways of saying the same thing.

Not only is the holy life and abounding life, but it is

II. A LIFE PLEASING TO GOD (1 Thess. 4:1).

Note how Paul described an ungodly life in 2:14, 15.

Do you remember the verse (2 Cor. 5:9) where Paul stated his ambition in life? (Read.) The child of God who pursues this course is walking in the way of holiness.

Cf. 1 Cor. 10:31,

Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

This is what has always motivated holy men and women--the desire to please God. Cf. Joseph's answer to Potiphar's wife in Gen. 39:9, " . . . how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

When we lose sight of the need to please God, then holiness of life always degenerates.

But how do we know that we are pleasing God? Is it something that every Christian has to decide for himself. NO! It is

III. THE OBEDIENT LIFE (1 Thess. 4:2).

To what are we to be obedient? (Read.)

"By the Lord Jesus" can mean by the authority of, or it can mean that the Lord Jesus gave you those commandments through us--that they came from us, but they really originated with Him. They are really His commandments.

Cf. John 14:21, 23.

How important it is for us to take the Word of God, and

single out the commandments one by one, to make sure just how obedient our lives actually are.

But let me go on to the fourth answer.

— IV. THE SEPARATED LIFE (1 Thess. 4:3-6).

A holy life has negative aspects as well as positive. These negative aspects are brought out in the Word along with the positive. In other words, if we are to be holy in our lives, there are things that we cannot do, that we must not do, if we are going to be holy.

Notice how Paul dealt with the subject here. (Read.)

What would you think if I were to tell you that you should abstain from fornication, from adultery, from all forms of such sins? Paul spoke this way, and he wrote this way.

There are two possible meanings to verse 4. "Possess" can mean either obtain, or it can mean to get control of. And "vessel" can either mean a wife, or it can mean a person's own body!

Verse 6 is also related to this same subject of moral purity. Note the 10th commandment in the Law.

— Moffatt in the Expositor's Greek Testament quoted a Jewish rabbi, Simon ben Zoma, who used to say this:

Look not on thy neighbour's vineyard. If thou hast looked, enter not; if thou hast entered, regard not the fruits; if thou hast regarded them, touch them not; if thou hast touched them eat them not. But if thou hast eaten them, then thou dost eject thyself from the life of this world and of that which is to come (IV, 34).

When you read the Word, note not only the positive commandments, but notice also the things that we are not to do. Cf. Rom. 12:1, 2.

Finally, a holy life is

V. A SPIRIT-FILLED LIFE (1 Thess. 4:8).

Have you forgotten Who the Holy Spirit is--that He is a Person, and that He is a Member of the Godhead, just as much God as the Father is, and as the Lord Jesus Christ is?

— Have you forgotten where He is--that He has been given to you by God, and that He indwells you? Cf. what Paul wrote to the Corinthians in 1 Cor. 6:19, 20.

Have you forgotten that He is the HOLY Spirit?

Do you remember that Paul wrote to the Galatians,
Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil
the lust of the flesh (Gal. 5:16)?

— This is just another way of saying that, if you walk in the
Spirit, you will become holy.

Concl: What a wonderful passage this is! Are you abounding in
what you already know? Do you seek to please God,
remembering that He is always present with you? Do you pay
attention to the Word of God, the commandments--positive and
negative? Are you living a life of separation from the world
and its ways? Are you depending upon the Holy Spirit?

If you can answer these questions affirmatively, then by the
grace of God you are making progress in holiness. If you
cannot, then seek God's forgiveness and look to Him for grace
to begin this very night to bring your life into conformity
with the will of God which He has revealed in His Word. Then
and only then will the blessing of God come, and will you see
God's purpose in your salvation becoming a reality. These are
the keys to our lives from now on until we are with the Lord.

—

AWAITING CHRIST'S RETURN
1 Thess. 4:9-12

Intro: One of the most prominent themes in 1 Thessalonians is the subject of the Lord's return. The believers in Thessalonica were eagerly looking forward to the coming of the Lord.

It seems that it is with this glorious event in mind that Paul wrote chapters 4 and 5 (although he mentioned the coming of the Lord in every chapter at least once). What are we to do if we are expecting the Lord at any moment? Should we do what some people in the past have done--quit working, sell what we have, and go up on some high place to wait for the Lord? There is always the danger that truths can be carried to extremes not sanctioned by the Word of God, and this is the reason that we need to know what the Word teaches on subjects like this.

The first part of the answer we considered last Sunday night. IF WE ARE REALLY LOOKING FOR THE LORD TO RETURN, OUR FIRST CONCERN SHOULD BE OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, AND THAT CALLS FOR HOLINESS.

Cf. 1 John 3:1-3. See also 2 Peter 3:11. In 1 Pet. 1:13-16 we have the same emphasis. Cf. Heb. 12:14,
Follow peace with all men, and holiness,
without which no man shall see the Lord.

Here in 1 Thessalonians, we have this emphasis in chapter 4, verses 1-8.

Tonight we want to look at the remainder of the instructions which Paul gave. He pointed the Thessalonians in two other directions.

I. TOWARD OUR BRETHREN IN CHRIST (1 Thess. 4:9, 10).

Not only must we be concerned about holiness in our relationship to God (and to men), but we must be concerned about our love for each other.

This was what delighted the heart of the Apostle Paul from Timothy's report to which he referred in chapter 3. Paul was praying about this. See 3:12, 13--and see the connection between love and holiness. Where you find one, you will find the other.

This is one of the first evidences we have that we are believers. See 1 John 3:14. It is such a vital part of our walk as Christians that it can be said of all of us, ". . . ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another." Nevertheless

he did write this:

. . . but we beseech you, brethren,
that ye increase more and more;
by which he meant that they were to be even more loving
toward each other!

How do you become more loving?

Read 1 Cor. 13, especially verses 4-8a.

But notice a third thing--the second in the passage we are
considering just now:

II. TOWARD THE WORLD (1 Thess. 4:11, 12).

See verse 12--"them that are without." This is one way
Paul referred to people in the world. They were outside of
Christ. They were outside of salvation. They were outside
of the church.

To "walk honestly" means to walk as the world would expect
you to walk as a Christian--not forsaking your responsibili-
ties, but fulfilling them better than anyone else does.
It means to do things in such a way that people will not
hold disparaging views of the Gospel, and be further
hindered from coming to Christ.

Paul means that we should not bring reproach upon the name
of Christ by being shoddy or unfaithful in the work which
we have to do, wherever it may be--at home, or at work.

How do we walk honestly? What does the world expect of us?

Paul pointed to two things:

A. First, we are to "study to be quiet" (v. 11).

The two words, "study" and "quiet" are almost in con-
flict with each other. It means that we are fired
with ambition, that we eagerly set our hearts on being
restful, quiet, peaceful.

It is like Peter wrote in 2 Peter 3:14, 15a,
Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for
such things, be diligent that ye may be found
of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.
And account that the longsuffering of our Lord
is salvation; . . .

The world knows nothing of real peace. With all that
the Word says about conditions prior to the coming

of the Lord, if no one else has peace, the world certainly expects it of the child of God--and this may open the way for us to speak to those on the outside about Christ!

But there is another point that Paul made. It is this:

- B. "To do your own (business), and to work with your own hands" (v. 11).

Contrast this with what Paul had to write in 2 Thessalonians--in chapter 3, verses 10 through 15. They had not done what he told them to do in his first Epistle.

We do not quit work as we await the coming of the Lord; if anything, we work harder. Why? For two reasons: (1) Because this is a part of our testimony to the world; (2) Because this is the way that the Lord intends to meet our needs.

And from this Paul went on to speak more in detail about the coming of the Lord--in verse 13 through 18.

Concl: Thus, as we await the coming of the Lord, we have three areas of life that we need to be concerned about:

- 1) The Lord.
- 2) The church.
- 3) The world.

These call for holiness, for love, and for peace and hard work.

How does your life check out with what Paul has written? Perhaps the first question that we need to ask is, Am I really looking for the Lord? Have I been looking for Him today--this past week?

IT IS VERY DOUBTFUL IF WE CAN REALLY BE WHAT THE LORD WOULD HAVE US BE UNLESS WE ARE EXPECTING THE LORD MOMENTARILY.

We may differ as to many of the details of the Lord's coming, but let me say without any hesitation that, if your view of the coming of the Lord does not allow you to expect the Lord at any minute, it is the wrong view. We are to expect the Lord today! And, if we do, we will strive to be holy, to be loving, and to be a witness to the world by the peace that is in our hearts as well as by the hard work that we do. May God grant us blessing in all three of these areas of life!

OUR COMFORTING HOPE
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Intro: Paul has been dealing with practical matters relating to the lives of believers in 1 Thess. 4. (Review them.) In our text he was dealing with another need: the need for comfort when a fellow-Christian died.

From this Epistle we know that Paul had taught them that the Lord was coming back, and that he had done it with great effectiveness and blessing. It is mentioned in every chapter of 1 Thess. It seems evident that they all thought that they would live to witness the coming of Christ. But, when He did not come, and believers began to die, this apparently brought great distress to those who were living. What had happened to them? Would they be included when the Lord returned? Imagine the interest of those Thessalonian Christians as they learned this for the first time--things which could not be known except by divine revelation.

But note first,

I. PAUL'S PURPOSE IN WHAT HE WAS WRITING.

It was not just to satisfy their curiosity. He did not set any date. But he did mention three reasons for this section.

- A. This is something that believers are expected to know (v. 13).

There are many things that we would like to know which have not been revealed, but this comes within the range of revealed truth. And what has been revealed, we are expected to know.

- B. This was to enable them to avoid the grief of those who are without any hope. Cf. v.13 again.

Illus: The families of those who were killed when the Soviets shot down the Korean airliner.

- C. It is for our comfort (v. 18).

But these are facts concerning the future which man with his wisdom could never know--even for an apostle. How can we know that these things are true?

II. PAUL'S AUTHORITY FOR WHAT HE WAS WRITING.

It is twofold.

- A. A revelation from God (v. 15).

Paul did not tell when or how he received this revelation, but only that he said what he said "by the word of the Lord."

This was a part of his calling as an apostle, and so he wrote those words at the beginning of verse 13.

B. The death and resurrection of Jesus (v. 14).

Here was another aspect of the work of Christ that Paul would speak of later in the first epistle to the Corinthians. See 1 Cor. 15:20, 23.

The resurrection of Christ proved His Deity. It witnessed to God's acceptance of His work. But it also guaranteed the resurrection of believers. So this also was Paul's authority for what he had to say.

III. THE SUBJECTS OF THIS PASSAGE.

Note the unusual way that he spoke of them:

- 1) V. 13 -- "them which are asleep."
- 2) V. 14 -- "them . . . which sleep in Jesus," or, through Jesus.

- 3) V. 15 -- "them which are asleep."

But finally in v. 16 he made it clear that he was speaking of "the dead in Christ."

Paul was not the first to speak of death as sleeping.

Cf. David in Psa. 17:15.

Daniel in Dan. 12:2.

Our Lord in Matt. 9:24; Mark 5:39; Luke 8:52.

in John 11:11.

Matthew in Matt. 27:52.

Luke in Acts 7:60.

Paul again in 1 Thess. 5:10; 1 Cor. 15:6.

How do we harmonize these passages with Phil. 1:21-24 and 2 Cor. 5:8?

These latter passages refer to the persons themselves who have died; the former passages to the body. The soul does not sleep, but the body does.

Why is the death of a believer called sleeping?

- 1) To express rest.
- 2) To teach that they will awake.
- 3) To show the ease with which God will raise them from the dead.

IV. THE TIME OF THEIR RESURRECTION.

It is not determined on earth, but in heaven. The Lord will

initiate it from heaven, and then Michael will cry out, the trumpet of God will sound (cf. Num. 10 for trumpets), and immediately all of the dead in Christ will be raised "first."

So we must await His coming.

But this still has not gotten us together with them.

V. THE EVENTS WHICH FOLLOW.

A. The living saints are caught up (v. 17).

B. Together we meet the Lord in our glorified bodies (v. 17).

But notice the last part of verse 17. It clearly shows what our primary interest will be then:

C. "And so shall we ever be with the Lord."

Paul did not say, "And so shall we ever be together," although we will! But he was apparently seeking to show that our greatest joy then will be, not that we are reunited with our loved ones, but that together we are with the Lord, and will never be separated from HIM!

Concl: Let me go back to what Paul said about "the voice of the archangel."

Jude 9 tells us that this is Michael. We also know from Matt. 24:36 and from 1 Peter 1:12 that the angels do not know the time when the Lord will come. But it seems that the angels are on a constant alert so that when our Lord descends Michael will shout, perhaps he will blow the trumpet, and the angels of heaven will rejoice who also have waited so long for that glorious day to come.

If such is their expectation, what should ours be? Oh, that the Lord would fill our hearts with a greater love for His appearing! What a climax to a chapter on holiness and love and peace and work!

MORE WORDS OF COMFORT

1 Thess. 5:1-11

Intro: Paul had just comforted, or encouraged, the believers of Thessalonica; now he proceeds to give them more comfort.

The word "comfort" is an interesting word because it has many meanings which are all bound together. To comfort is to encourage. But this is not all just talking; it also includes practical exhortation. Thus comfort comes not only from what we know, but also from doing, from our obedience.

The subject here is "the day of the Lord." See also 2 Thess. 2:1, 2.

This is a day spoken of many places in the OT. Here the emphasis is upon judgment, and that is the case in many places. Cf. Isa. 2:12. That is the meaning here in 1 Thess. 5. It points to the time of Tribulation which is coming upon the earth. There is no question but that the Word makes it very clear that conditions on the earth will get worse and worse prior to the coming of the Lord, whether we believe in the rapture of the church before the Tribulation and in the coming of Christ to the earth at the beginning of the millennium, or if one believes in just one final coming of the Lord to the earth--the significance is unchanged.

Paul makes it clear that:

- 1) The day of the Lord is coming.
- 2) It will come unexpectedly, "as a thief in the night."
- 3) It will come when many will feel that world peace has come.
- 4) Although many will be taken by surprise, the true child of God should not be overtaken as by a thief.

Personally I believe that he is talking about conditions which will prevail prior to the return of Christ for His church, and prior to the time of great tribulation which will follow. 2 Tim. 3 makes it clear that conditions will be bad before the Lord returns. While the Church will escape the Great Tribulation, it may not escape great suffering before the Lord comes back.

In vv. 4 and 5 Paul was addressing the saints. Since God has revealed what He has about the last days, we should know the truth and be living in a manner different from the world.

The practical exhortations begin with verse 6. All of this is included in Paul's words of encouragement.

Note that his remarks have to do with three different relationships.

I. THE BELIEVER AND HIS RELATIONSHIP TO THE TIMES IN WHICH HE LIVES (1 Thess. 5:6, 7).

There are three things to be concerned about here--one is negative; the other two are positive.

A. "Let us not sleep."

This word "sleep" was used in another way in chapter 4, and it is used in that same way in 5:10--to speak of physical death. But that is not the meaning here in 5:6. Here it means spiritual indifference.

The Lord said a very enlightening thing about this in Matt. 24:12. Listen:

And because iniquity shall abound,
the love of many shall wax cold.

With sin so blatant, it can easily put the child of God to sleep. What can keep us awake but a strengthening of our fellowship with the Lord in the Word, in prayer, and in our fellowship with each other.

Cf. Heb. 10:25.

B. "Let us watch."

This is the opposite of sleeping. It means to be spiritually alert, vigilant, expectant, not only for the coming of the Lord, but against sin in any form. We live in enemy territory, and the enemy is threefold: the world, the flesh, and the devil. Therefore, we need to be on a twenty-four hour a day alert.

C. "Be sober."

The basic meaning of this word (which is repeated in verse 8) is not to get drunk, not to be intoxicated.

What happens to anyone who is drunk? He has taken intoxicants into his body to the point that he does not know what is going on. He is defenceless.

But you say, "I would never take a drink." No, you probably would not, and I hope you never will. But you can get drunk on other things besides alcoholic beverages. People can get drunk on pleasure, on a desire to get rich, on popularity, and so on! Whenever you find a Christian given to frivolity, you have an instance of spiritual drunkenness. Oh, how we need to beware of this.

But there is more for us to notice here.

II. THE BELIEVER AND HIS RELATIONSHIP TO THE DEVIL (1 Thess. 5:8-10).

We know that this has to do with the Devil and his devices because of its similarity with Eph. 6:14b and 17a.

Cf. what Peter wrote in 1 Pet. 5:8, 9,

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour, whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.

So, first we have,

A. "Be sober." (Already discussed.)

B. "Putting on the breastplate of faith and love."

In Eph. 6:14b this is called, "the breastplate of righteousness."

"Faith and love" have to do with God first and other believers second. This is what is involved in keeping the heart, as Solomon admonished us to do in Prov. 4:23.

C. "Putting on . . . for an helmet, the hope of salvation."

This protects the head, the mind, the thoughts. It means to be assured of our hope and to keep that certain expectation before us continually.

Note: The participle "putting" indicates that this is at least a part of what it means to be sober.

III. THE BELIEVER AND HIS RELATIONSHIP TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD (1 Thess. 5:11).

All of Paul's instructions may fall into this category since in connection with them he said in both previous instances, "Let us . . ."

But here there are two things to be added.

A. "Wherefore comfort yourselves together."

Remember that this word not only means to comfort, but it also means to encourage, and even to exhort. So there is a lot of meaning bound up in this one word. How important that we minister to each other in this way!

B. "Edify one another."

Cf. Eph. 4:12; 1 Cor. 14:12; Rom. 15:2. This means that we are to build each other^{up} in the faith. This should be our aim in all of our fellowship with each other.

Concl: Are we living like this? We all believe in the coming of the Lord--in the imminent coming of the Lord. But do we know the dangers that we may face at any time in view of the Lord's coming. Are we careful about our relationship with the world, with the Devil, and are we concerned enough about the saints. Do we pray for one another? Do we pray for ourselves that, when we get together, we will be a means of edification to each other.

It is not our talk, but our walk, which reveals how sincerely we are looking for the coming of the Lord.

SAINTS MINISTERING

1 Thess. 5:12-15

Intro: There are two kinds of exhortations given in 1 Thessalonians: (1) those that apply to each believer for himself; (2) those that have to do with a believer's ministry to others. It is this latter group that we are concerned with tonight--the way believers in the church are to minister to each other.

Those who only go to church once a week apparently have never seen that we go to church not only to receive, but also to give. The leaders not only have a ministry to the people, but the people have a ministry to each other. This is one major place where the church is failing today--not entirely, but so much more could be done.

I have purposely chosen a short text because we are going to observe the Lord's Supper together tonight, but the more I have studied this passage, the more I have realized how fitting it is to consider four verses like these before we sit down together at the Lord's Table. The closer our fellowship is, the greater blessing we will have at the Lord's Table, and, what is more important, the greater glory we can give to God!

The exhortations which have to do with our ministry to each other began in 1 Thess. 4:13. They continued in 5:11. But we are really in it in the verses before us.

Note that they fall into two categories:

- 1) The people's ministry to their leaders in vv. 12, 13.
 - 2) The people's ministry to each other in vv. 14, 15.
- As we go on in vv. 16 ff. the shift is back toward those commandments which each of us must apply to himself, or herself.

I. THE PEOPLE'S MINISTRY TO THEIR LEADERS (1 Thess. 5:12, 13).

Paul told the Thessalonian church that there are three ways in which they can contribute to the ministry of their leaders:

- | | |
|-----------------|-------------------------|
| A. "Know them." | Elders, Deacons, notice |
| | how this describes our |
| Who? | work! |

They are described in three ways:

1. "Those who labour among you."
2. "And are over you in the Lord."
3. "And admonish you."

To know them means not only to get acquainted with them, but to pay attention to them, to cherish them, to love them.

- B. "And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake."

This means that nothing should be allowed to supercede their authority. God has vested the authority of His Word and of Himself in the spiritual leaders of the Church.

These are days when people know practically nothing about submission to authority. One place that is to be learned is the church. Another is in the home.

- C. "And be at peace among yourselves."

This can be one of the greatest contributions to the blessing of the work of the leaders. Every believer is responsible to maintain harmony in the fellowship of the saints.

This concludes what Paul wanted to say to the Thessalonian church on this subject, but it does not include all that we find in the Word.

— What about the ministry of the people toward each other?

II. THE PEOPLE'S MINISTRY TO EACH OTHER (1 Thess. 5:14, 15).

Again, this does not exhaust the subject, but it expresses what Paul wanted to say, and needed to say to the Thessalonian church.

There are 4 exhortations in verse 14; v. 15 expands on the fourth one.

- A. "Warn them that are unruly."

"Warn" is the same word translated "admonish" in v. 12. It means to put sense into people's minds. It is the verb from which Jay Adams gets his nouthetic counselling.

The "unruly" are those who do not stay in their place, like a soldier who would break rank.

- B. "Comfort the feebleminded."

These are those who need encouragement and calming because they want to quit.

C. "Support the weak."

"Support" means to hang on to, to cling to. The "weak" are those who are morally weak, those who have trouble with certain sins. We can support them with prayer, but we need to stay with them and to teach them and to encourage them.

D. "Be patient toward all men."

Paul used the Greek word here which means that we are not to retaliate when others do bad things to us.

Verse 15 expands upon this. The latter part of verse 13 also applies--showing that this was a major problem among the saints, probably carrying over from their days before they were saved.

We need to actively pursue ("follow"). that which is good, i.e., that which is pleasing to the Lord. And we do not have one standard for those in the church and those out of it, but we must do the same toward both.

Concl: This is only a starter. As you read the Word, notice what it has to say about your responsibility to your leaders. And notice, too, what it has to say about your ministry to each other. It is only as we do these in addition to matters of our own personal obedience that we will see the greatest blessing of God.

THE GOD WHO MAKES US HOLY
1 Thess. 5:16-28

Intro: We come tonight to the close of this delightful Epistle. We have seen Paul's great love for them, and have had some glimpses into the tremendous work that was done during the very short time that he was with them.

After being assured by Timothy that things were going well in Thessalonica, and that his relationship with the church was good, Paul addressed the subject of their sanctification. See 4:3. See also 4:7. And then we have it mentioned again in 5:23. So this seems to indicate that holiness was in Paul's mind as he wrote chapters 4 and 5.

The text we have tonight is only a part of that, but a very important part. It shows that, while our separation from sin is the overall definition of holiness, holiness, or the lack of it, is manifested in every aspect of a believer's life.

Let me begin tonight with verses 23 and 24, then go back to verses 16 through 22, and conclude with verses 25 through 28.

I. THE GOD WHO SANCTIFIES (1 Th. 5:23, 24).

Let me be very simple in dealing with this subject, and so we need to recognize, first of all, that

A. There is a work of sanctification.

Receiving Timothy's report encouraged Paul to write about this because wherever there is true faith, the work of sanctification will have started. It means a change of life. It means that the believer will realize that he now belongs to God, and must please God. There will be the desire in his heart to do so. This is one outstanding mark of a true believer. Cf. 2 Cor. 5:17. Also see 1 John 3:9.

B. The work of sanctification is a divine work.

We do not sanctify ourselves; it is what God is doing for us. Paul brought this out at the beginning of verse 23, and again in verse 24.

C. It is both an outward and inward work--involving both the body, as well as the soul and the spirit.

D. It is a work which involves preservation as well as change. God preserves the work which He does. There is a sense in which we can never go back to be like we were before.

E. Finally, it is a work which will not be completed until the Lord Jesus Christ returns.

So we can be certain that it will be done, but we can also be sure that it will not be completed until we see the Lord. Even those of our loved ones who are already with the Lord are not completely sanctified because their bodies are still here on earth even though they are with the Lord!

This should help us to understand the meaning of sanctification.

But there is more to learn from the other verses in this passage. Also remember that we are only taking the last part of the passage, so what I am saying could be expanded to include them.

II. THE WORK OF GOD IN SANCTIFICATION (1 Th. 5:16-22).

Now I am going to say something which will seem contradictory. I have said that sanctification is a work of God, and I have said that because Paul said it. But now I want you to see that our sanctification involves our obedience. That is the meaning of verses 16 through 22.

Let me say this also. Sanctification comes about through our obedience to God--and this always means to the Word of God.

In other words, we do not become holy by just sitting around and doing nothing. God will not let a true child of God do such a thing. He has ways of bringing pressure upon us, and of bringing us into situations where we will see what we are supposed to do. Many of you have told me how God has sovereignly led in your lives to bring you into contact with people or churches where you have been taught what you are to do, and what God's purpose in your life as a Christian is.

But always remember Phil. 2:12, 13 and Heb. 13:20, 21. Even in our obedience God gets the glory because He gives us the desire to obey Him, and He enables us to obey Him. Never approach the commandments of Scripture as though this is something that you are going to do for God. It is God Who is at work when we are obedient.

But notice the four areas here that Paul wanted the Thessalonian believers to be concerned about:

- 1) Their circumstances (vv. 16-18).
- 2) The Holy Spirit (v. 19).
- 3) The Word of God and preaching (vv. 20, 21).
- 4) Sin.

Let us look at each one of these briefly.

A. Our circumstances (vv. 16-18).

We cannot exhaust any of these, but let me give you at least one thought concerning each one.

1. "Rejoice evermore" (v. 16).

A Christian is not a person who has his head in the sand; he looks at everything more realistically than anyone else. How can he always rejoice? By knowing that everything that happens to us will have a good outcome. Cf. Rom. 8:28. Only a Christian can be assured of this.

The ability to rejoice in the Lord is an evidence of God's sanctifying work in our hearts. To fail to rejoice is sin.

2. "Pray without ceasing" (v. 17).

Our failure to pray is an evidence of our self-confidence, or of our confidence in some one else, or something else.

We cannot be on our knees all of the time, but no part of our lives should be excluded from prayer.

Eadie in his commentary on Thessalonians has written,

. . . there is no place where one may not pray; no time when one may not pray; no blessing which one may not solicit; no human being for whom intercession may not be offered; no step should be taken without asking divine counsel, and no enterprise engaged in without invocation of the divine blessing (pp. 206, 207).

3. "In everything give thanks . . ." (v. 18).

How can we do this? Should those of us who believe in the sovereignty of God ask, How?

Notice the preposition "in." It is not after, but "in." We need to pray concerning more than just our food--which is the only time many Christians ever give thanks to God. God is the Source of all of our blessings, and so we need to give thanks to Him. This is a mark of sanctification.

Secondly, let us consider what Paul wrote about

B. The Holy Spirit (v. 19)

We all know, or should know, that the Holy Spirit has a vital part in our sanctification.

Here is the implication that He is likened to a fire, a fire which must not be quenched! (This word for "quench" is used in Eph. 6:16; Heb. 11:34.)

There are many things that could be said about this, but let me mention two.

1. The Holy Spirit must not be quenched when He deals with us about something that is wrong in our lives. This is what He is doing to advance our sanctification.
2. The Holy Spirit must not be quenched when there are opportunities for us to exercise our gifts which God has given to us.

The work of sanctification produces in us an eager desire to serve the Lord as He shall indicate.

But we must hurry on to look at what is said about

C. The Word of God and preaching (vv. 20, 21).

The more sanctified a Christian is, the more discerning he will be where the truth of God's Word is concerned. He will not scorn the teaching of the Word. He will love it, and go where he can get it. But neither will he blindly accept everything that he is told unless it is according to the Word of God.

D. Sin (v. 22).

This does not mean just the "appearance of evil," but every form of evil.

We are all aware of certain sins which have been a problem to us, but it is only through the Word, and through the Holy Spirit that we will become conscious of sins which formerly we may have paid no attention to.

E.g., it is a sin to waste time. It is a sin to harbor wrong thoughts in our hearts. It is a sin not to be with the Lord's people on the Lord's Day. And I could go on and on.

All of these are not only ways in which God is sanctifying us, but they are marks of one who is being sanctified.

But let me conclude with a brief look at vv. 25-28.

III. THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE SANCTIFIED (1 Th. 5:25-28).

Here there are also four things to notice.

- A. Prayer for the servants of the Lord (v. 25).
- B. Love for the brethren (v. 26).
- C. The public reading of the Word (v. 27).
- D. The need for the grace of God--here expressed in prayer (v. 28).

Concl: Do you see how all-inclusive this work of sanctification is? It really means that all that we are, all that we have, all of our time, all of our circumstances, everything about us, is to be devoted to the Lord.

Is it? Is this what you want in life? God desires this, and this will be the purpose for everything that God does in our lives--to make us holy, as He is holy!